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# Eschatology and the Covenant

**A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11**

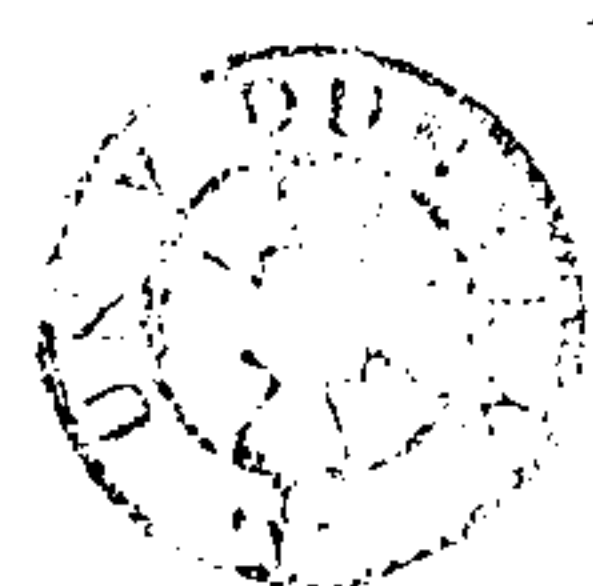
**By**

**Bruce W. Longenecker, B. A., M. Rel.**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at  
the University of Durham**

**March 1990**



**Eschatology and the Covenant:  
A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11**

Bruce W. Longenecker

Submitted for Ph.D. March 1990

**Abstract**

Taking as its starting point E.P. Sanders' characterization of Early Judaism as "covenantal nomism", this thesis sets out to examine the two first-century Jews whom Sanders cites as "exceptional", their presentations falling "outside" the common pattern of covenantal nomism. It seeks to examine the issue of "Paul and Judaism" by comparison with another Jew who, like Paul, is something of an enigma within the reconstruction of Judaism offered by Sanders. Of particular interest is the manner in which the law and the covenant people are presented by the two authors, against the background of Jewish covenantalism.

After highlighting (in ch. 1) three aspects of Early Judaism which are of importance for this project (*viz.*, its covenantal nature, its ethnocentric focus, its social diversity), 4 Ezra is examined sequentially (chs. 2-10), noting the manner in which the author interacts with covenantal nomism (renamed for our purposes "ethnocentric covenantalism"), replaces the ethnocentric understanding of the covenant with another (legalistic) perception of God's ways, and legitimates his innovative understanding of the law and the people. Paul's presentation in Romans 1-11 is then examined thematically (chs. 11-14), noting how Paul disqualifies the ethnocentric understanding of the covenant (ch. 12), repatterns the covenant along christocentric lines (ch. 13), all the while keeping an ethnic (not ethnocentric) component within his redefinition of the covenant (ch. 14). Finally (ch. 15), the presentations of these two "exceptional" Jews are compared in relation to Early Judaism and the emerging christian and rabbinic movements of their day.

The thesis demonstrates the manner in which two first-century Jews, grappling with the implications of their respective "crisis events", came to believe that the revelation of God's eschatological ways does not complement but, in fact, disqualifies traditional ethnocentric understandings of the covenant and the ways of God.

## **Declaration**

I confirm that no part of this material has been previously submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other university.

Signed: *Bruce W. Longenecker*

Date: *12 March, 1990*

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*To my parents,  
who have taught me much  
and loved me more*

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This project is dedicated to my parents, Richard and Frances, whose selfless support seems to have no boundaries, and whose love is a continual source of renewal.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### I. Modern Publications

AASFDHL	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae Dissertationes Humanarum Litterarum
AnalBibl	Analecta Biblica
AT	Arbeiten zur Theologie
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Series</i>
BEvTh	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DUJ</i>	<i>Durham University Journal</i>
EKK	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IAHR	International Association for the History of Religions
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSZ</i>	<i>Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit</i>
JSNTS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSPS	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KD</i>	<i>Kerygma und Dogma</i>
LEC	Library of Early Christianity, ed. W.A. Meeks
<i>LumVit</i>	<i>Lumière et Vie</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
nd	no date
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTS	Novum Testamentum Supplement Series
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society

<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Bible Study
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SEA	Svensk exegetisk arsbok
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
StNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SR	Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses
ST	Studia Theologica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
TrinJ	Trinity Journal
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
TZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
TPINTC	Trinity Press International New Testament Commentary
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literature
UPATS	University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies
WBC	Word Bible Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal

## II. ANCIENT TEXTS

### Bible and Apocrypha

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
1Kgs	1 Kings
2Ch	2 Chronicles
Ezr	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Ps(s)	Psalms (Psalms)
Prov	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Jon	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Zech	Zechariah

Tob	Tobit
Jud	Judith
WisdSol	Wisdom of Solomon
Sir	Sirach
Bar	Baruch
1Macc	1 Maccabees
2Macc	2 Maccabees

Mk	Mark
Lk	Luke
Acts	Acts
Rom	Romans
1Cor	1 Corinthians
2Cor	2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Phil	Philippians
Rev	Revelation

### Pseudepigrapha

ApAbr	Apocalypse of Abraham
ApMos	Apocalypse of Moses
ApSed	Apocalypse of Sedrach
AssMos	Assumption of Moses
2Bar	2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch
1En	1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch
2En	2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch
4Ez	4 Ezra

JosAsen	Joseph and Asenath
Jub	Jubilees
4Macc	4 Maccabees
PrMan	Prayer of Manasseh
PsPhilo	Pseudo-Philo
PsSol	Psalms of Solomon
QuesEzra	Questions of Ezra
SibOr	Sibylline Oracles
TAbr	Testament of Abraham
TDan	Testament of Dan (12 Patriarchs)
TLevi	Testament of Levi (12 Patriarchs)
TMos	Testament of Moses

### Dead Sea Scrolls

1QS	Rule of the Community
1QSa	Rule of the Congregation
1QH	Thanksgiving Hymns
1QpHab	Habakkuk Peshar

### Philo

<i>Decal</i>	<i>Decalogo</i>
<i>MigrAbr</i>	<i>De Migratione Abraham</i>
<i>SpecLeg</i>	<i>De Specialibus Legibus</i>
<i>VitMos</i>	<i>De Vita Mosis</i>

