

The Gospel as the Revelation of Mystery: The Witness of the Scriptures to Christ in Romans

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Paul's Gospel Hermeneutic

Paul does not interpret the Scriptures by a mere formal hermeneutic. Neither in Romans nor elsewhere does he provide us a method that once learned and acquired might serve us as a key to unlock the texts of the Old Testament. Nor can we read one indirectly off his use of Scripture. The knowledge of Scripture for the apostle is something more than learning the rules of a game, even if he would agree that the rules of grammar, style, rhetoric and logic have their legitimate place in interpretation. There is a certain usefulness to the analysis of Paul's techniques of citation and allusion, the examination of the patterns of his interpretation of texts, comparison of his interpretation with roughly contemporary rabbinic *midrash* or Qumran *peshet*, and the categorization of his apparent interpretive moves.

But we impoverish ourselves if we imagine that by describing Paul's use of the Scriptures we have come to understand it. As a reading of Romans shows, Paul's hermeneutic is essentially and profoundly material in nature, bound up with the incarnation, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹ It is not the sort of hermeneutic which yields its results to the intellectual skill of the interpreter who opens the text, investigates it, and then applies it. It is, rather, the text that exegetes the interpreter. It does not do so without the engagement of our faculties,

knowledge, and skill. Nevertheless, before and beyond our own ability to interpret it, the Scripture acts upon us and calls us to account. We necessarily bring to the text our own identity, a self-judgment that the Scriptures address whenever we encounter them. God speaks to us there in such a way that we are both undone and made new, exposed for what we are and yet marvelously forgiven and set free from ourselves.

As Paul's letter to the Romans makes clear, he was no exception to this truth. His encounter with the commandment of God which he describes in confessional form in Rom 7:7-25 is a narration, through the eyes of faith, of the tragic image of himself which appears in the mirror of the Law. The shout of joy which he utters nearly—but not quite—at the conclusion of this narrative is the joyful recognition of the Gospel “promised in holy Scriptures” to which the Law itself bears witness. Paul is an interpreter of Scripture only as the Scripture first is an interpreter of Paul. Although it is seldom observed, his first-person language in Romans 7 is merely the most prominent part of a series of self-references which describe believing participation in the gospel (6:19; 7:1, 4; 8:18, 38). That gospel—itsself the interpretation of Scripture—does not have to do with an abstract and remote outline of ideas, but with the confession of the truth in life. Paul's role as apostle and herald

remains that of witness. He speaks only as one addressed by the Scripture and in so doing invites his readers, both then and now, to hear the Scriptures in faith and so to be interpreted by them.

Paul makes four brief but significant statements concerning the message of the Hebrew Scriptures. The first of these statements appears in the opening verses of Romans. The gospel for which Paul has been set apart as apostle was “promised beforehand through the prophets in holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2). It concerns the son of God, “who came to be of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3). Through Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen son of God and son of David, Paul received his apostleship, which was to *effect* the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of Christ’s name (Rom 1:5-6). As Paul’s statements elsewhere in the letter make clear, this “obedience of faith” is nothing other than the obedience which *is* faith, (e.g., Rom 6:17; 9:16; 15:31). Paul speaks here of the gospel that works what it announces. The Gentile believers in Rome are ones “called of Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:6), those called by the effective word of the gospel to faith in Christ. The fulfillment of promise in Christ includes the conversion and faith of the nations, *the creation of new creatures in him*.

The second statement concerning Scripture appears in Rom 4:22-25, at the conclusion of Paul’s discussion of Abraham. The word of Scripture that pronounces Abraham’s justification also pronounces ours: “It was not written on account of him alone . . . but also on account of us” (Rom 4:23-24). What God did in the past in his promise to Abraham, he does now in his fulfillment of promise in Jesus. And just as the pattern of his

saving work remains the same, so the faith of those who believe in the One who raised Jesus corresponds to the faith of Abraham who believed in the One who gives life to the dead (Rom 4:17).

Paul’s third statement concerning Scripture occurs in the closing of the letter, bracketing the apostle’s message. It is no accident that it appears within the apostolic exhortations and is directed to the immediate needs of the church in Rome. For the apostle, the Scriptures do not speak in abstract theory, but instead they address us in the confusion, difficulties, troubles, and sorrows of life: “For whatever was written beforehand was written for our instruction, in order that through perseverance and the comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4). Here again Paul speaks of the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures. *Everything* written in advance of the in-breaking eschaton in Jesus Christ was written for our instruction. In context, his statement explains his description of Christ, who did not please himself but found his identity in God: “The reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen upon me” (Rom 15:3; Ps 69:10 [LXX Ps 68:10]). Paul thus hears Christ speaking in David’s words. What was true for David is true for Christ in transcendent measure, not only in his bearing God’s reproach, but also in sharing in the very identity of God.

