

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

“To the Jews as a Jew” (1 Cor 9:20): Paul and Jewish Identity

P h e m e P e r k i n s
B o s t o n C o l l e g e

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Paul of Tarsus: The Apostle to the Gentiles in His Jewish Context

Erasing the Great Conversion?

Krister Stendahl’s ground-breaking article, “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” appeared in 1963. The vigorous debate which followed marked a paradigm shift in understanding the apostle. Scholars shed the image of an anguished conscience convicted by impossible demands for “works righteousness”. Instead they saw in Paul the robust piety of a devout Jew who discovered that his most passionate convictions had placed him at cross-purposes to God’s plan. Or to invoke the categories of an earlier Harvard luminary, William James, our “twice-born” (“sick” or “divided-self”), Paul joined the ranks of the “healthy-minded”. Stendahl encouraged exegetes to rethink Paul’s discussion about the Law in terms of his conviction that Gentiles are being called to salvation; now that the Messiah has come, the custodial Law is not necessary.



Alan Segal added another dimension to the question of Paul, the Jew, in his provocative book, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*. With an eye toward apocalyptic and Jewish mystical texts, Segal adds a third category—that of “transformation”—to the earlier discussion of whether one should employ the term “conversion” or “call”. At the same time, he raised a crucial question about the socio-historical context for Paul’s Gentile mission: How did the larger Jewish community look upon sympathetic or interested Gentiles? He suggested that for complex reasons, Jews would encourage Gentiles to remain marginal outsiders:

...many Jews simply preferred that a God-fearer bypass formal conversion when a complex social situation was involved, relying on the universalism that God loves all people.¹

Shaye Cohen raised further issues about Jewish identity in the diaspora communities in *The Beginning of Jewishness*. He suggested that even proselytes might be considered part of the Jewish political community, *politeia*, without being “Jews” inside the Jewish community.² Such

¹ Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), 99.

² See Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999) 140-161.

considerations led me to propose that Paul's vigorous outbursts against Judaizing by Gentile Christians reflect his own (Pharisaic?) determination to eradicate such ambiguous categories. No Gentile could ever be counted as "Ioudaios".³

The antitheses and asymmetries of Paul's arguments in Galatians remain troubling: (a) the shocking reduction of Sinai/Jerusalem to a place of bondage—suggests an abiding hostility between those whose identity is grounded in the "earthly Jerusalem" and those Christ believers whom Paul designates as "offspring of Sarah"; (b) the presumption that while Jewish believers can be encouraged to adopt a Gentile way of life for the sake of their Gentile co-religionists, the opposite cannot be the case.⁴ What sort of "Ioudaios" is Paul, or any believer in Jesus-Messiah who comes from Pauline circles? J.D.G. Dunn suggests that even though Paul asserts that he can engage in shifting social identities, sometimes living as "Ioudaios"; sometimes living as a Gentile (1 Cor 9:20-21), in fact, Paul would not have seen himself as "Ioudaios" any longer.⁵ Does this shift away from identifiable Jewish praxis (the 'special laws') mark Paul as an ex-Pharisee perhaps but from another perspective as a rather ordinary diaspora Jew?⁶ Or has Paul's messianic apostleship produced a fictional Jewish identity that exists only as the apostle's theological construction?

Constructing a Diaspora Jew

The so-called "new approach" to Paul which dominates contemporary discussion depends upon two premises. First, that Paul did not recast Christian theology in new, alien categories derived from such Hellenistic cultural phenomena as popular philosophy, mystery cults or Gnosticism. And second, that his tangled negative statements about "the Law" do not refer to Torah observance as religious Jews experience it, but to the "special laws" (circumcision, kashrut, Sabbath) which posed a barrier to including Gentiles in the Jesus movement. Stendahl suggested that the much debated "parting of the ways" by which Christianity became something distinctly "other" than a Jewish group has less to do with *halachah* or doctrine than with demographics.⁷ Or, to adapt a metaphor from Wayne Meeks, Paul is a religious Proteus. He appears as anomalous as he does—sometimes a prophet, an apocalyptic seer, a philosophic pedagogue, a Jewish homilist, even an apostate—because of the context in which we see him.⁸

However, Karl Donfried points out that Paul appears most Jewish when interacting with the non-Jewish churches that he founded, "...it is precisely Paul as a Jew, as 1 Corinthians 10 illustrates so effectively, who addresses and interacts with his congregations located in the midst of the Graeco-Roman context."⁹ When evaluating the apostle, one must recognize that he was not engaged in a battle between a group called "Christians" and the "Jews" but in what was an

³ See Gal 5:3; PHEME PERKINS, *Abraham's Divided Children: Galatians and the Politics of Faith* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) 11.