### Josephus

<i>Ant</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>Apion</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Wars</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>

### Rabbinics

<i>AZ</i>	<i>`Abodah Zarah</i>
<i>b.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud</i>
<i>BB</i>	<i>Baba Batra</i>
<i>ExR</i>	<i>Exodus Rabbah</i>
<i>GenR</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>m.</i>	<i>Mishnah tractate</i>
<i>Mek</i>	<i>Mekilta</i>
<i>Mid</i>	<i>Middoth</i>
<i>Sanh</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>SifDeut</i>	<i>Sifre Deuteronomy</i>
<i>Sukk</i>	<i>Sukkah</i>
<i>t.</i>	<i>Tosephta</i>
<i>TgNeo</i>	<i>Targum Neophiti</i>
<i>y.</i>	<i>Jerusalem Talmud</i>

## PART I: INTRODUCTION



**Chapter 1:**  
**Introduction**

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**1.1. New Approaches, New Issues**

It has been over a decade since the publication of E.P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, a book which is considered by many (particularly in the English-speaking world) to have introduced a new era in New Testament studies; especially in Pauline scholarship, much of the agenda has been set by this one book. So N.T. Wright, in his review of recent scholarship, states: "it is no exaggeration to say that the entire flavour of Pauline studies has been changed, quite probably permanently, as a result" of Sanders' work.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, D. Moo, reviewing the recent scholarly scene, cites Sanders' work as "a watershed in Pauline studies".<sup>2</sup> So also, even within the past year, one commentary was advertised by its publishers as "the first major commentary on Romans to take full account of the revolution in Pauline studies inaugurated by the publication of E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*".<sup>3</sup>

Acclaim of this sort is not unduly given, for if Sanders' central argument is correct, a new approach is to be undertaken when studying the texts of Early Judaism. Sanders argues (as others have as well<sup>4</sup>) that all too often the texts which were produced within the social and religious matrix of Early Judaism have been analysed from a flawed understanding of the character of Early Judaism. Traditional characterizations of Judaism have portrayed it as an arid wasteland of legalistic works-righteousness with an emphasis on merit and achievement, so that one's good works outweigh the bad works in the final eschatological evaluation of behaviour. In short, Judaism was thought to be a religion of scoreboard mathematics. Easy parallels were then drawn between the formalism and bankruptcy of Early Judaism and similar characterizations of

---

<sup>1</sup> Wright, 1988: 424.

<sup>2</sup> 1987: 287.

<sup>3</sup> Back cover of Ziesler, 1989. In fact, however, Dunn's commentary (1988a) preceded Ziesler's on this score.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., Montefiore, 1914; Moore, 1921; Klein, 1978; more briefly, F. Watson, 1986: 2-10.

sixteenth-century Christianity, against which Luther and other Protestant reformers reacted.

In contrast, Sanders contends that such an estimation (often identified as the “Lutheran view”) misses what animates the whole of Jewish thought and practice: an awareness of Israel’s election by, and covenant relationship with, God. Sanders’ fundamental point concerns the *motivation* for Jewish obedience to the law; rather than seeking to *earn* salvation by merit points and, thereby, putting God under obligation to bestow salvation in the final judgment, the pious Jew concerned himself with obeying God’s commandments as the means of *preserving the covenantal relationship already established by God’s initiating mercy upon Israel, his people*. Sanders argues that the underlying principles of Early Judaism arrange themselves in a “pattern of religion” which he names “covenantal nomism”, a term devised to demonstrate that Jewish observance of the law (“nomism”) remained firmly rooted within a covenantal context.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Sanders contends that, for too long, the theological agenda of Christian scholars has caused Jewish texts to be evaluated in an environment foreign to their historical context, without regard for the covenantal undergirding which permeated Early Judaism.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the “watershed” in contemporary studies of Early Judaism facilitated by Sanders’ work comes when judging scholarly appraisals of the place of 4 Ezra within its historical context. In the traditional characterization of Early Judaism, 4 Ezra is cited as paradigmatic of the kind of legalistic piety which pervaded contemporary Judaism. For instance, W. Bousset, whose work *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* has long been a basic textbook for the study of Early Judaism, describes Early Judaism as “eine Religion der Observanz und des absoluten Beharrens”<sup>6</sup> in which external formalism (“ausseren Betätigung”) suffocated true religious sentiment, thereby facilitating the deterioration of Jewish religion. Bankruptcy of this kind, which was founded upon “eine Frömmigkeit ödester Observanz”,<sup>7</sup> promoted a rigid individualism, in which salvation was merited “durch angespannte Anstrengung”.<sup>8</sup> Since the individual relied upon his own efforts, his salvation was

---

<sup>5</sup> See his eight-point definition in 1977: 422; revised in 1982: 394–95. For defenses of his position, see Sanders, 1976; *idem*, 1977: 33–428; *idem.*, 1982: 394–402.

<sup>6</sup> 1926: 85, cf. 409.

<sup>7</sup> 1926: 101.

<sup>8</sup> 1926: 115.

never assured.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, hypocrisy took root in Judaism, as is evidenced by the Pharisees who became haughty in their self-achievement.<sup>10</sup> Their arrogant self-complacency is indicative of the deterioration of the Jewish religion and is instructive of the dangers of legalism in Christian history: "Die Parallele mit dem katholischen Klerus der Renaissancezeit drängt sich auf".<sup>11</sup> For Bousset, 4 Ezra is most illustrative of the self-reliance and personal piety of Early Judaism; although the author is doubtful about one's abilities to earn salvation,<sup>12</sup> nonetheless he holds fast to the view "dass der Einzelne verantwortlich ist für sein Tun"<sup>13</sup> in order to earn salvation by those deeds.

