

PAUL AND THE JEWS: A NEW STARTING POINT

THE APOSTLE Paul describes a telling incident in his Letter to the Galatians. In what must have been a calculated move on his part, he went up to meet the Jerusalem apostles, taking along an uncircumcised man. He laid before the acknowledged leaders of the church the gospel he preached among the Gentiles, with the uncircumcised Titus as exhibit A. All might have gone well except that certain “false believers” “slipped in” to the private meeting “to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us” (Gal 2:4), but “we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you [Gentile Galatians]” (2:5). Later, after Peter had arrived at Antioch and was eating with Gentile Christians there, certain people came from James in Jerusalem. Peter immediately withdrew from the table “for fear of the circumcision faction,” and “the other Jews” joined Peter in his withdrawal (2:12). Paul stood up and opposed Peter to his face. At both Jerusalem and Antioch, people loyal to Judaism and its central rite of circumcision opposed Paul’s circumcision-free mission to the Gentiles. They sensed in his teachings elements that seemed to compromise the essence of the Jewish faith. The zealous persecutor of Christians ironically became himself the focal point for Jewish zeal. After the dust settled from the conflicts at Jerusalem and Antioch more than a hundred years later, a Jewish Christian author reflecting on Paul would label him “the enemy man,” a destroyer of Judaism.¹ Many Jews through the centuries would have agreed.

The reaction is understandable when one comes across a passage such as 1 Thess 2:14–16. Paul says that the Jews

killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so

¹The author of the *Letter of Peter to James* (2:3–5) claims to be part of a group observant of the law of Moses. The author goes on to speak of *two* missions to the Gentiles, one by Peter and the other by Paul, “the man who is my enemy,” who preached a “lawless and absurd doctrine.” Further, it was Peter’s mission that was the first to the Gentiles; cf. Acts 8–11.

that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.

The Jews are "Christ killers." While this would become a common label among second-century Christians for the Jews, its roots go back to the very first decades of Christianity. Paul adds that the Jews have been filling up the measure of their sins and so God's wrath has overtaken them at last. Elsewhere he writes:

Beware the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. (Phil 3:2-4)

While in these verses Paul may be opposing Jewish teachers who were themselves also followers of Jesus Christ, does not the vicious rhetoric lend itself better against the circumcised who do *not* boast in Christ? The uncircumcised who believe in Christ have *taken the place* of Jews as the true circumcised. Circumcision is a matter of indifference, as Paul explains in his Letter to the Galatians: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). In case his recipients do not realize the full impact of the statement, Paul repeats it: "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything" (6:15). In 4:21-31 the apostle speaks of two women, Sarah and Hagar, who bore offspring for the Jewish patriarch Abraham (cf. Genesis 16, 21). These two women represent two covenants. The Jews were historically descended from Sarah, Abraham's wife. In a surprising twist Paul associates the Jewish covenant, which included the sacred Law ("Mount Sinai"), with Hagar, Abraham's slave woman banished into the wilderness of Arabia. In Paul's thinking, Mount Sinai, the holy site where God had given the Jewish people the Law, "corresponds to *the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.*" Paul's language may again be taken as indicting ethnic Jews in general ("present Jerusalem," "Mount Sinai," "children of slavery" / "Hagar" vs. "children of promise" / "the free woman").

The same apostle can speak of a church, inclusive of Gentiles, that appears to have swallowed up entirely the historical prerogatives of ethnic Jews. In Gal 3:15 Paul surprisingly insists that Abraham's promised "seed" was grammatically singular, unlike the corporate sense of the Hebrew original in Genesis. His implication is that corporate Israel is no longer Abraham's proper heir. By the end of Galatians 3 Paul transforms the promise of a corporate Israel from the Hebrew Scriptures into a new corporate body of those united by their shared faith in Jesus Christ, the sole legal beneficiary of Abraham's promises. The promises to Abraham benefit only those who are "in Christ" by their faith or trust in him. First Corinthians 10:1-13 narrates the story of Israel's stumbling in the wilderness, that is, the "Israel according to the flesh." Paul explains that the story of Israel's stumbling was ultimately intended for the benefit of his Gentile Christian readers (10:6, 11).

The events of Israel's past prefigured *Christian* experience. Believers in Christ are thus the beneficiaries of Israel's promises. Biblical texts that once referred to ethnic Israel are redirected toward the church.²

Alongside the rite of circumcision at the heart of Jewish identity was the practice of Moses' Law. The Law had historically distinguished the Jewish people and their religion from antiquity. Paul, a former zealot for the Law, ironically proclaims that "all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse" (Gal 3:10; cf. 1:14). Moses' Law, he claims, is a "law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). The Law was only a temporary measure in the history of humanity (Gal 3:19, 23–24). Now that Christ has come, the role of the harsh disciplinarian has ended (3:25). Christ is the "end" of the Mosaic Law and/or its "goal" and was what it had been proclaiming all along (Rom 10:4–8). Unfortunately, the Jews missed the goal. They did "not succeed in fulfilling that law" (9:31) and are "enemies of God" (11:28). "Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds" (2 Cor 3:15). Paul's message at times seems to fan the flames of anti-Judaism. In a generation that lives after the *Shoah*, the mass murder of Jews in concentration camps, it may seem that Jewish readers of Paul through the centuries have been right—his message of redemption is unredeemable; his "good news" is really bad news.