⁴ See Perkins, 127.

⁵ See J.D.G. Dunn, "Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish Christian Identity" in *New Testament Studies* 45, 1999, 175-93.

⁶ See Alan F. Segal, "Universalism in Judaism and Christianity," in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed. *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 24.

⁷ See Krister Stendahl, "Qumran and Supersessionism—and the Road not Taken," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Volume Three: The Scrolls and Christian Origins*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006) 39.

⁸ See Wayne A. Meeks, "The Christian Proteus," in Wayne A. Meeks & John T. Fitzgerald, eds., *The Writings of St. Paul*, (New York: Norton, 2007) 690.

⁹ See Karl Donfried, "Rethinking Paul On the Way Toward a Revised Paradigm," *Biblica* 87, 2006: 583.

intramural argument among Jews.¹⁰ At the same time the audience to which Paul's letters present that argument is predominately Gentile. It is that peculiarity which poses a difficulty with Donfried's conclusion that the nearest points of comparison are between Paul and the Essene, *yahad*.¹¹

Therefore before we turn to this proposal that we frame questions about Paul's Jewish identity in relationship to Qumran, we need to consider what sort of Jew does Paul appear to be in cities of Greece and Asia Minor? Or, perhaps more precisely, how does he project himself into that context as Jewish? Paul's self-presentation was problematic in two ways: (a) its acceptance—or not—by others in his own context; and (b) the images of “the Jewish non-believer” which Paul's letters left as legacy for later Christianity.

Steve Mason's survey of the linguistic evidence finds no generic term in the 1st century CE for what we refer to as “Judaism”, that is, a coherent system of beliefs and practices that make up what can be classified as “a religion”.¹² He advocates translating the term *loudaios* as “Judean”, not “Jew”, since the ancient reader would presume that the word designated a particular people or *ethnos*. “Each *ethnos* had its distinctive nature or character, expressed in unique ancestral traditions, which typically reflected a shared (if fictive) ancestry; each had its charter stories, customs, norms, conventions, mores, laws, and political arrangements or constitution.”¹³ Unlike Christians whom ancient writers compared with members of other cults, outsiders perceived *loiudaiou* as members of a specific *ethnos*. Philo clearly treats *loudaiou* as an *ethnos*, which received its constitution from Moses (*Virt* 108). “Precisely as an *ethnos* the *loudaiou* are in constant conflict with Alexandrians and Egyptians (*not* with followers of Isis or Stoics) over the issues of civic and political status.”¹⁴ Thus for a non-Jew to become a proselyte required a complete re-calibration of the individual's identity as Philo's exhortation to welcome the proselyte makes clear (*Virt.* 102-103). Ancestry, ethnicity, political organization and culture all come into play.

Yet the situation appears to have been more complex for *loudaiou* in the Greek-speaking diaspora than Mason would have one believe.¹⁵ Mason concludes—wrongly in my view—that Paul did not present himself as *loudaios*. “Paul should not be taken as representative of Judean views. Outside of Romans, from which the passage in question comes (Rom 2:28), he shows no interest in being seen as a *loudaios*, and his appeal here that being a *loudaios* is internal or spiritual only serves his rhetorical needs in this letter.”¹⁶ On the contrary, the pairing *loudaios/Hellēnes*, serves as a comprehensive classification for all humanity in several Pauline letters (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 1:22-24; 10:32; 12:13; Rom 1:16; 3:9 etc). Paul, himself, is situated as *loudaios* (Gal 2:13-15). One may grant that in underscoring his “ancestry, ethnicity and cultural heritage” Paul uses other terms (“Israelite, Hebrew, Seed of Abraham” 2 Cor 11:22; “circumcised on the eighth day, from the Israelite people, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew born of Hebrew parents, as to Torah observance a Pharisee” Phil 3:5). Paul's comment in Phil 3:6-7 that turning to Christ as “Lord” rendered that proud heritage “empty, rubbish” in such polemical contexts can be read on two levels: (a) as a reflection of external criticism against Paul for setting aside what he should not

¹⁰ See Donfried, 2006: 586.