R. Bultmann, Bousset's student, maintains his teacher's position concerning the legalistic character of Early Judaism. In his presentations, Early Judaism is represented as the paradigm of the human tendency to grasp at salvation apart from any dependency upon God, concerning itself instead with detailed and trivial regulations which went "to the point of absurdity"<sup>14</sup> and "pettifogging".<sup>15</sup> Bultmann cites in this regard 4 Ezra 8.47b-49, thinking it to demonstrate how in Early Judaism "self-praise can be combined with a sense of sin".<sup>16</sup> Moreover, for Bultmann, this passage depicts the manner in which "repentance itself became a good work which secured merit"<sup>17</sup> before God. From this passage in 4 Ezra, Bultmann concludes that, in Early Judaism, "the whole range of man's relation with God came to be thought of in terms of merit".<sup>18</sup>

Similar estimates can be reproduced at some length. Representative is the pronouncement of J. Köberle:<sup>19</sup>

[T]he author of IV Ezra without doubt gives us a correct presentation of the repercussion of the belief in the future judgment on the religious expressions of individual Jewish piety. *All the many expressions of belief in God's grace and mercy appear to be denied.*

---

<sup>9</sup> 1926: 92

<sup>10</sup> 1926: 184, 189.

<sup>11</sup> 1926: 101.

<sup>12</sup> Bousset cites 7.46, 8.35, 3.35, 7.68. Cf. Mundle, 1929: 249.

<sup>13</sup> 1926: 405.

<sup>14</sup> 1956: 65.

<sup>15</sup> 1956: 67.

<sup>16</sup> 1956: 71.

<sup>17</sup> 1956: 71.

<sup>18</sup> 1956: 71.

<sup>19</sup> 1905: 657, cited by Sanders, 1977: 41, 427.



It would be wrong to suggest that estimates of this kind belong to a past day in scholarship. A decade ago M. Knibb commented on the matter of 4 Ezra's place within Early Judaism,<sup>20</sup> stating that the author of 4 Ezra

*in common with other Jews of his day* believed that by the strict observance of the law it was possible for an individual to acquire, as it were, a credit balance of good works to earn thereby the reward in the world to come of life.

Estimates of this sort often result in strains of polemic, such as those found in the claims of H.M. Hughes:<sup>21</sup>

There could be no better illustration of the need for the Christian revelation than ps.-Ezra's doctrine of the will. He grasped the truth, not comprehended by many of his Jewish contemporaries, that the law of itself left the will almost powerless for righteousness. The next step was the realization of the moral dynamic in the life of faith. For this his light was insufficient. . . The step [of faith] which ps.-Ezra was unable to take was taken by Paul when he surrendered to Jesus Christ, and this momentous advance represents the gulf between the moral outlook of the two.

For Hughes, while 4 Ezra is unique in that it alone of the Jewish literature recognizes the inadequacy of traditional Jewish piety, it remains trapped in the problem characteristic of all Judaism (*viz.*, the powerlessness of legalism) – a problem which is surmounted only by Christian faith.

While not all interpreters of 4 Ezra have found its author to be a legalist, it is no exaggeration to say that 4 Ezra has often been found to bolster the traditional understanding of Early Judaism as a legalistic religion: The experience of the “typical” Jew is clearly represented by the author of 4 Ezra who is caught in the dilemma of legalism – salvation will come to those who have to their credit works of merit, but few are capable of achieving that end since their works are flawed and sinful.

In Sanders' case, however, 4 Ezra is not representative of Early Judaism but is something of an oddity within the broader scope of Judaism: 4 Ezra is to be distinguished “from the rest of Judaism as it is revealed in the surviving literature”.<sup>22</sup> In his review of Palestinian Judaism from 200 BCE to 200 CE, Sanders repeatedly *speaks of* “the distinctiveness

<sup>20</sup> 1979: 182, emphasis ours.

<sup>21</sup> nd: 240-41.

<sup>22</sup> 1977: 418.

of IV Ezra". "the unique position of IV Ezra among the literature which remains", qualifying his general depictions of Judaism with notes such as "except IV Ezra", "IV Ezra differs", and "absent in IV Ezra". Sanders' estimate of 4 Ezra's place within Early Judaism, then, is in sharp contrast to those given in the above paragraphs. Sanders argues that a legalistic attitude "has often been held to be 'Jewish 'soteriology', but we have seen this nowhere to be the case, except in IV Ezra".<sup>23</sup> In contrast to those who maintain the traditional view of Judaism, Sanders locates 4 Ezra "outside" the common pattern of thought and practice of Early Judaism.

This survey demonstrates something of the radical shift which has been facilitated by Sanders' work concerning the covenantal character of Early Judaism. Although Sanders' view has not been accepted by all,<sup>24</sup> and although it has drawn criticism on a number of scores,<sup>25</sup> it is expertly argued from a selection of Jewish texts and has been well received by a good number of exegetes and historians. Moreover, it has received added support from the work of other scholars who have gone beyond the texts he himself analysed and who have obtained similar results.<sup>26</sup> It is not unusual these days to hear scholars speak of the covenant as "the key to any understanding of Judaism".<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the trend of modern scholarship in this matter is well demonstrated by the fact that the most recent university "textbook" to concern itself with the origins of Christianity begins its introduction to "Jewish Life and Thought at the Beginning of the Christian Era"<sup>by</sup> pointing to the covenant as a "dominant theme in the Jewish religion".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> 1977: 543. It should be pointed out, however, that in one sense 4 Ezra *is*, in fact, representative of Early Judaism. Neusner, for instance, claims it to be such (1981: 23), but he is using it to highlight the eschatological expectancy prevalent in Early Judaism.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., eg., Käsemann, 1980; Hübner, 1984a.

<sup>25</sup> These criticisms tend to fall into three categories: (1) Sanders asks his own questions of the texts; (2) Sanders' "covenantal nomism" is a scholarly, ahistorical abstraction which does not do justice to the diversity within Early Judaism; and (3) some texts refute "covenantal nomism" itself. Sanders responds to criticisms especially in 1980. The third criticism needs to be noted, for there is a corpus of Jewish literature which Sanders does not cite and which falls outside the pattern of "covenantal nomism". He himself notes this in his translation of "Testament of Abraham" (1983b). The genre of Jewish "propaganda literature" tends to play down the distinctiveness theme which is inherent in "covenantal nomism" (cf. Collins, 1985: 164-70), as do some authors who have a more cosmopolitan perspective, such as Philo of Alexandria.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Garlington: 1987; Collins, 1983, although he also notes that much of Diaspora Jewish literature breaks out of a covenantal scheme in one way or another; Dunn, 1988a: lxxvii-lxxi.