Other readers of Paul have noted a different, perhaps contradictory trajectory in his thought. He also refers to the Law's commandments as "holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12; 8:2). He claims to uphold the Law's continuing relevance (Rom 3:31; 1 Cor 9:8; 14:21). He cites the Law as an abiding and normative moral code that must be fulfilled, even by Christians (Rom 13:8–10). Salvation remains to the Jew "first" and then to the Greek (1:16–17). According to Paul, the Jewish people maintain a position of priority in God's plan: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs" (9:4–5). "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much, in every way" (3:1–2). Paul even anticipates a day when "all Israel will be saved" (11:26). Is this the same apostle who had just claimed that the people of Israel are "enemies of God"? Is Paul's message redeemable after all?

Some have considered Paul an utterly contradictory thinker. Perhaps this is a sign of the frustration that many have experienced in trying to make sense of these diverging strands in his thought. Is it really conceivable that he would contradict himself so thoroughly and so often, even within a single paragraph or sentence? It may be that these contradictory emphases are the product of a complex line of reasoning rather than actual inconsistencies, although such a proposition would need to be supported. What follows will

²E.g., whereas the prophet Hosea foresaw a brighter future for the people of Israel (Hos 2:25 LXX [2:23 MT]), in Rom 9:25 Paul transforms the prophecy into a vision of the Gentiles who would one day join the church; see ch. 4, below.

seek and examine the logic behind these apparently divergent strands of thought in the apostle's relationship with his Jewish heritage.

Paul says that he was "a Hebrew born of Hebrews," a Pharisee, and zealous for the Law of Moses (Phil 3:5–6). He had excelled in Judaism beyond his contemporaries (Gal 1:14). An accurate understanding of first-century Judaism is therefore crucial in interpreting Paul's statements about the Jews, their Scriptures, and their traditions. Unfortunately, those immersed in the interpretation of Paul, the former Pharisee, have in the past projected onto Judaism an understanding derived more from the apostle's writings than from a study of Judaism itself. In other words, Pauline interpretation has sometimes led to a very negative understanding of first-century Judaism. Even today some scholars remain convinced that the grace-oriented Paul, who taught God's love, was opposing Jewish legalists trying to earn their way into heaven by their good works.³ This remains a common way of understanding first-century Judaism in many churches and pulpits as well. This popular notion of Judaism accurately reflects the consensus among NT scholars prior to the last quarter of the twentieth century.

For almost a hundred years, NT specialists drew upon, whether consciously or not, the research and writings of one man—Ferdinand Weber, who published in 1880 a famous work on early rabbinic Judaism.⁴ Before Weber, nineteenth-century Christian scholars had been eager to show in their writings how Judaism had pointed forward to Christianity. Christianity was thus the legitimate fulfillment of what Judaism, or at least its Scriptures, had predicted. Weber's approach supplanted the fulfillment schema.⁵ He contended that rabbinic Judaism was fundamentally a legalistic religion. God had granted the people a covenant relationship, which Israel had promptly broken in the wilderness. All that was left for them was the weighing of the scales. Individuals enjoyed a place in the world to come only if their good deeds outweighed the bad on the divine scales. Although a Jewish individual might benefit from the treasury of merits earned long ago by the patriarchal ancestors of Israel, the accounting of individual deeds remained strict. Weber contended that, for some Jews, the system led to self-righteous boasting and that, for others, it led to despair and uncertainty over whether a person had accumulated enough good deeds before the holy and righteous God, whom the Jews viewed as remote and inaccessible.

Precedence for Weber's description may be traced to Martin Luther and the sixteenth-century Reformation. Luther rejected what he perceived

³See Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); and Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁴Ferdinand Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie* (ed. Franz Delitzsch and Georg Schnedermann; 1880); revised in 1886 as *Die Lehren des Talmuds*. Schnedermann revised Weber's book in a second edition under a third title, *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandte Schriften*, in 1897.