At the same time, Paul’s appeal to the text indicates that the pattern of experience of the people of God is constant. They must face the world’s rejection of God which came upon Christ. Just as Christ was present in David, so now he is present in all who believe in him. They suffer with him in order that they might be glorified with him (Rom 8:17). But that is not the end of the story. The larger context of the

Psalm which Paul cites remind his readers of God's deliverance of David and the resurrection of Christ: "I will praise the name of God with song and magnify him with thanksgiving" (Ps 69:31). This triumphant conclusion remains here unspoken, however, just as the final deliverance of the Roman Christians remains a matter of hope unseen. According to Paul, the instruction of Scripture provides something greater than intellectual knowledge. It is a reminder of Christ, in whom the Roman Christians share, and of God's deliverance of him which is promised to them as well. In the church at Rome, where conflict had arisen between conservative Jewish Christians and Gentile believers in the Christ, Gentile believers expose themselves to reproach from their neighbors as Christ once did, as they accept the Jewish practices of "the weak in faith." Yet in doing so they also lay hold of hope. The Scriptures were written in order to impart *hope*, a hope that comes through "perseverance and the comfort of Scripture."

Paul's words in Romans 15:4, however, are not bound to this particular situation any more than the words of the psalm uttered in a particular distress were bound to that single event. The apostle speaks to the lives of all believers at all times. As Paul has indicated already in the letter, the perseverance through which hope becomes ours is not the outcome of our own endurance, but the product of the time of testing in which that which we have been given by God proves itself in us. In and by God's grace "the boast in tribulations" is ours here and now along with the "boast in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:2-4). Tribulation works perseverance, because God's unshakable love for us has been poured out in

our hearts and made known to us by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:3-5). "Perseverance" is thus a holding fast to the message of Scripture, the gospel, which itself *holds us fast* through the time of trial.

Paul's second word, the "comfort of the Scriptures," describes this sustaining counterpart. It is the hearing of the gospel message of the Scriptures afresh in the midst of trial in such a way that it penetrates the heart. As Paul says elsewhere, those who experience Christ's afflictions also know the comfort that comes through Christ. And only those who know Christ's afflictions know Christ's comfort (2 Cor 1:5-7). "Perseverance" and "the comfort of the Scriptures" are thus paired and inseparable. According to Paul, then, the instruction that we gain from the Scripture is a sort of wisdom that comes from being sustained in trouble and delivered by God in and through Christ. In this experience of perseverance and comfort we come to have hope, according to Paul: we grasp more firmly that which God already has given us in Christ. Indeed, as Paul makes clear in his following characterization, God is known solely through this experience, and he himself is the source of it: God is the God of "perseverance and comfort" (Rom 15:5). The purpose of the Scripture is to impart hope, a hope that is bound up with "perseverance and comfort," and that thereby entails a new identity in Christ and in God. For believers in Rome that new identity entails the concrete acceptance of one another as Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ.

Paul's fourth statement concerning Scripture appears in the closing doxology (Rom 16:25-27), so that the letter concludes with a double-bracket (Rom 15:4; 16:25-27) that recalls the opening statement in his

greeting. The statement here appears as an expansion of his confessional characterization of God as “the One who has power to establish you.” The Hebrew Scriptures have their place in God’s work of sustaining and keeping the faith of the Christians in Rome (cf. Rom 1:11) in view of the threat of deception (Rom 16:17-20). There is a slight ambiguity in the first phrase in which Paul develops this thought. He speaks of “the One who has power to establish you *according to my gospel*” (Rom 16:25). One might here understand him to speak of the message of the gospel that ascribes such power to God (cf. Rom 2:16). Very likely that idea is present. But in the following, lengthy phrase where Paul expands his thought he again speaks not of what the gospel *says* but of what the gospel *does*: (“*according to the revelation of the mystery . . . manifest . . . and made known for the obedience of faith*”). The gospel is a mystery that is now manifest and made known to all nations, *so as to effect the obedience of faith*. The mystery is made known “through the prophetic Scriptures,” i.e., through the Scriptures which by their very nature are prophetic (Rom 16:26). Paul thus reprises the opening theme of the letter in a new form: now his emphasis lies on the work of Scripture rather than the calling of the apostle. The prophetic Scriptures make known that “mystery which for long ages was silent,” namely, the gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ. They thus effect among the Gentiles “the obedience which is faith.”