<sup>27</sup> Vermes, 1981: 163.

<sup>28</sup> Rowland, 1985: 27.

Fundamental to this project is the conviction that the best starting point for the study of Early Judaism is the recognition of the importance of the covenant for Jewish reflection and practice. We find Sanders' case to be compellingly substantiated by the Jewish texts of the period (see 1.2. below). It may well be, of course, that this approach will need to be subjected to various degrees of nuancing and revision when individual texts are examined in its light. It is arguable, nonetheless, that insights can be gained into the majority of Early Jewish texts when approached from this angle. It will frequently repay the student of Early Judaism to ask of Jewish texts questions such as: Does the author of this text interact with a covenantal perception of God's ways? If so, what is his "posture" towards the covenant? Has the situation which gave rise to this text helped to determine the manner in which the covenant is understood by its author(s)? To what extent is a covenantal perspective maintained/abandoned in this text? Questions such as these will, more often than not, help to illumine the purpose behind the writing of those texts. It provides, we believe, a historically-sensitive working hypothesis for the study of Jewish texts within the context of Early Judaism.

Of course, the study of Judaism was only part of Sanders' overall project, as the title of his work clearly indicates. Sanders' book is almost two books in one, the first establishing a covenantal pattern of thought and practice pervading Early Judaism (Part One), and the second analysing the contours and content of Paul's thought and its relationship to Judaism (Part Two and Conclusion). With regard to this second issue, Sanders makes the following claim:<sup>29</sup>

Paul's 'pattern of religion' cannot be described as 'covenantal nomism', and therefore Paul presents an *essentially different type of religiousness from any found in Palestinian Jewish literature. . . Paul in fact explicitly denies that the Jewish covenant can be effective for salvation, thus consciously denying the basis of Judaism.*

An obvious point needs to be mentioned here. That is to say that the accuracy of this provocative statement and others like it (cf. his talk of Paul's radical "change of 'entire systems'"<sup>30</sup>) depends upon the accuracy of Sanders' reconstruction of Paul's thought and of its relationship to Judaism; accepting Sanders' point concerning the covenantal nature of Judaism (Part One) does not necessarily entail the acceptance of his portrayal of Paul (Part Two) and Paul's place within

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<sup>29</sup> 1977: 543, 551, emphasis his.

<sup>30</sup> 1977: 550.

or “without” Judaism (Conclusions). Sanders has been joined by others who share his concern to reapproach the matter of Paul and Judaism with a backdrop of covenantal nomism in view,<sup>31</sup> but, despite their common understanding of Judaism, these scholars have registered different analyses of Paul, his thought and his relationship to Judaism.<sup>32</sup> If it can be said that Sanders has set the agenda for much of Pauline study by his compelling characterization of Judaism, it is not clear that he has offered the definitive presentation of Paul or answered the issue of Paul and Judaism beyond doubt. This remains a matter for investigation and discussion.

The traditional understanding of “Paul and Judaism” was based upon a legalistic portrayal of Judaism. Paul was seen as the great challenger of religious legalism and institutionalism, attacking the Judaism of his day for this very reason and converting to Christianity with its double emphasis on human inadequacy and divine grace. Obviously, then, renewed study of this issue (Paul and Judaism) is required as a result of Sanders’ analysis of Judaism. If the legalistic portrayal of Judaism is to be done away with, what then do we do with Paul? At least two possibilities arise. The first is that the traditional understanding of Paul as the challenger of legalism is left intact, despite a revised understanding of Early Judaism as a covenantal “religion”. If it were shown to be the case that Paul actually did make the charge of legalism against his Jewish contemporaries, it would seem necessary to suppose that “mainstream” (*viz.*, covenantal) Judaism was misrepresented by Paul. One might postulate, then, that the Judaism known to Paul was merely a peripheral and perverse phenomenon within Judaism which was not given voice to by the texts of Early Judaism, and/or that Paul simply failed to understand or recognize the covenantal context of Jewish obedience to the law.<sup>33</sup> Either way, Paul’s Jewish contemporaries might well have found his charges of legalism to “miss the mark”. A second possibility might be to suppose that the (misinformed) legalistic understanding of Judaism has misguided our perceptions of Paul; that is, perhaps the traditional view of Paul is itself incorrect, just as the traditional view of Judaism seems to have been. It is arguable, then, that the “result

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<sup>31</sup> Donaldson notes “the increasing recognition within Pauline scholarship that the legalistic depiction of pharisaism is simply false” (1989: 669).

<sup>32</sup> Cf., e.g., Sanders (1977, 1983a), Räisänen (1983), Dunn (1983, 1988a) and Westerholm (1988). A legalistic approach is maintained especially by Hübner (1984a) and (earlier) Cranfield (1975a).

<sup>33</sup> Cf., e.g., Montefiore, 1914; Schoeps, 1961.

of the traditional, and false, picture of Judaism has been...the manufacture of an imaginary apostle".<sup>34</sup> All this is still very much a matter of debate; accordingly, it is, as Wright estimates, "an exciting time to be a Pauline scholar".<sup>35</sup>

It is the purpose of this project to join in the examination of Paul and Early Judaism by means of a route as yet unexplored. In Sanders' survey of Jewish literature, Paul does not stand alone outside the common pattern of Early Judaism; as we have seen, Sanders cites one other first-century Jew whose work can be shown to fall beyond the bounds of covenantal nomism: the author of 4 Ezra. Since the issue of Paul and Judaism remains problematic, it would seem quite appropriate, if not imperative, to consider whether any light can be shed on this matter by comparing with Paul another Jew who, like Paul, is something of an enigma within the reconstruction of Judaism offered by Sanders. Sanders himself was not concerned with a comprehensive analysis of 4 Ezra, as he was with Paul; he does not ask in any detail about how the author of 4 Ezra constructs his distinctive case against the background of the prevailing covenantalism of his day, or whether, and to what extent, the author interacts with covenantal nomism itself. Sanders' primary point in this regard was simply to show *that* (not how or why) 4 Ezra falls outside the typical Jewish "pattern of religion". These matters of relationship are, of course, applied to the issue of Paul and Judaism, but not to the question of 4 Ezra and Judaism. While many have joined Sanders in reapproaching Paul against the background of Jewish covenantal nomism,<sup>36</sup> little consideration has been given to whether 4 Ezra holds any clues to aid in this reinvestigation of Paul and Judaism. Since the publication of Sanders' work, no detailed study has appeared which sets out to discover what can be learned from a comparison of these two "exceptional" Jews against the background of Jewish covenantalism. However different they may be, if Sanders is right, 4 Ezra and Paul have one significant point in common: their common displacement from the covenantal "pattern of religion" which was so prevalent in Early Judaism. Certainly a comparison of the two is called for, and it is this task which we seek to undertake herein.