¹¹ See Donfried, 2006: 586-87.

¹² See Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea and Christian Origins*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009) 141-58.

¹³ Mason, 2009: 162.

¹⁴ Mason, 2009: 167.

¹⁵ See Cohen: 125-34.

¹⁶ Mason, 2009: 171 n. 83.

have done because he was pursuing believers among the Gentiles; and (b) as a reflection of the common experience of diaspora Jews in relating to their non-Judean cultural environment. Even so, John Barclay's schema for diaspora Jewish identity considers the apostle as an anomaly.¹⁷

Such difficulties over Paul's relationship to Judaism are mitigated in studies of Paul that focus on Hellenistic culture. Such treatments privilege parallels between his terminology, approach to moral pedagogy and thematic argument and the philosophic pedagogy of Stoic and Cynic philosophers. For example, Abraham Malherbe employs a pastiche of Stoic and Cynic topoi to reconstruct a philosophical perspective on determinism and the sage's freedom and self-mastery in 1 Corinthians 8-9. Malherbe argues that both the apostle and his audience are competent users of a fairly sophisticated philosophical vocabulary. He rejects the view that Paul has adopted from the Corinthians a mode of reflection that he would not otherwise employ.¹⁸

This reconfiguration of Pauline theology and pedagogy in conversation with Graeco-roman philosophy can be pressed to the point of concluding that Paul is not addressing *Ioudaioi* at all—even when he appears to do so—as in Stanley Stowers' interpretation of Romans.¹⁹ Against such thoroughly hellenized depictions of the apostle, I would insist that Paul's adaptation of philosophical argument is unlike examples of Jewish assimilation which exalt Moses as "culture hero" from whom even the Greeks derive their wisdom as in Artapanus' *Peri Ioudaiōn* ("About Jewish Matters");²⁰ or in Philo, *Mos.* 2.31.²¹ Did Artapanus' depiction of Moses as cult founder for the other nations imply Jewish participation in local civic cults? "Like many of his contemporaries Artapanus can refer interchangeably to God (singular) and Gods (plural): even as a Jew he is both a monotheist and a polytheist...he shows no sign of embarrassment in this confident cultural synthesis."²² Or is Artapanus representative of a monolatry, proud of the superiority of Israel's God but predicated on the assumption that other nations have their own gods. In either case, "the nations" are never encouraged to abandon their gods for Israel's.²³

Barclay's comparison of what he calls the "constitutional ideal" in Josephus and Paul's Corinthian letters sharpens the difference between Paul and other 1st century Jews. For Josephus precisely the elements which distinguish Israel from her neighbors make its constitution superior to those of other peoples. Since childhood every citizen—even women and slaves—has been shaped by laws and customs which regulate all aspects of life and produce a harmonious polity.²⁴ There is no place in such a picture of the Jewish way of life for the carefully

¹⁷ See John M.G. Barclay, "Paul among Diaspora Jews: Anomaly or Apostate," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 60, 1995: 89-120. See also John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora. From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117CE)*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1996) 381-91.

¹⁸ See Abraham J. Malherbe, "Determinism and Free Will in Paul. The Argument of 1 Corinthians 8 and 9," in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 238-40; 255.

¹⁹ See Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews and Gentiles*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

²⁰ See Erkki Koskenniemi, "Greeks, Egyptians and Jews in the Fragments of Artapanus," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 13, 2002:17-31; and Koskenniemi, "Moses—A well-Educated Man," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16, 2005: 5-6.

²¹ See Maren Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture TSAJ 86*, (Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 139-45.

²² Barclay, 1996: 132.

²³ See Koskenniemi, 2002: 30-31. [Except in the case of slaves who were expected to join the Jewish *politeia*. See Niehoff; 26.]