Paul paradoxically here indicates that although the mystery of the gospel is made known through the *prophetic* Scripture, that mystery had been “silent for long ages.” The gospel unlocks the Scriptures; the Scriptures unlocked make

the gospel known. A reciprocal relation exists between the apostolic proclamation of Christ and the Hebrew Scriptures, which incipiently points to the inclusion of a “New Testament” within the canon. It is not the mere occurrence of events which makes manifest the once-silent mystery. The Scriptures make known the gospel. If they do so presently, they did so beforehand as well. That is why Paul describes them as *pro-phetic*, announcing in advance that which is to come. The event of Christ’s incarnation, cross, and resurrection announced in the gospel is pivotal, as Paul’s emphatic statement that the mystery “is *now* manifest” makes clear (Rom 16:26a). Yet the apostle does not speak of an event in itself, but of “the gospel” and “the proclamation of Jesus Christ,” in which the event that has taken place is interpreted and made known (Rom 16:25). His opening characterization of God thus turns out to be a hermeneutical statement: God is the one who is powerful to establish in faith “according to the gospel,” i.e., according to the message and effect of the gospel. The proclamation of Christ unlocks the Scriptures by unlocking the human heart and creating faith. This unlocking of the heart does not take place apart from the announcement of that which has come to pass. But it is something more than the bare reception and acceptance of “facts.” As we have seen, the interpretation of Scripture is something more than intellectual knowledge for the apostle. It includes “the obedience which is faith” in the human heart. The “event” and its “meaning” are inseparably bound together in *word*, in the proclamation of Jesus Christ, a proclamation which creates faith. The Scriptures once unlocked in the heart then have the power to effect faith *in others* (Rom 1:17

“from faith to faith”).

Again according to Paul, the gospel does what it announces. In and through the gospel, spoken and proclaimed, God acts in power to establish the Roman believers (and with them all others) in faith. Interpretation of the Scriptures is thus not a private matter. The scholar’s desk has its necessary place, but we imagine the act of interpretation wrongly if we think of it in terms of the scholar sitting at a desk in the study, gleaning results for the education of others. According to the apostle, the interpretation of Scripture comes out of hearing and receiving the proclamation of the gospel. As those who have heard and who have had the Scriptures opened to us, we are called to bear witness and hand on afresh to others that which we have received. Scripture thus interprets itself in Jesus Christ through proclamation and hearing, receiving and bearing witness: *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.²

Paul’s “gospel hermeneutic” is rightly understood only in its context. As Paul’s narrative of the human encounter with the Law in Rom 7:7-25 makes clear, the gospel is God’s second, final, and decisive word to us. Our ears are opened to hear that second word only by God’s first word of judgment pronounced on us in the Law. We fail to understand Paul’s use of Scripture in Romans and elsewhere if we overlook the sharp contrast that the apostle sees between the Law as demand and the gospel as promise. Interpreters often overlook the apostle’s uncompromising language in Rom 4:15: “the Law effects (God’s) wrath.” The advantage of the Jewish person according to Paul is that they have been entrusted with the “oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). As a part of these oracles, the Law exposes us for what

we are, bringing God’s charge against us to our hearts (Rom 3:9). This charge is always *concrete* and not abstract. Paul’s argument in Rom 1:18-2:29 prepares his readers for his charge in Rom 3:9 that “all are under sin.” His descriptions of the injustice of idolatry and the hypocrisy of moralism are a mirror that he holds up to his readers in which he invites them to see themselves. The same is true of the chain of citations to which he appeals in Rom 3:10-18, and his reminder of the prohibition against coveting (Rom 7:7-13). In the presence of this mirror the charges have their bite. The testimony of the “oracles of God” thus speak to every human heart, so that “every mouth is closed and all the world is held guilty before God” (Rom 3:19-20). The gospel of *God’s righteousness* (and not our own) is comprehensible only in its triumph over the judgment of the Law, in a second, radically different word: “*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifest*” (Rom 3:21).