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<sup>34</sup> Wright, 1978: 80.

<sup>35</sup> 1988: 430.

<sup>36</sup> Cf., e.g., Räisänen, 1983; Dunn, 1983; *idem.*, 1988a; Wright, 1978; *idem.*, 1980; Ziesler, 1989; Westerholm, 1988; Barclay, 1988.

Such a comparison would appear to have some potential on several scores. The two authors were near contemporaries; not more than half a century separates the time of their writing. Moreover, both authors underwent a profound “crisis experience” which motivated their respective works – events which necessitated the re-examination of their traditional perspectives: for Paul, the encounter with the risen Christ; for the author of 4 Ezra, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. For this reason scholars have often spoken of each author as having a “conversion” experience (whether the word is correct or not),<sup>37</sup> thereby indicating that both authors have arrived at their position in distinction from an earlier held view – a significant point for this project. Furthermore, two or three decades separate those crisis events from the writing of the authors’ texts. As such, those texts embody not the initial “knee-jerk” reflexes but the calculated reflections upon those events and their implications for the situations in which these authors found themselves. Further still, one prominent scholar has claimed that both authors struggled with a common dilemma, and that their solutions are “structurally very similar”.<sup>38</sup> The structural similarities are especially evident when 4 Ezra is compared with Paul’s letter to the Roman christian communities, chapters 1-11 in particular. For this reason, the texts of comparison chosen for this study are 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11.

Before undertaking a comparison of this sort, it is necessary to ground our understanding of Early Judaism in the texts of that period, while highlighting aspects which will prove to be of importance for this project. First, it will become evident early on that the authors of 4 Ezra and Rom 1-11 develop their respective cases with two common convictions in their sights: (1) the pervasiveness of sin throughout humanity, and (2) the effectiveness of God’s grace within the covenant. This will be documented in (section) 1.2.1. Second, many Jewish texts demonstrate how easily a covenantal self-identity could result in a sense of national distinctiveness, thereby promoting an attitude of Jewish ethnocentrism, as 1.2.2. will illustrate. This aspect of Early Judaism is of fundamental importance to the cases of the authors of this study, as we will see in Parts II and III below. In 1.2.3., the social diversity of Early Judaism will be called to mind since, if we hope to analyse correctly the position of these authors to or within Early Judaism,

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<sup>37</sup> For 4 Ezra, see Stone, 1981; Collins 1984a: 165. For Paul, see Donaldson, 1989; Gager, 1981; Wilckens, 1974; Räisänen, 1987b.

<sup>38</sup> Stone, 1973: 84.

the “variations” upon the covenant “theme” must first be recognized. With these considerations in mind, we will establish in 1.2.4. the issue of particular interest for this project. Then in 1.3., we will define several terms and set out the perspective and approach of this study.

## 1.2. Aspects of Early Jewish Covenantalism.

**1.2.1. Human Sinfulness and the Covenant of Divine Grace.** Much of Jewish literature demonstrates a common conviction concerning the wickedness of all humanity. Throughout 1QH, for instance, there are repeated statements to this effect. It is said that a man has no defense before God (1.25-27), for to him (“man”) belongs “the work of iniquity and deeds of deceit” (1.27). No one, “when he is judged, shall be righteous before Thee... nor can any withstand thy wrath” (7.28-29; cf. 9.14-17, 12.24-31). There is “no fleshly refuge” (7.17); a creature of clay and dust – himself “a source of pollution, a melting pot of wickedness and an edifice of sin” (1.22; cf. 12.25) – stands “in the realm of wickedness” (3.24) and therefore has no hope of standing upright before a just God (cf. 10.3-12, 12.19). His beginning is in sinful iniquity (13.15) and he remains “in iniquity from the womb and in guilty unfaithfulness until his old age” (4.29-30). Righteousness “is not of man nor is perfection of way of the son of man” (4.30; cf. 15.12). for he inclines all his days towards sin and guilt (11.20-21).

From this, it is clear that, despite a strong sense of separateness and distinctiveness from the rest of society, those who recited these hymns and psalms affirmed their position in sin right alongside the rest of humanity. This condition of sinfulness includes all humanity; social distinctions were considered to be inappropriate when one’s position before God was in view. There are none who are righteous before God since sin is pervasive throughout the human race. This conviction is evident in much of the literature of Early Judaism,<sup>39</sup> and expands upon the pronounced confessions of sinfulness and personal inadequacy as recorded in the psalms, the Jewish prayerbook. One needs only to glance briefly at Pss 25, 51, 79, 90 or 105 to see that such convictions concerning sin were hardly unique; it was a Jewish commonplace to recognize the indiscriminate character of sin upon all humanity: “No one living is righteous before you” (Ps

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Sanders, 1977: 279; Charlesworth, 1988: 49.

143.2; cf. 1Kgs 8.46 = 2Chr 6.36; Eccl 7.20; Ps 14.1-3; Ps 53.1-3; Ps 155.8; PsSol 3.5 with 3.9, 9.7; PsPhilo 12, 13.9, 26.14, 19.9-10, 44; 1QS 11.9-11; Philo, *VitMos* 2.147).