⁵George Foot Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *HTR* 14 (1921): 228–37.

as the Roman Catholic Church's insistence on indulgences and good works as the means of earning one's way into heaven. He found in the apostle Paul's writings a similar struggle. In Luther's reading, Paul was likewise contending against "works righteousness," that of the Jews. Of course, Martin Luther was also known for other, darker statements concerning the Jews. In *On the Jews and Their Lies* in 1543 he argued at length for razing their homes, seizing their sacred books, and burning down their synagogues.⁶ Throughout his writings, he spoke of the Jews' "claim to be God's people by reason of their deeds, works, and external show" "in the same way as our papists, bishops, monks, and priests."⁷ Not surprisingly, Ferdinand Weber, a German Lutheran, was advancing a way of approaching Paul and the Jews that had at its root Luther's perennial struggle against works righteousness.⁸

At the end of the nineteenth century, many scholars objected to Weber's description of Judaism as sorely inaccurate and based on an inadequate study of the primary sources. George Foot Moore critiqued Weber at length.⁹ Several Jewish scholars voiced their objections. The dissent was drowned out by a chorus of voices from within the ranks of Christian biblical scholars, especially German Lutherans, who were drawing upon Weber's work as the standard for good scholarship on Judaism. Furthermore, many of these scholars were famous and influential in their own right. Wilhelm Bousset, a renowned scholar at the beginning of the twentieth century, drew upon Weber's work, and Bousset's writings remained in print longer.¹⁰ Bousset conveyed Weber's legacy to his own student, Rudolf Bultmann, who would become arguably the most influential biblical scholar of the twentieth century. Bultmann defined "Jewish legalism" as "a piety

⁶Martin Luther, "On the Jews and Their Lies, 1543," in vol. 47 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 268–69.

⁷*Ibid.*, 175. Luther compares Jewish works righteousness to that of the pope (and the devil) on pp. 162–63 as well.

⁸Hans J. Hillerbrand ("Martin Luther and the Jews," in *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future* [ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: Crossroad, 1990], 134) writes, "Since the repudiation of all forms of works righteousness formed the pivotal core of Luther's theology, his repudiation of the Jews—as a theological entity—was categorical. The Jews were exemplars of false religion, as were Catholics, Turks, and Anabaptists." For other post-Holocaust Lutheran scholarly reflection on Luther and the Jews, see Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (trans. James I. Porter; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Note also Ken Schurb's fine-tuning of Oberman's reading of Luther in "Luther and the Jews: A Reconsideration," *Concordia Journal* 13 (1987): 307–30. E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 55) describes the divide that took place between German-speaking scholars who were relying upon Weber and several English-speaking scholars who dissented.

⁹Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," 197–254.

¹⁰Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1903). A revised edition of his volume appeared in 1925.

which endeavors to win God's favor by the toil of minutely fulfilling the Law's stipulations."¹¹ In this system, "the idea of reward and punishment becomes the motivation, but also—and this is the characteristic thing for Judaism—that the obedience man owes to God and to His demand for good is understood as a purely formal one; i.e. as an obedience which fulfills the letter of the law, obeying a law simply because it is commanded without asking the reason, the meaning, of its demand."¹² Bultmann's students then championed the synthesis, as did several articles in the widely used *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich.¹³

Wilhelm Bousset was only one trajectory from Weber. In 1874, about six years before Weber's classic work, Emil Schürer published his *Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Zeitgeschichte*. Schürer intended this work to introduce students to the aspects of Jewish history from 175 B.C.E. to 70 C.E., a period crucial for the interpretation of the Christian NT. He extensively revised and enlarged the book in 1886–1890 as *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, translated into English as *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*. Though a very useful work that remains popular and is still in print, Schürer's revision drew upon Weber as a key source and equated Judaism with legalism. In a section entitled "Life under the Law," he explained that God would reward or punish the Jews strictly on the basis of their deeds:

But what were the motives, whence sprang this enthusiasm for the law, what the means whereby it obtained this enormous sway over minds? To answer briefly: it was *faith in Divine retribution*, and that a retribution in the strictest juristic sense. The prophetic idea of the covenant, which God had entered into with the chosen people, was apprehended in the purely juristic sense; the covenant was a legal one, by which both the contracting parties were mutually bound. The people to observe the law given them by God, exactly, accurately and conscientiously: while God was also bound in return to pay the promised recompense in proportion to their performances. And the obligation held good not only with respect to the nation as a whole, but to every individual; performance and recompense always stood in corresponding relation to each other. He who did much had to expect from God's justice the bestowal of much reward; while on the other hand every transgression entailed a corresponding punishment.¹⁴

¹¹Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951–1955), 1:11.

¹²*Ibid.*, 1:11–12.

¹³Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (trans. G. W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), originally published as *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*.

¹⁴Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*. 2.2 (trans. Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie; 1890; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 90–91. See § 28 (pp. 90–96, 120–25) for further dark descriptions of Jewish legalism and externalism.