Jesus Christ as the Center of Scripture

According to his announcement in Rom 16:25-27, Paul understands the proclamation of Jesus Christ to be the message and interpretive key to the whole of Scripture. The Scripture in turn makes Christ known. The interrelation is not circular, but takes into account the necessary “hearing” of the gospel which effects faith and understanding. Paul obviously does not regard Christ as a systematic center from which lines of thought logically unfold. Nor does he speak of Christ in an abstract manner that offers no definition or limit to understanding. He speaks of the gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The witness of Scripture to Jesus

Christ bears specific content, the good news that can be announced and made known.

The gospel concerns God's Son who "came to be of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3). Paul's wording here presupposes the preexistence of the Son of God, who became incarnate. The gospel concerns the one who became human. Indeed, it concerns the one who became Jewish, the one who came to be "of the seed of David." Although many interpreters today would like to wish it away, the scandal of ethnic particularity is attached to Paul's gospel. His essentially Jewish introduction of his gospel to this very Gentile church already anticipates his affirmation of the abiding advantage of "the Jew" (Rom 3:1-4) and his enumeration of Israel's benefits at the opening of Romans 9-11 (Rom 9:1-5). There are clear indications in these chapters that he understands the Scriptures to speak of the hope of Israel's final salvation—beyond all human calculations, charts or speculation about its political status. The distinction between Israel and the nations so fundamental to Paul's argument in Romans 9-11—Rom 9:24 is no exception—that any attempt to reinterpret "Israel" as the church must overlook or discard the dynamic of the text. The apostle grieves over the unbelief of his contemporaries (Rom 9:1-5). He prays for the salvation of Israel: he does not ask for that which he does not expect to receive (Rom 10:1). He affirms that God has not rejected his people, the Israelites (Rom 11:1-2). The presence of a present "remnant" holds the promise of the salvation of the whole nation (Rom 11:1-10; see Rom 11:11). He announces the mystery of the Redeemer who comes from Zion for Israel and *not* for the Gentiles (Rom 11:25-27). The "gifts

and calling of God are unchangeable" (Rom 11:29).

As the "seed of David" and the Anointed One ("Christ") of Jewish hope, Jesus is God's appointed ruler over the nations, whom he shall defeat and bring into submission. The biblical citations concerning "the Christ" which Paul presents in Rom 15:9-12 allude to this triumph (see Ps 18:49 [2 Sam 22:50] and Deut 32:43 in their contexts). Yet the reign of this Christ is a saving reign! The nations, humbled and brought into submission, enjoy salvation: they rejoice and praise the Lord along with Israel (Rom 15:10-11; Deut 32:43; Ps 117:1) and hope in "the root of Jesse" (Rom 15:12; Isa 11:10). The Gentiles come to salvation through judgment. Paul likewise speaks of his mission as a priestly service of gathering the Gentiles as an offering to God (Rom 15:15-16). The Gentiles thus appear as defeated enemies and offerings to God. The particularity of the gospel has its sting.

Yet Israel, too, must be judged in order to be saved. That *Jesus* is "the Christ" (9:3, 5; 15:3, 7, 19; 16:16), the promised seed of David (Rom 1:4), is a reminder of the failure of David's line and of Israel's exile. It is as the risen root of *Jesse*, the new David, that Jesus rules the Gentiles (Rom 15:12; Isa 11:10). The Davidic dynasty has been brought to an end and yet now is raised to life in Jesus. Continuity rests entirely in the God who promises and fulfills. Correspondingly, David appears in Romans not only as a suffering figure who looks to God for vindication (Rom 11:9; Ps 69:22-23), but also as a transgressor who receives forgiveness (Rom 4:7-8; Ps 32:1-2). The Scriptural pattern of Israel's experience with God is present in David, the individual. The corporate and the individual meet in God's ways with us.

Israel's identity therefore is not to be made into a principle or transferred to "the church." Obviously for Paul the continuity of God's saving purpose for Israel is not "of the flesh." Ethnic identity is no guarantee of salvation. But God's promises, although they are not "of the flesh" nevertheless come to fulfillment "in the flesh." Here again is the scandal of particularity: the Gentile mission shall come to an end; Israel will be saved by the Redeemer who comes from Zion (Rom 11:25-26). According to the apostle, this hope is to have a definite and discernible impact on the present. Jews and Gentiles are together "with one mouth" to glorify the God and Father of Jesus Christ (Rom 15:6). They meet, but *not* by discarding their ethnic identities. Paul is a defender of conservative Jewish Christians in this respect (Rom 14:1-23). They meet in Jesus Christ alone. Their unity is ultimately not visible, but hidden in Christ and in hope.