Nonetheless, such all-embracing declarations are outnumbered in Jewish literature by statements concerning the efficacy of the grace of God (cf. PsSol 10.4; Ps 155.20-21; PrMan 13-14; JosAsen 10-13), grace which is bestowed upon those in covenant relationship with God. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in Pseudo-Philo (cf. 11.1, 6, 13.10, 14.2, 18.10, 19.8-11, 21.4, 9, 22.5-7, 23.4-14, 28.4-5, 30.7, 32.1-13, 35.3-4, 39.4-6, 47.3, 49.3).<sup>40</sup> Repeatedly we hear pronouncements such as this one, spoken by God: "For even if my people have sinned, nevertheless I will have mercy upon them" (31.2; cf. 19.11, 39.6, 49.3). Divine grace is granted to the people of Israel "because of his covenant that he established with your fathers and the oath that he has sworn not to abandon you" (30.7). Divine grace is effective through the channel of covenant relationship. Although God may punish his people when they sin, this is the natural result of a prior relationship, a relationship compared to that of a father and a son (16.5; cf. Exod 4.22-23; Hos 11.1; WisdSol 18.13; PsSol 18.4; Jub 19.29). This relationship is assured through God's faithfulness to his people:

It is easier to take away the foundations and the topmost part of the earth and to extinguish the light of the sun and to darken the light of the moon than for anyone to uproot the planting of the Most Powerful or to destroy his vine. (PsPhilo 18.10)

Throughout, Pseudo-Philo is animated by this notion of the unique covenant relationship between God and Israel. One can turn to almost any page of the text and find the fundamental concern of its author(s) to be the preservation of the covenant. At every point, the various episodes of Israel's history are explained according to covenantal dynamics; the people's faithfulness or unfaithfulness provokes God to act in various ways, thereby shaping the course of Israel's past. This in itself is not very original,<sup>41</sup> and the work may well be typical of "main-

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<sup>40</sup> On the importance of the covenant in Pseudo-Philo cf. Perrot, 1976: 44; Nickelsburg, 1981: 267.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander calls the author's project "trite and predictable" (1988: 108). Nonetheless, this work may well have had profound significance in the context of his day by encouraging confidence in God despite political oppression or national disaster; cf. Moxnes, 1980:166.



stream" Jewish piety:<sup>42</sup> God is merciful to his people as they walk in the ways which are pleasing to him, living by the law (10.4-6, 19.9, 23.10) which he gave them in order to establish an "eternal covenant with the sons of Israel" (11.5; cf. PsSol 10.4; Jub 1.4-5, 1Macc 1.57). Offenses of the law threaten the covenant relationship but can be set right (especially "unintentional" sin; cf. PsPhilo 6, 22, 30; PsSol 3.7-8; Lev 4.2, 13, 22, 27, 5.15, 18, 22.14; Num 15.22-31) by means of repentance and atonement (contrast the unrepentant sons of Eli in PsPhilo 53 with the repentant Israelites in PsPhilo 39).

Although the Qumran sectarians revalued the covenant between God and Israel in a manner distinct from that found in Pseudo-Philo, the pattern is nonetheless much the same. In their literature, they emphasized the necessity of divine grace as the means of salvation. While recognizing that all are sinful before God, the speaker of 1QH nonetheless considered himself to walk in righteousness (7.14), but only through the goodness of God: "*By Thy goodness alone is man righteous*" (13.16-17); "Thou wilt pardon iniquity and *through Thy righteousness* (Thou wilt purify man) of his sin" (4.37; cf. 7.18-19, 16.11; 1QS 10.11, 11.2-3, 12-15). This cleansing from sin by God's goodness was thought to occur only as one participated in the membership of the "children of Thy grace" (12.20) who were "purified" and "made holy" and who had "no abominable uncleanness" or "guilty wickedness" (11.10-11). So the confessor blessed God: "Thou hast (caused the perverse heart to enter) into a Covenant with Thee" (16.24; cf. 3.21-22, 16.26-29). Despite recognizing the pervasiveness of sin throughout all humanity, the author of 1QH urged his fellow covenanters in the following manner: "O just men, put away iniquity! Hold fast (to the Covenant) O all you perfect of way" (1.36).<sup>43</sup> It is, then, in the community of the covenant (albeit redefined here in narrow sectarian terms) that one is rescued from the condition of sin which pervades the whole of humanity. In various hymns, the recognition of the unworthiness of all humanity and the belief that as a member of the covenant community one was righteous stand together without apparent contradiction.<sup>44</sup> These two convictions – of standing among

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Perrot, 1976: 23, 28-39; Murphy, 1988: 275; but see Alexander, 1988: 111.

<sup>43</sup> For "you perfect of way" as a community signifier, cf. 1QS 4.22a and 1QSa 1.28.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. esp. (following Vermes' twenty-five hymn structure) Hymn 1 (cf. 1.22 and 1.25-27 with 1.36), Hymn 5 (cf. 3.23-25 with 3.19-23), Hymn 7 (cf. 4.29-30 with 4.31-33 and 4.35-37), Hymn 11 (cf. 7.16-17 with 7.17-25), Hymn 12 (cf. 7.28-29 with 7.29-31), Hymn 14 (cf. 9.14b-16 with 9.12-14a), Hymn 17 (cf. 11.3 with 11.9-12), Hymn 18 (cf. 11.20 with 11.17-18 and 11.29-32),

the righteous and of personal unworthiness before God – are labeled by G.W.E. Nickelsburg as “the public and private sides of the speaker”,<sup>45</sup> a distinction which is possible only on the basis of divine grace.

Since they considered themselves to be the exclusive members of the covenant people, the members of the Qumran community claimed for themselves such titles as “the just”, “the elect of righteousness”, “the Holy Ones”, “the upright of way” and “the council of Holiness”, and distinguished themselves from “the wicked”, “the seekers of falsehood”, “the horde of Satan” who “wallow in sin”. These titular distinctions illustrate a (perceived) fundamental social difference between those in the covenant and those outside of it, a difference which is evident in the behaviour of the two groups; the status of an individual is demonstrated by his manner of life. The sectarian, believing himself to be enlightened concerning the ways of God (cf. 11.16-28), loathes “all the ways of iniquity” (14.26) so as not to turn aside from God’s commands or to be separated from his laws (15.11-12). He walks in the ways of God’s holiness (15.15; cf. 6.20), keeps his hands free from iniquity (16.10) and loves God by keeping his commandments (16.13; cf. 12.24). For this reason, the sectarian claims to have the law of God “engraved on my heart” (4.10) or hidden within (5.11). Conversely, those outside the covenant “walk in the way which is not good” because they have “loathed Thy (truth)”, taking “no delight in all Thy commandments” (15.18). Teachers of lies with stubborn hearts (4.10, 15) lead astray “Thy people” (*viz.*, ethnic Israel; 4.11, 16) by worshipping idols and setting them before the people (4.15, 19). Their idolatry and “the multitude of their sins” (4.14) proves them to be “the wicked” who have no share in the community of God’s grace. The law is the strict possession of the covenant people (*viz.*, the Qumran community); those who fail to live up to the standards of the law demonstrate their unworthiness of community membership, and are thereby deserving of God’s wrath.