²⁴ See *Against Apion* 2.171-181. See also John M.G. Barclay, "Matching Theory and Practice: Josephus' Constitutional Ideal and Paul's Strategy in Corinth," in Troels Engberg-Pedersen ed., *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2001) 144-47.

honed distinction between Torah as moral guide or Noahide laws and the “ceremonial law” or “special laws (circumcision, kashrut, Sabbath)” employed as an explanation for the *erga nomou* which Paul rejects. Though Paul concurs with the premise espoused by Josephus that “word” and “deed” match in the ideal order and frames his hortatory language accordingly, it often appears that the “connections between Christian master symbols and definite patterns of life” do not appear to have been either obvious or persuasive to Paul’s audience.²⁵

Barclay highlights the objections one might have after reading 1 Corinthians in light of Josephus’ presentation:

...the Christian duty is “keeping the commandments of God” [1 Cor 7:19]...in a context where he relativizes circumcision as a cultural token, though it was naturally regarded in the Jewish tradition as one of God’s commandments. A Jewish reader of 1 Corinthians might also sense that in 10:23-26 Paul suggests an alarmingly casual attitude to the Jewish food laws, a suspicion that would be supported by close attention to 1 Cor 9:21 and 2 Cor 3:6-18 (cf. Rom 14:14). It might seem legitimate to complain that Paul’s traditional Jewish language such as “keeping the commandments of God” is belied by his practical neglect of key features of the law.²⁶

Is Paul’s inability to give cultural specificity to the new identity which he asserts that his converts possess in Christ the inevitable consequence of trying to found churches across the cultural boundaries of Jew and Gentile? Paul’s appeal to being “*ennomos Christou*” in 1 Cor 9:21 is an “ill-defined” concept that is neither obedience to Torah nor the “lawlessness” of Gentiles (Barclay, 2001: 155). Even ethical convictions which Paul clearly adopts from his Jewish context concerning opposition to idolatry and sexual immorality are presented as derivative from specifically Christian convictions (1 Cor 6:12-20; 10:14-22). Barclay observes:

Thus, from the insider’s perspective, these practices are not inherited Jewish practices but the expression of Christian faith. Similarly, the virtues of honesty and love, which were quite unobjectionable to outsiders, do not thereby necessarily function *for insiders* as links that include them in the wider society ... Thus it is not impossible for Paul to build a complete moral universe founded on a distinctively Christian identity, even where the majority of its components are not in practice socially distinctive.²⁷

Paul protests that the Corinthians have misunderstood an earlier letter, “when I wrote not to mix with wicked people, not about the wicked of this world, or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters, lest you would have to leave the world” (1 Cor 5:10). But the Corinthian response could be as much a consequence of identity ambiguities as was the attractiveness of “judaizing” in Galatia. In these churches as well as Phil 3:1-11, Paul consistently undermines developments which might lead Gentile converts to adopt Jewish customs or form civic, social or political alliances with the Jewish *ethnos*—in other words to be “God-fearers” in one of the several forms described by Alan Segal. To achieve this goal, Paul paints a distorted picture of Jewish practice. How distorted becomes clear when one contrasts his versions of righteousness, God’s Spirit, Torah, apocalyptic eschatology and messianic teaching with other first century Jewish writings.²⁸ “For God has done what the Law weakened by flesh, could not do: by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,” (Rom 8:3-4).

²⁵ See Barclay, 2001: 153.

²⁶ Barclay, 2001: 153.

²⁷ Barclay, 2001: 158,

²⁸ See Donfried, 2006: 588-93.

Of course, we never hear Paul addressing other *loudaioi*. His vigorous claims to Jewish credentials all occur in rhetorical contexts.²⁹ He expects his converts to accept his authoritative interpretation of the Jewish tradition as the apocalyptic “mystery” which God has revealed to him (1 Cor 2:6-10). The conflicts reflected in Paul’s letters suggest vigorous challenge from other Jews (followers of Jesus) to his claims.³⁰ Barclay concludes:

The very fact that Paul could speak so persuasively in the traditional Jewish idiom, made him all the more insidious a foe to those who judged his teaching subversive. The majority of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries (both Christian and non-Christian) found his mutation of the Jewish tradition incomprehensible or unattractive. The majority of his Gentile converts, and most of the subsequent readers of his letters, could only see their distance from and not their common destiny with Jews.³¹