Paul's reference to Jesus as "the seed of David" also signifies, of course, that he became a human being. Paul hears Christ speaking in Scripture in the suffering David: an anticipation of the incarnation (Rom 15:3; Ps 69:9).³ God sent Jesus "in the likeness of sinful flesh" and as a "sacrifice for sin" in order to effect the condemnation of sin (Rom 8:3; the expression *perihamartias* appears in the Septuagint as a translation of *hattāt*, the Hebrew term for the sin offering, e.g., Lev 5:6). In Christ God thus delivers all who are condemned and enslaved to sin (Rom 7:7-25; 8:1-2). The Son of God who has become flesh makes us "sons of God," who by the Spirit cry out to God, "Abba, father!" just as he did (Rom 8:15). Those who share in Christ's *sufferings* shall share in his glory (Rom 8:17).

Before all else, it is Paul's extended con-

trast of Adam and Christ in Rom 5:12-21 that reveals how he reads Scripture. Paul contrasts Adam with Christ, not Moses and the Law (which "entered in" only late, 5:20), and not Abraham to whom the promise was given. The life and death of all humanity has been determined by Adam's one transgression and Christ's act of grace and righteousness—an act which was simultaneously an act of obedience toward God (Rom 5:14-19). Paul's twofold description of Christ's work in Rom 5:15-19 is indicative of his thought throughout Romans. As the one who acts in grace and giving, Christ's act of grace is nothing other than God's act of grace (Rom 5:15). Christ performs the one act of righteousness that brings justification and life, an act which only God can perform (Rom 5:18). Yet Christ also appears here in a passive role: it is *through* him that God gives life (Rom 5:17). His act is not only an act of grace toward humanity, but an act of obedience toward God (Rom 5:19). God and Christ are thus simultaneously identified and distinct. God acts savingly for us and upon us nowhere but in and through Christ, the human being. The human Christ is none other than God acting in his grace, conquering sin and death for us as our Lord: the grace of God rules *through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom 5:21).

At the conclusion of each of the next three chapters in Romans, Paul echoes this announcement of the saving lordship of Christ in which we have been freed from sin, the Law, and death itself (Rom 6:23; 7:25; 8:39). Not only this central section of Romans, but the inner dynamic of the entire letter opens up to us in this light. The Creator, whom we have rejected in our idolatry and rebellion (Rom 1:18-31), has come to meet us in Jesus Christ. *In Christ*, the love of God has savingly laid

hold of us—a love which is saving precisely because it transcends all created things (Rom 8:39). *In Christ* the glory of God, namely, the goodness of the Creator reflected in the living thanksgiving of the human creature, has returned to the human being. Christ has been raised from the dead “through the glory of the Father” (Rom 6:4). The glory of God which we abandoned in idolatry (Rom 1:21, 23; 3:23; cf. 9:4) has been given back to us in Jesus Christ (Rom 5:2; 6:4: 8:17, 21, 30; 9:23; cf. 4:20). That is to say, the glory of God is ours in hope, although not yet ours in sight (Rom 5:2; 8:17, 21; 9:23). *In Christ* the righteousness of God justifies the human being under the power of sin. Behind and before justifying faith in Christ stands Christ and God’s work in him. The crucified and risen Christ is the mercy seat of God, *where God is present* and meets sinners in forgiveness and salvation (Rom 3:25). In Christ, the mercy seat, God has displayed *his* righteousness, triumphing over our unbelief and idolatry, showing himself to be the one true God, by working our salvation even in our condemnation and defeat (Rom 3:26; cf. 3:5).