Noticeable in all this is the dual-character of adjectives such as “righteous” and “sinful” in Early Jewish literature; as one scholar states on evidence from Psalms of Solomon, the godly “are not free from sin, but are sinfully pious, unrighteously righteous. Their opponents are the

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Hymn 19 (cf. 12.19 and 12.24-31 with 12.20-23 and 12.32), Hymn 20 (cf. 13.13-16 with 13.16-19), Hymn 25 (cf. the interspersing of the two emphases throughout 17.26-18.30).

<sup>45</sup> 1981: 139.

sinners".<sup>46</sup> The antithetical status of these two groups – the righteous and the sinners – is wholly determined by whether or not one is, and intends to remain,<sup>47</sup> a member of the covenant community, for common to both groups is sin, but restricted to the covenant community is the grace of God which is efficacious for the repentant members of that community who seek his forgiveness. So W.D. Davies states: "To be righteous was to be within the Covenant despite one's failures".<sup>48</sup> The law plays a role in this, itself serving to testify to the fact that God has promised to be merciful to Israel, his servants. Thus, PsSol 10.4 reads: "And the Lord will remember his servants in mercy, for the testimony of it (is) in the Law of the eternal covenant."

**1.2.2. Jewish Distinctiveness, Separation and Ethnocentrism.** It is significant for this project to note the manner in which Israel's covenant relationship with God and possession of God's law facilitated a sense of nationalistic distinctiveness for many Jews. Israel, having been selected as God's unique people, were to live in a manner worthy of their calling; since YHWH is holy (שׁוֹדֵף) so too are they to be holy (שׁוֹדֵף אֱלֹהִים, Lev 11.44), a holy nation (שׁוֹדֵף יִשְׂרָאֵל, Exod 19.6). It is this characteristic, shared by covenant God and covenant people, which distinguishes Israel from the nations who do not enjoy a covenant relationship with God. So, for instance, Deut 4.6-8 praises the people of Israel over all the other nations because of their possession of the law and their observance of God's commandments:

[The gentile nations] will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'...What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws?

Similar pronouncements concerning the privilege and distinctiveness of Israel are made on the basis of this same connection between wisdom and the law given to Israel. So ben Sira, contending that a life of wisdom is lived in devotion "to the study of the Law of the Most High" (Sir 39.1), personifies wisdom as a divine figure who wanders throughout the world looking for a place to take up residence (24.3-7) until she is commanded: "Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance" (24.8; cf. 24.23; Bar 3.36-4.4). This intricate connection between the

<sup>46</sup> Franklyn, 1987: 8.

<sup>47</sup> Schoeps: "intention is man's affirmation of the covenant" (1961: 196). Cf. Sanders, 1977: 135.

<sup>48</sup> 1984b: 18. Cf. Schoeps, 1961: 204; Przybylski, 1980: 76; Lührmann, 1989: 88.

law and the people of Israel is presupposed by the author of Pseudo-Philo, who describes the law as containing the “rules for *our race*” (PsPhilo 12.2). The law, then, served not only as a symbol or “testimony” (PsPhilo 11.2; cf. PsSol 10.4) of the covenant relationship between God and Israel (“the book of the covenant of the Most High God”, Sir 24.23) but as a guide book for moral living which gives to the people of Israel the “ethical edge” over the gentile nations.

While it was the case that a good many Jews sought to highlight the universal character of the Mosaic legislation in order to encourage gentiles to respect (at least, and perhaps to adopt) Jewish practices and beliefs (e.g., Philo), for many Jews just the opposite was the case. Israel’s election by God, their possession of the law, and their concern for holiness frequently promoted a Jewish concern to keep separate from others by adhering to practices which distinguished them from their gentile contemporaries. Various ritualistic observances became recognized throughout the Greco-Roman world as distinctively *Jewish* practices, since they were for the Jews symbols of covenant membership. These practices were to be maintained upon penalty of forfeiting one’s covenantal standing. Of them, circumcision was normative, being considered the mark of the covenant *par excellence*<sup>49</sup> – viz., “the covenant of the flesh” (PsPhilo 9.13, 15). Gen 17 records the divine command in this regard:

This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised... My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male... will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. (17.10, 14; cf. Exod 4.24-26)

While some Jews in Alexandria considered this command to have symbolic rather than literal significance (cf. Philo, *MigrAbr* 89-94), their view was certainly somewhat idiosyncratic; P. Borgen has argued that such Jews were “persecuted” by their contemporaries in view of the scriptural injunction.<sup>50</sup> For the vast majority of Jews, circumcision seems to have been essential for covenant membership (cf. Jub 15.11-15, 15.23-34, 16.14). So, for instance, when speaking of the physical attribute which identified Moses as a Jew, the author of Pseudo-Philo spoke not of Moses’ circumcision but, instead, of his “covenant” (9.15), thereby signalling how the two terms

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Nolland, 1981; Collins, 1985.