Paul Constructing a Jewish Identity

Contrasting the “in anger” affirmations of his Jewish identity in Galatians and Philippians with the “in anguish” pleading of Rom 9:1-5, Barclay wonders who is “the real” Paul? Has he matured or is he vacillating?³² If the former, then perhaps Rom 9-11 recognizes the detrimental effects of his own rhetorical strategies. Niehoff’s study of Philo highlights the significance of Jerusalem as “mother city” to all “loudaioi”, a nation so populous that they cannot be encompassed in a single country.³³ Greek colonists or Roman citizens were familiar with such dual identification, loyalty to the “mother city” combined with residence over many generations in a city far removed from those origins. Despite his shocking negativity about the “earthly Jerusalem/Sinai covenant” as enslaved like Hagar in Gal 4:24-25 and a muted hostility toward Christian opponents connected with James and Jerusalem in Gal 2:1-14, Paul collected money for Jerusalem Christians from his churches (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9). The nature of that obligation remains obscure. Was it undertaken as a trade-off for the agreement that Gentile believers would be free from Jewish observances (Gal 2:10)? Or a freely given acknowledgment of the spiritual debt that Gentile believers owe to their Jewish co-religionists (2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:27)?

In either case, Paul must present himself as a Jew embedded in a social network with ties to the mother city, Jerusalem. Whether or not his converts adopted Jerusalem as part of their own Christian identity is less clear. A regular practice of dispatching offerings to Jerusalem com-

²⁹ See Barclay, 1996: 382. Donfried (2006: 593) takes a more positive reading of Paul’s conclusions than I am suggesting: “Critical is the interpretation of “just requirement” and that “the law might be fulfilled”. While the “works of the Law” are not the basis of righteousness – only Christ is – that does not deny a positive function for the Law, properly understood, for those who are “in Christ”. In such an interpretative context the term *telos* in Rom 10,4 would mean that Christ is the goal or intention of the Torah, not its termination or end.”

³⁰ Sigurd Grindheim insists that while Paul rejected his past as “dung” and regrets his activities as a persecutor (1 Cor 4:9), he would never accept the “apostate” designation but considered himself to be entrusted with a prophetic mission that involved a critique of Israel as well as mission to the Gentiles. In Sigurd Grindheim, “Apostate Turned Prophet: Paul’s Prophetic Self-understanding and Prophetic Hermeneutic with Special Reference to Galatians 3.10-12,” *New Testament Studies* 53, 2007: 550-58.

³¹ Barclay, 1996: 395.

³² See Barclay, 1996: 382.

³³ See Niehoff: 33-37.

parable to that of diaspora Jewish communities would be more effective in establishing ties to the city than a one time contribution for impoverished believers in Jerusalem.

Paul does not possess either the wealth and family connections or the education that would have enabled him to associate with Jews who had ties among the non-Jewish Roman or civic elite. So the images in Acts of a persecutor entrusted with arrest warrants by the Sanhedrin, a speaker invited to address philosophers in Athens, or an “aristocratic” prisoner addressing Roman governors and visiting Jewish royalty are clearly imaginative reconstructions on Luke’s part. Did Paul retain a social network of ties to Jewish communities and some elements of personal observance throughout his life as Acts would have us infer? Or had the comment to Peter, “if you though a Jew are living in a Gentile manner and not in a Jewish one, how can you compel the Gentiles to judaize? (Gal 2:14), become so much Paul’s way of life, that his “to the Jews as a Jew” means no more than conforming to childhood custom on visits home? If the latter, then Paul is a chameleon whose colors are a function of his social environment.³⁴

There is a darker shadow to this shifting coloration, a rift within the leadership of the Christian churches. Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem recounted in Acts 21:18-26 provides some clues. The narrative of Paul’s report to James contains numerous difficulties. Unlike the unified, Jerusalem-centered missionary expansion earlier in Acts, this passage reflects a sharp distinction between the myriads of Torah observant believers in Jerusalem and Paul’s many gentile converts. There is no mention of the collection brought by Paul and his associates. Instead James voices the report that Paul had been encouraging Jews to abandon the Torah by no longer circumcising their sons or following other Jewish observances (21:21). James devises two strategies: Paul’s participation in a Nazarite vow with four members of the Jerusalem community and a stipulation that Gentiles observe the commandments necessary to enable Jewish believers to associate with their Gentile co-religionists comfortably (vv. 22-25). Rather than consider this episode evidence that Paul was well-received by Jerusalem believers, one should entertain the possibility that James and the elders there wanted nothing to do with him.³⁵