As surprising as it seems at first hearing, according to the apostle, the oneness of God is established in the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. “If indeed God is one,” Paul argues, God is God of the Gentiles, who acts savingly for them as well as Jews. God thus shall justify both “the circumcision” and “the uncircumcision” by faith (Rom 3:29-30). God’s oneness is not simply numerical for Paul. The apostle’s conception of monotheism corresponds to that of Scripture: the confession of the one God is the confession of God’s uniqueness, manifest in the fulfillment of the promise of salvation (e.g., Isa 45:14-46:13). As we have seen in our brief reflection

on Rom 5:12-21, it is in their saving action for us that Paul identifies God and Christ. The same is true of his subsequent use of Scripture that speaks of “the Lord” in reference to Jesus Christ. Christ is the stone upon whom one believes and is saved. Where the book of Isaiah speaks of Yahweh, Paul speaks of Christ (Rom 9:33; 10:11; Isa 8:14; 28:16). The book of Joel speaks of those who call upon the name of Yahweh and are saved. Paul speaks of calling upon Christ (Rom 10:13; MT Joel 3:5; ET Joel 2:32). For the apostle, then, the Shema is not an obstacle to the confession of Jesus Christ as God, but its very premise (Rom 3:30; Deut 6:5). His naming Jesus as God in Rom 9:5 is not to be regarded as an unusual and isolated statement, but the expression of an essential aspect of the message of Romans.

Typology as a Theology of History

Paul’s understanding of Scripture is fundamentally “typological.” It is already clear that this characterization must not be misunderstood as a description of a method by which he discovers or invents historical analogies to the narratives that appear in the biblical text. As we have seen, Paul’s use of Scripture is material, bound to the message of Scripture, the gospel of Christ. With the apostle “typology” must be understood as a theology of history. In a slight modification of J. G. Hamann, the radically believing Enlightenment author, one might say that Paul (along with the rest of Scripture) speaks of historical truths not only of the past, but of the present and of the future.⁴ The Scriptures speak of God’s ways with humanity in judgment and mercy in the past, through which he addresses us in the present and announces to us the future and end of all things.

As a theology of history, Paul's typology includes the understanding that Christ himself was present in the past words and events of Scripture. We have already noted that he hears the voice of Christ in the words of the suffering David (Rom 15:4; Ps 69:9), as well in David's triumph over the nations in Ps 18:49 (2 Sam 22:50). Christ likewise speaks in the book of Deuteronomy and in Psalm 117, calling the Gentiles to rejoice with Israel and to worship the Lord (Rom 15:10-11; Deut 32:43; Ps 117:1). These ascriptions of the voices of Moses and David to the Christ are anticipations of the incarnation in typological form.

In Romans 9-11, Paul's citations of the past words of Scripture—the most numerous and concentrated in all his letters—are dramatically directed to the present time, so that his typological interpretation of Scripture here serves as a prominent aspect of his argument. Repeatedly in these chapters the apostle introduces Scripture with a reference to past figures speaking in the present tense. While the use of the present tense may simply convey vividness (and not time) there are sufficient signals in these chapters to suggest that it signifies present time. God *speaks* to Moses (Rom 9:15). The Scripture *says* to Pharaoh, "For this reason I have raised you up" (Rom 9:17). God *says* in Hosea, "I shall call 'Not-My-People' 'My-People'" (Rom 9:25). Isaiah *cries* on behalf of Israel (Rom 9:27). Isaiah *has said in advance*, "Unless the Lord left seed for us" (Rom 9:29): Paul's use of the perfect tense here confirms the temporal significance of the present tense usage throughout the series of citations. Moses *writes* the righteousness of the law (Rom 10:5). The righteousness of faith *speaks* (Rom 10:6, 8). The Scripture *says* (Rom 10:11). Isaiah *says*

(Rom 10:13, 16, 20, 21). Moses *says* (Rom 10:19). David *says* (Rom 11:9).

Paul does not rob the past of its significance, of course. That is already apparent in his opening reference to the promises concerning Isaac and the calling of Jacob: these are past events that speak to the present (Rom 9:6-13). The past likewise retains its place in God's words to Moses and to Pharaoh (Rom 9:15, 17). With his use of the present tense, the apostle rather underscores that what God once said to them *speaks to us today*. In Isaiah's day "not everyone obeyed the good news" (Rom 9:16). The same is true with respect to Israel now, according to the apostle. Likewise, just as the Lord kept for himself seven thousand who did not bend their knee to Baal, *so also now in the present time* there has come to be a remnant (Rom 11:4-5). The pattern of God's dealings with Israel in the past is recapitulated in the eschatological events of the present. From Israel's birth in the promises to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca (Rom 9:6-13), through its deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Rom 9:14-18), to its exile and restoration (Rom 9:19-33), the *whole* of its history in its dramatic encounters with the word of God is now repeated in its encounter with the fulfillment of God's word in the gospel.