According to Schürer, this belief in a just and exact rewarding of deeds led to an “externalism.” All Jewish religious and moral life revolved around the external fulfillment of legal stipulations in order to merit God’s reward. Two Christian rabbinic scholars, Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, wrote a lengthy commentary on the NT in the light of later rabbinic literature early in the twentieth century.¹⁵ Commentators would frequently refer to Schürer’s and Strack and Billerbeck’s works in order to help interpret the NT in the light of its Jewish context. For instance, those who read R. C. H. Lenski’s popular commentary series were introduced to the synthesis as mediated through Schürer, Strack, and Billerbeck. Such views then filtered down from academia into pulpits and Bible classes, the audience for whom Lenski intended his series. Lenski regularly speaks of “the Jews with their moralistic, self-righteous use of the Mosaic code of law” or “legal works-righteousness” in contrast to Christians with their religion of grace.¹⁶

Jewish scholar after Jewish scholar—Samuel Sandmel, Solomon Schechter, Claude Montefiore, Louis Finkelstein, Jacob Lauterbach—repeatedly and to no avail urged Christian scholars to look firsthand at the primary sources left behind by the Jewish authors of the first and second centuries and to recognize the error of the Weberian picture. The situation would finally change when the dissent came from within the ranks of Christian NT scholars. In 1977 a NT specialist named E. P. Sanders, himself indebted to these Jewish predecessors, reviewed the primary sources and demonstrated that Weber’s synthesis was a caricature. Judaism was not the legalistic religion that Christian scholars following Weber had described it to be.¹⁷

Sanders drew attention to passages in the rabbinic Mishnah from 200 C.E., a compilation of the oral traditions and interpretation of the Torah from earlier generations. In several places the Mishnah reflects first-century discussions. Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1 says, “All Israelites have a share in the world to come.” The passage then goes on to speak of those excluded from this general rule as only the most egregious and blatantly unrepentant sinners in Israel’s past. In other words, only those who had deliberately acted in defiance of the God of Israel were excluded from a place in the world to come. Ordinary Israelites could be confident of their place in that future world because of God’s election of the people of Israel. They need not despair of their place in a divine plan enacted long ago to include them.

Certainly these rabbis spoke of laws, rules, and regulations. These regulations may even seem overwhelming and strange to the modern,

¹⁵Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (4 vols.; Munich: C. H. Beck, 1924–1928).

¹⁶R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Lutheran Book Concern, 1936; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 238, 180.

¹⁷Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. See esp. Sanders’s review of the history of scholarship on this question, pp. 33–59.

uninitiated reader. Sanders must remind the modern reader of laws that people obey every day and that are embedded in the very fabric of society. No one would consider stopping at a red traffic light an instance of legalism. Meats purchased in a store have passed regulatory codes through an inspection process. Citizens of industrialized countries usually must possess certain governmental forms of personal identification as well as licenses for their vehicles. No one would likely conclude as a result that the average Westerner is “legalistic.” These are simply the laws that structure life in a particular society. The same may be said of the laws of Moses. The fact that the laws of Moses were derived not from a human source but from divine legislation would have been a greater incentive for a Jew to observe these laws. A first-century Jew would also have appreciated that these laws were designed to serve as a reminder of the special relationship that he or she enjoyed with the Creator of the universe.

An Israelite would not despair should his or her performance of the Law fall short of the Mosaic standard. The Law included various means of restoring a broken relationship with God. Sanders pointed to the system of sacrifices and atonement. The laws concerning such would comfort and encourage consciences troubled by sin. Even after the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 C.E. during the first Jewish revolt, the Jews were not deterred from their observance of the Law. The rabbis substituted the study of temple laws for the actual sacrifices that were central to their religion. God did not require of people what was physically impossible, only what was realistically attainable. The mere intent to perform a biblical law, even if not carried out, would satisfy the legal requirement, according to the rabbis. Sanders coined the term “covenantal nomism” to describe this perspective. God’s gracious election and covenant relationship with the people, along with the merciful provision of sacrifice and atonement for failure, enveloped and formed a framework around the Jews’ observance of the Law’s requirements, the embedded “nomism.”¹⁸

As a result of Sanders’s study, most NT scholars have abandoned the view that a fundamentally petty legalism characterized the religion of first-century or rabbinic Judaism. Such a view does not adequately account for the unique relationship of Israel with the God who had elected them as a special people. The notion that all but the most unrepentant sinners in Israel would find a place in the world to come simply does not conform to the Weberian description of Judaism. After Sanders reviewed rabbinic Judaism, he turned to several Jewish documents from the Second Temple period through the end of the first century. These documents demonstrated the same, generally gracious pattern of religion. No longer could Jewish legal-

¹⁸Sanders defines “covenantal nomism”: “Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one’s place in God’s plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression” (ibid., 75).

ism be the proper foil for the apostle Paul's critique of the Mosaic Law. A proper Christian understanding of first-century Judaism and of the beginning of the rabbinic movement, the foundations for normative Judaism, would go far toward improving Jewish-Christian relations after centuries of caricature.