Whatever the facts behind the story as Luke frames it, neither James nor any of the Jerusalem believers reappear in the narrative. Paul can no longer rely on the agreements reached some eight to ten years earlier (Gal 2:7-10). As Pervo concludes, “Both sides suspected the other of betrayal. Acts 21:17-25 is indirect testimony to the failure of this early attempt at unity among Christians.”³⁶ Reflecting on the failure of Paul’s Jerusalem visit to realize his objectives (Rom 15:26), leads me to suggest that it was Christian Jews, not outsiders, who labeled Paul “apos-

³⁴ A stunning example of how complex Jewish identity could be when the Jewish populace had to negotiate the shifting powers of two dominant cultures, Christian and Muslim, can be drawn from the life of Moses Maimonides. Faced with the issue of forced conversions, Maimonides accepted the possibility of “appearing to accept Islam” while remaining devoted to Torah in one’s heart as distinct from apostates who willingly embraced Islam (Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides* [New York: Doubleday, 2008] 99-113). The “forced convert” should emigrate to a place where Judaism could be practiced openly when possible. Though the point remains disputed, it appears that Maimonides, himself, lived publically as a Muslim while he was residing in Fez (See Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides. The Life and World of One of Civilization’s Greatest Minds*, New York: Doubleday, 2008, 116-24).

³⁵ Pervo, who presumes that Luke was familiar with Pauline letters and the work of Josephus, concludes that for Luke Torah observance among believers is not a live issue. “...those believers make no positive contributions to the story of Acts. ...Since observance no longer conformed to the divine mandates, it was to be tolerated and no more. Luke despite his insistence on continuity, is a product of the gentile mission who sees the peculiar features of Jewish life as a relic of the past ...” in Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009: p. 544.

³⁶ Pervo: 547.

tate".³⁷ That in fact—barring objections to his announcement of Jesus as messiah of course—Paul may have had an easier time as “a Jew to the Jews”, than as an “apostle to the Gentiles” among Jerusalem believers. Among non-believing Jews, Paul could—and likely did—observe Torah with all its commandments. It is precisely because he considers Jewish identity to constitute the “whole package” of ancestry, education, Torah, even the “special laws” in short being part of a unique *ethnos* that Paul rejects “judaizing” among Gentile converts.

The new identity which has reconciled them with God through the death of God's Son (Rom 3:24-26) is distinctively non-Mosaic as Paul's version of the Abraham story makes clear. Paul's position may have created less conflict with local Jewish communities than the proselytizing of Gentiles by Christian Jews would have done. Unfortunately it left him without supporters in the Jerusalem community, and as an “outsider” in Jerusalem, Paul is then an easy target for anti-Christian sentiments.

However as Paul formulated a new discourse about their relationship to the God of Israel, God's promises, covenants, Torah and prophets for his Gentile churches, he also provided an outline for later Christian supersessionism. In order to maintain the boundary between Israel and “the nations” outside the unity of Jew and Gentile in the Christ, Paul had to sketch a Jewish way of life in colors that would be unattractive to a Gentile audience. “Special Laws” aside, any reader familiar with Greek-speaking Jewish apologists like Artapanus, *Wisdom of Solomon*, Philo or Josephus would be startled by Paul's, “Jews seek signs; Greeks, wisdom” in 1 Cor 1:22. Did someone forget to tell Paul that Moses was the wisest, most educated of human beings?³⁸

That brings us to our final question. What is Paul's anguish in Rom 9-11? That so few of his fellow Israelites have come into Christ? Or, as Stendahl suggested, is the “so few” a simple fact that God's version of the run up to the “end of days” has ended the mission to Israel early? In speaking to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13), Stendahl concludes that “...it is none of their business to try to manipulate or perhaps even evangelize the Jewish people...Paul considers the Gentiles to be potentially and actually conceited in their attitude toward Israel.”³⁹ God's plan was not for a great transformation of Israel in the messianic age⁴⁰ that would bring the nations to revere Israel's God. It was to transform the nations...and then what?⁴¹ Paul's resolution has left plenty of ambiguities for exegetical debate: “if their rejection [meant] reconciliation of the world, what [will] their acceptance [mean] but life from the dead” (11:15). Paul has concluded that rejection of the gospel by all but a remnant of Israel belongs to God's plan for reconciling the nations. But the “small remnant saved among Israel” cannot be an adequate fulfillment of God's promise to save God's people—for Paul at least, though it has hardly bothered later Christian theologians!