Paul, then, does not speak of Israel's exile as a continuing reality that ended with Jesus' resurrection, as some interpreters now claim. He speaks rather of a *new* exile in the present, in which only a remnant of the nation believes the gospel, and that shall end only when the Redeemer comes from Zion to restore "Jacob" (Rom 9:27-29; 11:1-10, 26-27). The pattern of disobedience, judgment, and mercy in the past is being repeated in Israel's present unbelief.

Paul's typology is even broader and deeper. According to the apostle, while Israel's experience of judgment and exile remains hers alone, every human being and all nations find themselves in the story of Israel. The exile is a figure of the tragic meeting of destiny, guilt, and condemnation which is present in all of us. Paul strikingly uses the image of exile in describing our fallen state. His charge that both Jews and Greeks are "under sin" echoes the language of Isa 50:1 "you were sold (into slavery and exile) on account of your sins." The same allusion appears more fully in Rom 7:14, where Paul confesses, "I am fleshly sold under sin." Israel's exile is thus a figure of human rebellion and slavery under sin. That is so not only corporately, but also individually: we find not only ourselves, but also our world addressed in God's dealings with Israel. Adam's disobedience, which Paul has described in Rom 5:12-21 stands in the background to these statements, so that the image of expulsion from Eden implicitly stands behind and before that of the exile. Yet Paul draws his language from the exile, i.e., from *Israel's* experience of exile, in which the tragic pattern of guilt and destiny reappears in *particular* form (Rom 9:6-10:21). The Scriptures bear a universal message, not by speaking in abstract generalities, but by their penetratingly particular announcements of judgments and promises.

The figure of Israel's exile likewise stands behind the apostle's opening announcement of the revelation of God's righteousness and God's wrath. The text from Habakkuk which he cites presupposes the judgment impending upon Israel (Rom 1:17: Hab 2:4). Paul, however, speaks of the judgment impending not only upon Israel, but on all nations. His

threefold description of God's judgment on idolaters, "he gave them up" (Rom 1:24, 26, 28) is likewise a recollection of the Lord's surrender of Israel to defeat and exile (e.g. 1 Kgs 8:46; 2 Chr 6:36; 2 Kgs 21:14; 2 Chr 36:17; Ps 78:60-61; Ps 106:40-41; LXX Isa 64:6; Isa 65:12; Jer 21:10; 22:25). God's way with disobedient Israel is his way with idolatrous humanity. God's past dealings speak to the present while remaining in the past.

The same dynamic appears in Paul's appeal to the promise of the land and the return from exile, the second Exodus. As in early Judaism, so with Paul the promise of the land to Abraham becomes the promise of the *world* (Rom 4:13). The Genesis narrative itself suggests that in his becoming a blessing to the nations dominion over the world is given to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). Of course, Abraham died without inheriting the land, much less the world. According to Genesis, the promise belongs to his "seed" whom Paul identifies as those from among Jews and Gentiles who also believe God's word of promise (now fulfilled in Jesus), and who thus become little "Abrahams" (Rom 4:16-17). This typology is no mere interpretive game on Paul's part. This reading of the Scripture determines the very recipients of salvation. Only those who have Abraham's faith are Abraham's seed. And all those who have Abraham's faith are Abraham's seed.

Paul likewise draws on the pattern of God's dealing with Israel in mercy in the Scriptures, especially in his appeal to the book of Hosea in Rom 9:25-26. In Hosea the Lord rejects his people in judgment and makes them into "Not-my-people" (Hos 1:8). After this judgment, in which the Lord again brings Israel out into the wilderness—a second Exodus—he will

turn to his people again in mercy, and will call “Not-my-people” “My people” (ET Hos 2:23b). “In the place in which it was said “you are not my people,” *there* they shall be called ‘the sons of the living God’” (ET Hos 1:10). According to the apostle, the calling of the new people of God from among Jews and Gentiles (Rom 9:24) follows this pattern of God’s dealings with Israel, in which he made them into “no people” and then restored them in a new act of creation. The work of God in the past speaks to the eschatological moment that is present in Christ. It also speaks to the future. No reader of this letter or Hosea can forget that this promise of God was spoken to Israel. God’s present rejection of Israel, of which Paul immediately speaks (Rom 9:27-29), is accompanied likewise by the hope that he will again turn to them in redeeming love and salvation. Paul thus here points to Israel’s final salvation.