Once the Weberian fog had lifted, scholars began to see more clearly that Paul was never really confronting Jewish works righteousness. Romans 2 critiques Jewish confidence on the basis of mere *possession* of the Law. Paul seeks to disturb that comfort by reminding the hypothetical Jew that he or she must also obey that Law. To borrow a phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, perhaps Paul would have labeled the problem "cheap grace." Certainly nothing in Romans 2 suggests that the Jews were trying to earn their way into heaven by their good works. Likewise Gal 3:15–21 speaks of a Law that simply came 430 years after God's gracious dealings with Abraham and thus was never intended to save in itself. Not a word in the passage suggests Jewish legalism. Pauline specialists were forced to look afresh at Paul's problem with the Law: what is it that he saw as problematic about the Mosaic Law if he was not confronting Jewish legalism? A heated discussion began that rages on even today.

Out of the discussion a dominant approach has emerged that some believe deserves the status of a new paradigm; it is auspiciously labeled "the new perspective on Paul and the Law." The scholar James D. G. Dunn has been its most ardent and articulate champion. Dunn took Sanders's scholarship in a new direction. The starting point was Sanders's premise that Judaism was a gracious religious system grounded in God's election and favor toward the people. No Jew would have had to obey God's Law perfectly. The provisions of sacrifice, repentance, and atonement guaranteed that an individual could experience life in the world to come even if he or she were less than absolutely meticulous in the observance of all that God had commanded. Such a construal of Judaism resonated for Pauline specialists with Paul's own description of himself as "blameless" in Phil 3:2–9. Along with his autobiography in Galatians 1, where he boasts that he had excelled in Judaism well beyond his peers, the apostle does not appear to be a man who had been burdened by pangs of conscience, angst, and guilt as would allegedly be typical of a formerly Law-observant Jew from the traditional standpoint. Perfect obedience of the Law was simply never an issue for Paul or for anyone in his day. First-century Jews would have clung to a gracious and merciful system of religion grounded in a God who had chosen and elected Israel.

Sanders had been content to say that what Paul found problematic about Judaism was that it was not Christianity; Judaism was not based on faith in Christ. Dunn found this less than satisfying. As Dunn read through the writings Paul left behind, he noted the recurrent ethnic dimension of Paul's reasoning. Paul juxtaposes Jew with Gentile or Greek quite regularly in the very passages in which he is talking about Moses' Law and the issues

this Law raised for Paul's missionary work among Gentiles. Dunn concluded that Paul's problem with the Mosaic Law must therefore relate to its ethnic features. The Jews had treated the Law as a boundary marker in identifying a special people who enjoyed God's grace. The Gentiles would have to submit to circumcision, Sabbath, and dietary regulations if they wanted to be included among God's people and thereby be guaranteed a place in the world to come. In Dunn's reading of Paul, the apostle faulted the Jews on just this point. The Jews had failed to understand that the Scriptures had always pointed toward the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan. God's grace was never just for the nation of Israel but was ultimately intended for the non-Jew as well. It was a misunderstanding that had resulted in the Jews' excessive pride in their ethnic identity because of their exclusive possession of the Law. The Jews were wrongly forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews.¹⁹ Consequently, Paul draws differently the boundaries identifying God's people. The boundary marking God's people is not circumcision, Sabbath, or any other ritual from the Mosaic Law but rather an existence "in Christ." As the Law itself testified, God had planned all along to include all the peoples of the world. The Gentiles did not need to observe the aspects of the Law that distinguished Jews from Gentiles, that is, the "works of the Law," if they wanted to experience God's favor. Dunn concluded that whenever Paul speaks positively of the Law, it is the Law understood apart from Jewish ethnic identity or boundary markers. Whenever Paul speaks negatively of the Law, he has in mind primarily these ethnic boundary markers.

After a long period during which many interpreters of Paul's critique had viewed first-century Jews as crass legalists, Dunn represented a very different approach. Dunn's approach was indeed a "new perspective on Paul and the Law."²⁰ No longer did Paul's critique of the Law have anything to do with people not being able to obey the Mosaic Law as perfectly as God required. The critique was entirely of Jewish ethnic presumption. The new perspective that Dunn introduced offers several advantages sustaining a more positive Jewish-Christian interfaith relationship. Not only did Dunn

¹⁹Some would wrongly say that his opponents were "judaizing" and thus were "Judaizers." Such a use of the term "judaizing" is improper since the word referred to those who adopted a Jewish way of life for themselves, not to those advocating or compelling such a lifestyle. See James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC 9; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 9 n. 2; and Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 175–97. Christians have historically employed the label "Judaizers" as a pejorative term.