³⁷ Pervo is certainly correct in rejecting the ecumenically fashionable conclusion that if he had had a son, the Christian Paul would have had him circumcised as a given. He suggests that while Paul had no qualms about communities comprised solely of Torah observant believers, he is more likely to advise those in mixed communities that circumcision was not necessary (or even not to do so; p. 544).

³⁸ See Koskeniemi, “Moses—A well-Educated Man,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16, 2005.

³⁹ Krister Stendahl, *Final Account. Paul's Letter to the Romans*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 34.

⁴⁰ For the complexity of the timing of the messianic age, the last days prior to the coming of the messiah so the discussion of Qumran messianism by John J. Collins in “Teacher and Messiah? The One Who Will Teach Righteousness at the End of Days,” in Eugene Ulrich and James VanderKam, eds. *The Community of the Renewed Covenant*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994)193-210.

⁴¹ Stendahl draws an important theological conclusion for mission strategy in the 21st century, an acknowledgment of “limits”: “God will always find enough people to carry the torch, if we can get over the idea so totally absent from Romans that salvation means we win and others become like unto ourselves” (Stendahl, 1995: 44).

God's fidelity to those promises requires another "act" in the eschatological drama which signals Israel's salvation.⁴²

Paul casts his own role as apostle to the Gentiles in the penultimate position. Quite unexpectedly God's hardening of Israel is making Gentiles "righteous through faith". Paul has pulled out all the stops in his scriptural exegesis to justify this reading of "God's plan" and God's sovereignty over the process of salvation. But as Niebuhr rightly observes, at every point Paul's role as "apostle to the Gentiles" requires a Jesus who is first (and last) "messiah of Israel", the one in whom God's promises to Israel are realized.⁴³ Perhaps a strategic withdrawal from missionary efforts among the Roman synagogues had been forced by Jewish resistance to growing numbers of converts—or in the reading of the Claudius edict and its consequences by Andrew Das the effective demise of any Christian Jewish groups in Rome.⁴⁴ "God-fearers, for their part, were far less integrated into the Jewish community since they also maintained strong social ties with non-Jews...God-fearers and sympathizers, provided they ceased attending the synagogues, would pose no threat to the Jewish communities. Faced with the threat of imperial intervention, God-fearers could leave the synagogues and blend into other communities."⁴⁵ So one might conclude that Paul's separation strategy, insisting upon an end-time "righteousness through faith" was recommended to Christians in Rome as the divine necessity behind threats to both Christian believers and the larger Jewish community in Rome.⁴⁶

A Theological Coda: Divine Condescension

Whatever the social dimensions involved, Paul certainly would have provided a theological rationale. If we take his affirmation that apostles of Christ engage in "self-lowering", humiliation to advance the gospel as *imitatio Christi*, to be more than a rhetorical strategy, then the asymmetry of Jews "living like Gentiles" but saying "no" to judaizing by Gentiles has a deeper significance. It depends upon Paul's conviction that God's people Israel are superior to the Gentile world around them. To live as he does among the Gentiles is neither freedom from a demanding God nor an attack on Torah holiness, but a surrender of something of which Paul is genuinely proud. It is a form of humiliation, not a quest for social elevation.

⁴² Niebuhr rightly points out that Paul's focus remains "all Israel", the "remnant" which ensured the continuity of God's saving promises from Israel to the Gentile believers cannot be the end of the story for the apostle. (Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, *Heidenapostel aus Israel. Die jüdische Identität des Paulus nach ihrer Darstellung in seinen Briefen*. WUNT 62; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1992: 142-54). He also points out that the expression "vessels of wrath" in the argument of 9:22 should not be treated as a description of the unbelieving Jews of Paul's day (p. 155).

⁴³ See Niebuhr: 176. Jewett reconstructs a scenario of highly politicized conflict between those engaged in non-Jewish missionary efforts among the Gentiles and an on-going mission by Christian Jews among their confreres in Rome, each considering the growth of the "other" as a threat to its own position. He thinks that Paul must reconcile both sides in order to enlist a unified Roman church behind his Spanish mission, which will exhibit God's sovereignty over the world. See Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007): 675-712.