The apostle finds not only the pattern of God’s judgment and mercy in the Scriptures, but also the experience of suffering and deliverance, in which God’s people both past and present share, a suffering and deliverance which came to its ultimate expression in the death and resurrection of Christ. This pattern is pervasive in Romans. As it was for the psalmists of Israel and the suffering Servant of Isaiah, so also now the world is a battleground where a life-and-death struggle over claims to being-in-the-right is taking place. Paul’s opening announcement, “I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Rom 1:16) reflects this conflict. The psalmists and the servant of God look to God for vindication and triumph. Either they or their enemies must be put to shame and defeated (see, e.g., Isa 50:4-9; Ps 69:9-18, which appears later in Romans). Here Paul implicitly identifies himself with the psalmists,

just as he later does with the prophets of Israel in Romans 9-11 (see especially Rom 10:5-21, but also 9:27, cf. 9:1-5). The pattern of their life and witness is being repeated in him. His lengthy chain-citation of Scripture in Rom 3:10-18 which describes the fallen human condition also presupposes the background of conflict with the world. The psalms upon which Paul draws speak of the deadly conflict into which the people of God have been thrust (see Ps 14:1-7; Ps 5:1-12; Ps 140:1-13; Ps 10:1-11). The text of Isaiah which he cites is similar. There the Lord exposes his rebellious people as violent and murderous (Isa 59:7-8). The suffering which, according to the psalms, Israel itself has experienced as the people of God, it has come to inflict on those within its midst according to Isaiah. The pattern of human fallenness is present within its own heart. For Paul, Jesus Christ alone stands as the innocent sufferer, whose blood the violent have shed (Rom 3:15, 25). All the sufferings of the people of God are a participation in his suffering. Paul goes on to speak without qualification of tribulations that come to believers in Christ (Rom 5:1-5), and later that we must “suffer together with him” in order that we might be “glorified together with him” (Rom 8:17). Like the Son of God, the sons of God share in the “sufferings of the present time” (Rom 8:18). The people of God endured these same sufferings in the past. Like the sufferings of Christ himself, they cannot be attributed to guilt or failure. Then as now, God at times hides his face from his people in a manner that has no answer or solution this side of glory. The hope of seeing God’s goodness and glory are ours (Rom 8:18-25), as is the knowledge of God’s love in Jesus Christ (Rom 8:37-39). But in the present time there is an immeasurable

gap between faith and sight. In speaking of hardships that had not yet come upon the Roman Christians—but soon would arrive—Paul cites a psalm of lament that speaks of God’s hiding his face from his people: “On account of you we are put to death all the day, we are reckoned as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom 8:36; ET Ps 44:22). The psalmist grieves over the defeat and exile of the people of God, while protesting their innocence (ET Ps 44:20-21). They have been inexplicably abandoned by their shepherd, who has sold them without a price and forgets their affliction. God “reckons” them as sheep for slaughter. And his reckoning makes them so. He has given them over to death itself. The “sufferings of the present time” are a sort of “exile” for believers in Christ, yet one without answer or basis in guilt or transgression. Christians do not yet see God’s love in Christ. Yet, as Paul makes clear in this passage, they are carried by that love and brought to “more than triumph” through it (Rom 8:37-39). That which is ours by faith shall become ours in sight. That is the pattern of God’s dealings with his people, which he has made known in the gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, incarnate, *suffering*, crucified, and risen. According to Paul’s gospel and his interpretation of the Scriptures, the power of God in the gospel is effective in us to carry us through, just as it did God’s people in the past.

ENDNOTES

¹On this topic in Luther’s thought see O. Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie: Eine Vergegenwärtigung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 67–70.

²See O. Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik: Zu Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) 65-82.

³Ulrich Mauser has examined this dynamic in a study that generally has been overlooked, *Gottesbild und Menschwerdung: Eine Untersuchung zur Einheit des Alten und Neuen Testaments* (BHT 43; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1971).

⁴J. G. Hamann, “Golgotha und Scheblimini,” *Johann Georg Hamann: Sämtliche Werke* (J. Nadler; Wien: Thomas-Morus-Presse im Herder-Verlag, 1951) 305. My awareness of Hamann is largely due to the work of Oswald Bayer. See especially, O. Bayer, *Zeitgenosse im Widerspruch: Johann Georg Hamann als radikaler Aufklärer* (Munich: Piper, 1988) 151–78.