²⁰Advocates of the new-perspective approach also include N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael Cranford, "Abraham in Romans 4: The Father of All Who Believe," *NTS* 41 (1995): 71–88; idem, "The Possibility of Perfect Obedience: Paul and an Implied Premise in Galatians 3:10 and 5:3," *NovT* 36 (1994): 242–58.

work with an understanding of Judaism that included a gracious and approachable God and that avoided the caricature of busy, anxiety-ridden Jews trying to earn their way into heaven on the divine scales, he was able to maintain a positive perspective on the Mosaic Law in Paul. Paul does not discard the Law as the relic of a past era. The Law is actually good in and of itself. The Mosaic Law remains the sign of an elect people that includes Gentiles and of a giving Lord, albeit whose blessings are realized only by faith in the *Jewish* Messiah, Jesus Christ.

More traditional biblical scholars have resisted the “new perspective” paradigm, as fruitful as it may be for Jewish-Christian interfaith dialogue, because of its inability to account for key passages where the apostle does appear to be speaking of humans as unable to accomplish what the Law demands. In other words, while Dunn and important predecessors such as Krister Stendahl²¹ have certainly advanced the modern understanding of Paul by highlighting the often intensely ethnic dimension to the apostle’s reasoning, these advances must be reconciled with the strengths of the traditional reading. The possibility must also be entertained that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Paul may very well be critiquing the Law on the basis of the difficulty of doing the works that it requires. Upon further, more detailed examination, subsequent scholarship has also criticized Sanders’s global characterization of “common Judaism” as covenantal nomism. Sanders grossly generalized the complexities of Second Temple Judaism. The Jews held God’s grace, God’s mercy, and repentance in a lively tension alongside the necessity for people to do God’s Law. The shape of this tension varies from writing to writing and from genre to genre. The emphasis may fall toward one extreme or the other.²² How one resolves

²¹ Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

²² I argued at length for this modification of Sanders’s view of Judaism in A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 12–69. Independently, Friedrich Avemarie took a similar approach to rabbinic literature (*Tora und Leben: Untersuchungen zur Heilsbedeutung der Tora in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* [TSAJ 55; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996], esp. his conclusions on pp. 575–84). Certain passages in Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism do advocate strict observance of the Law as a means to gaining the reward of a place in the world to come. Recently a group of specialists in the literature of Second Temple Judaism have corroborated my approach and that of Avemarie; see the essays in D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Siefid, eds., *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). The essayists offer a more nuanced view of the literature in question but do not return to the pre-Sanders caricature of Judaism as a religion of crass works righteousness and gross legalism. The essayists generally recognize the importance of election, covenant, sacrifice, and repentance in the Jewish systems of thought that they discuss, even while reexamining the extent and role of God’s grace. Greater and more sustained attention in the volume to the matter of strict and perfect obedience in Judaism would have been helpful since it is the denial of perfect obedience to the Law in Judaism that forms the basis for the new perspective reading of Paul. Further, the authors of the volume do not always recognize the

these questions will naturally figure in one's understanding of Paul's relationship with, and opinion of, other Jews who did not choose to join the early Christ movement.

Few have realized, however, that an approach to Judaism as a religion inclusive of God's grace and mercy may lead to a very different reading of Paul than that offered by Dunn. If Paul is a formerly strict Pharisaic Jew, as the apostle himself claims, then a proper understanding of first-century Judaism presents the best background to the apostle's own position. Sanders's covenantal nomism distinguished between the embedded nomism, the strict rules and regulations God handed down from Mount Sinai to be accomplished, and the overarching gracious framework that included the full narrative of a God who had entered into a relationship with the people of Israel and their ancestors, rescued them from their enemies and slavery, and then protected them in the wilderness and in subsequent generations. Even in scholarly discussions critical of Sanders, the tension remains between the strict demand of the Law and God's mitigating grace and mercy.

This tension in Judaism may be taken in a different direction than the path Dunn took. When Jesus Christ revealed himself to the future apostle, Paul realized that Judaism did not offer a viable path to salvation; the path to a right relationship with God was only in Christ. In Paul's reasoning, the gracious elements in Judaism were never efficacious for salvation of themselves and apart from the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Mosaic Law had never provided salvation in and of itself. Performance of its regulations involved empty human deeds, and nothing more, apart from the proper framework of grace in Christ, Abraham's seed. Consequently, if the works required by the Mosaic Law were never the means to salvation, then the Law's own distinctions between Jew and Gentile would not be the basis for identifying those who have a place in the world to come. If this understanding of Paul is correct—and what follows will advocate and work from this “newer perspective”—the denial of any saving value in the Law's works will provide a crucial plank in reconstructing Paul's view of the Jewish people. In other words, while the Jews did not approach the Law le-

significance of the tension they themselves highlight in Judaism (and Paul) between salvation by God's grace and a judgment according to works. Occasionally, when an essayist finds works and obedience extolled as necessary in Jewish literature, the essayist assumes a degree of works righteousness in spite of the presence of God's grace and mercy (e.g., Craig Evans's essay). The interplay between grace and demand is complex in both Judaism and Paul and need not equate to earning a place in the world to come entirely by one's own efforts. The apostle specifically qualifies the divine origin of human works in relation to salvation (Phil 2:12–13). Are not Jewish authors in his day capable of similar reasoning? Also, some of the essayists deem efforts to “stay in” the Jewish community, such as Law observance, instances of works righteousness. If so, should Christian acts of piety and avoidance of sin, all of which help maintain status within their community of faith, be analogously labeled as works righteousness? Greater sophistication in the analyses of these matters would have been helpful.

galistically, Paul's critique of the Law as based on works is a consequence of the transition in his thinking from one conception of grace to another.