⁴⁴ See A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) 149-202.

⁴⁵ Das: 180. Tensions over practice evident in Rom 14-15 could reflect the determination of "God-fearers" to maintain their adherence to Jewish customs in the new environment of Gentile Christian communities. "Many or most of the gentiles who had previously associated with the synagogues prior to the expulsion may have preferred a Law-observant lifestyle as God-fearers while newer members were likely uncomfortable with or cared little for such practices," (Das: 198).

⁴⁶ It may have pushed both the Jewish community and Jesus believers to draw the sharp boundaries that would enable Nero to target the Jesus believers, costing both Peter and Paul their lives. See Das: 198-201.

Margaret Mitchell proposes that the philosophical/rhetorical category of “accommodation” or condescension explains the “all things to all persons” agenda in 1 Cor 9:19-23.⁴⁷ The “wise” must adjust language and conduct to the capacities of his or her audience if they are to benefit from his or her pedagogy. Christ’s death reflects God’s own condescension in saving humanity (Rom 15:1-6). But if that is Paul’s understanding, he would reject the interpretation of his long career outside the Law⁴⁸ which treats it as vacillating or ambivalent.⁴⁹ However one describes Paul’s consciousness of having been gifted with insight into the mystery of God’s saving power expressed in the crucified messiah, his own apostolic efforts and the unfolding story of Israel and the nations in the age between the messiah’s resurrection and the subjection of all things to God, Paul cannot be any less an Israelite than Jesus, Peter, James the brother of the Lord or the rest of Jesus’ first disciples. Misguided as his zealous opposition was, he may even consider himself a better Jew because of his labors for the gospel (1 Cor 15:9-10).

Therefore any “dual covenant” reading of Romans represents only Paul’s penultimate version of God’s plan for the end of days. Paul’s “all Israel” will be saved (Rom 11:26) means just that, not some partial group. Since God’s power and purpose are represented in the messianic events, Paul does not have to answer “how” that can be.⁵⁰ Making that happen is not the mission God has entrusted to him. Respecting Israel’s “no” as a divine condescension to bring the nations to know God through God’s Son could lead one to conclude that Christians should not evangelize Jews.

In Paul’s account, at least, the messianic sign for Israel is the witness of God’s faithful children in Christ.⁵¹ For Paul—and for us—the final act has yet to be played out. And for those of us Paul styles as “wild olive branches” fruitful only because of the strong root onto which we have been grafted, the question is not “when will recognizing Jesus as ‘Son of God’ erase the difference which marks Jews as God’s beloved children” but when will we discover Jesus, God’s beloved son, as messiah of Israel and teacher of righteousness? If Paul’s vision of all humanity drawn together in a “doxological community”, to use Jewett’s phrase⁵² is right, then we still have many miles to go and boundaries to cross. So though I disagree with the “two covenants” reading of Romans 9-11, I heartily concur with Stendahl’s insistence that “reconciling the world to God” is not about the erasure of difference under the hegemony of a single religious tradition, Christian or Muslim, but about the preservation and flourishing of all God’s children.

⁴⁷ See Margaret Mitchell, “Paul’s Accommodation and Condescension (*sugkatabasis*): 1 Cor 9:19-23 and the History of Influence” in Troels Engberg-Pedersen ed., *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2001) 203-214.

⁴⁸ For most of his adult life Paul set aside the “Judean self-concept into which he was socialized” (Esler: 272). Esler observes that while Rom 9:1-5 is a dramatic way of reconnecting with Israel that would impress Judean believers, Paul still retains a distance from his fellow Jews. See Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans. The Social Setting of Paul’s Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 272-273.

⁴⁹ Commenting on 1 Cor 9:19-23, Mitchell remarks, “the passage presents Paul as to say the least ambivalently positioned with respect to Judaism and Hellenism – claiming to be both Jew and *anomos* (“Torah-bereft”), and yet not essentially identified with either since the one who is a true chameleon never can be, for assimilates to each group in its turn,” (p. 197).

⁵⁰ See Jewett: 701-710.

⁵¹ Jewett rightly insists that in Paul’s view accepting Jesus as messiah would not require any change at all in the identity of Israel. See Jewett: 702.

⁵² See Jewett: 1010.