The association of grace with Christ in Paul's thought may very well have been accompanied by a denial of Jewish ethnic privilege or election. An exploration of whether Israel maintains a special place as an ethnic people in God's plan or whether Jewish identity has been swallowed up by a new Christian identity within the church will therefore be necessary. If Israel does maintain a special relationship with God, what is the nature and value of that relationship?²³ Further, as Paul's reasoning led him away from associating God's grace with the Jewish institutions of election, sacrifice, or covenant, the apostle might very well have viewed the Law as likewise ineffectual or ceasing with the coming of Christ. This possibility leads to several further questions that deserve attention: Does the Law function positively for Paul? To what extent should Christians observe the Law, or does it even continue to function as a norm for Christians?²⁴ The chapters that follow will address the extent to which Paul's association of God's grace with Christ sent ripples through his entire system of thought.

Since Paul explicitly discusses the Mosaic Law, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles/Greeks, justification, and the relationship between the church and its Jewish roots in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans, the bulk of what follows will concentrate on those two letters. At the same time, one of the advances in Pauline scholarship this last century has been the recognition that Paul was a situationally driven thinker. He never formulated abstract, systematic doctrine, although Romans in particular has been culled for its doctrinal statements. The historical situation behind a letter must be developed before one can begin to resolve Paul's approach to the Mosaic Law or the Jews in that letter.²⁵ Only when the situation he was addressing has been properly reconstructed will a nuanced and fair reading of Paul's view of Judaism, its election, and its Law be possible.

In reconstructing the situation of the letter to the Galatians, many scholars have concluded that Paul was not critiquing Judaism as such. If he was engaged in an intense dispute with fellow missionaries in the service of Jesus Christ, his critical comments would most likely be directed against his rival peers rather than against Jews in general. Many recent Pauline specialists aver that to take Paul's statements as a blanket condemnation of the Jews is a gross misinterpretation.²⁶

²³ Chs. 4 and 5, below, will tackle these issues.

²⁴ I did not treat in *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* the passages that could lead to a potentially more positive view of the Law. Ch. 6, below, will briefly expand what I previously argued, and ch. 7 will develop my understanding of the Law's continuing role in Paul's theology.

²⁵ See ch. 2, below.

²⁶ For the strongest recent expression of this view, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997).

At the same time, any reading of Paul that is sensitive to the situations within the churches to which these letters were addressed must also recognize that the Pauline churches were among the earliest within the Christ movement. Had the first followers of Christ separated from the Jewish synagogues? Was Pauline Christianity still a movement of Judaism, or had there been some separation? Some have suggested that the followers of Christ in Rome were still meeting alongside other Jews for worship. The Galatian Christians may have attended synagogue worship or known people who did. The interpretation of Paul's correspondence would be decisively influenced by the question of whether his audiences were worshipping *within* or interacting with the Jewish assemblies.²⁷

Chapter 2 will therefore reconstruct the concrete situation at Galatia by means of the clues hidden within the letter. In the mid-twentieth century, many scholars supposed that the apostle was combating more than one rival group. Eventually, by the end of the last century, scholars reached an almost unanimous consensus that the contents of the letter may be explained on the basis of a single rival group at work in the Galatians' midst. Recent developments have challenged that consensus. At the same time, at the end of the last century, specialists began to realize that Paul's Letter to the Galatians reflects an apocalyptic worldview that decisively shaped his reasoning with respect to Judaism and the Jewish Law. A review of the debate over the situation of the Galatian letter—especially the role of the Mosaic Law, faith in Jesus Christ, and Paul's apocalyptic worldview—will offer an excellent test case for the newer perspective sketched here. The way Paul treats notions such as the Mosaic covenant, atoning sacrifice, and the place of the Jewish people as God's elect will help illumine whether the apostle considers Judaism's gracious elements efficacious or saving.

Paul's Letter to the Romans addresses many of the same topics as his Letter to the Galatians. The Mosaic Law and the place of Jews and Christians among God's elect are prominent within the discussion. And once again, the letter appears to be aimed toward the concrete situation of the Roman congregation. Contrary to the optimism that characterized study of the Galatian situation, no one can claim that a similar consensus has been reached on the situation at Rome. Many scholars have leaned toward a particular reconstruction in the last several decades: Paul was addressing the tensions within a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians over matters of distinctive Jewish practices. Nevertheless, books frequently appear with such titles as *The Romans Debate* or *The Mystery of Romans*. Chapter 3 will therefore delve into these matters by beginning with the origins of Jews and Christians in Rome. For the first Christians in Rome, the evidence is not limited to the biblical material but includes information from the Roman historians. Chapter 3 will develop a hypothesis regarding the situation at

²⁷See the discussion of Mark Nanos's proposals in chs. 2 and 3, below.

Rome and then test it against a recent and very different proposal, which would situate the Roman Christians within the Jewish synagogues rather than within their own assemblies. The chapter will conclude with the potential implications of the situation within the Roman congregation as well as Paul's advice to the congregation for Jewish-Christian relations.

The clues used to reconstruct the situation at Rome lie primarily in Romans 14 and 15, but a discussion of the implications for Jewish-Christian relations requires a review of what Paul has written earlier in the letter on these very topics. Romans speaks at length about the role of the Jews and the Gentiles in God's plan and their relationship to each other, especially in Romans 9–11 as well as in the first three chapters of the letter. Indeed, Paul draws upon the language of the Jewish Scriptures for God's elect people in describing Christians, and yet he does not deny a place for ethnic Jews in God's plan. The vast majority of ethnic Jews, however, have not assented to Paul's claims regarding Jesus as the Messiah.

The precise role of the Messiah for the future of Israel within Paul's letters is a matter of intense contemporary debate, and again, a resolution to these modern debates will decisively shape what one may conclude about the role of ethnic Jews in God's saving plan for the world to come. For instance, if Jesus Christ were God's operative path to salvation only for the Gentiles, then the Jews might be able to approach God through the Mosaic Law. If Paul has assumed a two-covenant model and if his position is to influence modern perspectives, then modern Jewish-Christian relations would be very different than if Paul thinks God saves *all* people through faith in Christ. In other words, the framework of grace for the Jews as an elect people may be effective after all. This question—whether the Jews remain an elect people and what this entails—is the topic of ch. 4.

Chapter 5 will take the matter of ethnic Israel one step further in order to consider whether the Jews maintain a position of *priority* in God's plan for the world. Paul seems to speak of Jewish priority in Romans 9–11, but students of the apostle have questioned whether the Jews occupy a privileged position anywhere else in his letters. In the last several years a growing number of scholars have concluded, on the basis of a careful examination of Paul's use of pronouns to distinguish Christian Jews from Christian Gentiles in Galatians, that Paul prioritizes the Jewish people in that letter as well. Paul appears to be making the claim that the Gentiles are enjoying their blessings in Christ as a result of what God has done and is continuing to do for the Jewish people. At the same time, other passages within the undisputed Pauline corpus appear to rule out a privileged place for ethnic Israel. The most notorious anti-Jewish passage is 1 Thess 2:14–16, where Paul speaks of the destruction that has finally, rightfully come upon the Jewish people. Such sentiments, if as truly dark as they initially seem, would undermine anything positive the apostle has said about the Jews elsewhere. The question, then, is how to explain these diverging trajectories in Paul's comments with respect to Jewish priority in God's plan for the world.

Chapters 3 to 5 revolve around the issue of Israel's election. If the gracious election of a people was of no benefit apart from what God has done in Christ, what is the value of the Law bequeathed to the Jewish people through Moses? Paul's position on the Law has been just as disputed as his view of ethnic Israel's status as God's elect. Again, one group of passages speaks very negatively about the Law while others speak positively. In the first century, the Jews viewed the Law as leading to life for the Jewish people. Paul alludes to that tradition (Rom 7:12; 8:2), but ultimately his thinking on the Law was shaped by an awareness of the decisive apocalyptic change of eras created by Christ's entry onto the stage of human history. From the point of view of this new age in Christ, Paul contends that God never intended the Law to function as an instrument of salvation. At the same time, such a contention does not necessarily imply that the Law ceases to function within Christian existence (although many Pauline specialists have argued that Paul thinks the Law no longer remains in effect). Certainly, if the Law were to remain in effect for the Christian, it would have to be understood in light of the momentous, transforming events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Each of the following chapters will therefore tackle a unique set of problems within the body of Pauline scholarship. Once the most probable readings of the apostle have been established, the various strands of Paul's thought will be drawn together into a coherent account of his stance toward the Jewish people. This will not be the definitive, final answer on Paul's view of his fellow Jews. Scholars will undoubtedly continue to debate Paul's view of the Law and of Judaism because of the sheer breadth and complexity of these topics. Nevertheless, a careful reading of Paul that is ever cognizant of the various positions scholars have taken as well as of the supporting evidence for their positions should lead to the most probable interpretation. As modern Jews and Christians seek positive and constructive ways to relate to each other, the question must finally be asked: Does the apostle's stance toward his people foster anti-Semitism or do his writings lead to a renewed appreciation of the Jewish faith and its heritage?