<sup>50</sup> 1983: 38.

could be used virtually interchangeably. Other practices which were regarded as necessary for the preservation of the covenant included especially the observance of the Sabbath rest (PsPhilo 44.7; Jub 2.17-33, 50.1-13) and Jewish dietary regulations (Jub 6.4-16).<sup>51</sup> Thus, when these practices were threatened by pagan influences and overlords (1Macc 1.41-50; 2Macc 5.27-6.11), some pious Jews passively “welcomed death rather than defile themselves and profane the holy covenant” (1Macc 1.63; cf. 1.54-62, 2.50; 2Macc 6.10-11, 6.18-7.42; so also the passive character of Dan 7-12 and, if dated to this time, AssMos 9), while others actively took up arms against their rulers in order to preserve the covenant, even if that entailed their death (1Macc 2.15-28; 2Macc 8.1-36; Jub 23.20; 1En 90.13-19). Such measures were said to be motivated by Jewish “zeal” (1Macc 2.54; 4Macc 18.12), a “zeal for the law” (1Macc 2.26-27, 54, 58). The “renegade Jews” (1Macc 1.11) who followed the Hellenizing programme of this period argued that Jewish separation from the gentiles resulted in “disaster” for the Jews (1Macc 1.11). Accordingly, they “removed their marks of circumcision...intermarried with the Gentiles, and abandoned themselves to evil ways” (1Macc 1.15). Those who maintained the distinctively Jewish practices denounced these “renegades” as having “broken the covenant with the Lord our God” (Jub 15.26; cf. 15.28-34; Dan 11.30; 1Macc 1.15) and having entered “into a covenant with the Gentiles” (1Macc 1.11).<sup>52</sup>

As a consequence of their distinctiveness as God’s people who live in accordance with the law, the people of Israel could be acclaimed as “a race of most righteous men” (SibOr 3.219). This attitude has a converse side to it, of course: the denigration of other nations. Since the gentiles did not possess the law (*viz.*, they are “unlawful”, PsSol 17.24) and “have not learned my [God’s] Law” (PsPhilo 10.2), so they were perceived by many Jews as being “sinners” (PsSol 2.1, 17.23 [1.1?]; Jub 23.24; Gal 2.15) and “rabble” (PsSol 17.15). They are likened to “spittle” before God, being as significant to him as a drop of water (PsPhilo 7.3, 12.4; 2Bar 82.5; 4Ez 6.56). All this follows from the fundamental point of Israel’s unique election: God chose Israel alone to be his “portion and inheritance” (PsSol 14.5), blessed “above all the nations” (PsSol 11.9, cf. 11.8-11; PsPhilo 11.1, 19.8, 30.4, 35.2). Consequently, just as distinctively *Jewish* practices (*viz.*,

<sup>51</sup> Further textual support is given by Stern, 1974: sect. 195, 258, 281, 301.

<sup>52</sup> Bickermann proposed that the “renegade” Jews legitimized this on the basis that distinctively Jewish practices were later additions to the original Mosaic law, having been incorporated in the the Mosaic code through the efforts of “superstitious priests” (1979: 86). Cf. Hengel, 1974: 1.258-60; Blenkinsopp, 1981: 16-17; Cohen, 1987: 42.

circumcision, Sabbath and dietary observance) were to be maintained, so also practices which were distinctive of the *gentile* nations were to be avoided, for gentiles were a polluted people. Denigration of this sort is obvious, for instance, in Jub 22.16:

Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, despicable, and abominable.

The concern to maintain Jewish distinctiveness (with the denigration of the gentile nations as its corollary) is especially apparent in Pseudo-Philo. Throughout that work, idolatry is cited as characteristic of the practice of the gentiles – it is the sin which provokes all other sins (PsPhilo 27. 44).<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, idolatry heads the list of practices which compromise the covenant relationship between God and Israel and which, naturally should be avoided lest other gentile practices be adopted (cf. 12.2-10, 19.7, 25.7-13, 27.2 with 27.15, 34.1-4, 41.3, 44.1-10). The author repeatedly makes the point that if one is truly to shun this fundamental evil (idolatry), one must refrain from mingling or associating with the pagan nations in any way (9.1, 18.13-14, 21.1, 25.10, 30.1, 34.1-5, 43.5, 44.7, 45.3).<sup>54</sup> A most dramatic portrayal of this is evident in PsPhilo 9.5, where Tamar is depicted as devising a plan to have sexual intercourse with her father-in-law in order to keep herself from having to have intercourse with gentiles; the former would be pardonable since it prevented her from “mixing” with gentiles, an unpardonable sin. Here is clear indication of the Jewish concern to keep themselves separate and distinct from the gentile nations who fall outside the boundaries of the covenant of God’s grace.<sup>55</sup> Necessarily, then, ethical distinctions demarcate the covenant boundaries (*viz.*, those “within” are ethically superior to those “without”) and ethical behaviour situates a person accordingly.

As a result of their election by the merciful covenant God, the people of Israel awaited their final vindication in the ultimate eschatological conflict through which God will establish his

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Murphy, 1988: 279-80. In *SifDeut* 142b, it is said that when the representatives of the gentiles heard of the law’s prohibitions against murder, adultery and robbery, they declined to accept it.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Murphy, 1988: 276, 284.

<sup>55</sup> Meeks: “The first point in each form of the variety of Jewish ethics...is to *be* Israel” (1986: 95-96, emphasis his).

reign on behalf of his people. Although expectations concerning the fate of the gentiles in the eschatological age vary greatly,<sup>56</sup> one common expectation is clearly given voice in the messianic section of Psalms of Solomon. Therein, God's grace and protection upon Israel is contrasted with the condemnation and destruction of the "unlawful" nations (8.23, 17.22-28; PsPhilo 10.4-6) who are deserving of God's wrath because of their rampant sinfulness. There is nothing therein to signal an awareness of Israel's vocation as a light to the gentiles (cf. eg., Isa 49.6, 51.4). God will be compassionate to the people of Israel, being faithful in mercy towards them forever (cf. PsSol 7.6-10, 8.23-34, 10.5-8, 11.1-9, 12.6, 17.1-46).

**1.2.3. The Covenant and Its Diversity in Early Judaism.** Each point in the discussions of 1.2.1. and 1.2.2. has as its basis a covenantal awareness. Nonetheless, it is important to add here that the covenant, while being a commonplace throughout much of Early Judaism, proved to be a point of contention among the various segments of Jewish society – "a swirling dynamo full of life".<sup>57</sup> The concept of the covenant did not function in the same way or mean the same thing "across the board"; in fact, although the covenant is fundamental to much of the literature of Early Judaism, those texts themselves suggest that two central components of covenantalism – the law and the people of Israel – are subject to (re)definition. If we extract these components from particular texts in order to notice common themes and the like, we must also recognize that what we are left with is something quite bare-boned which tends to be an ahistorical abstraction. As soon as flesh is given to this "skeleton", what becomes visible is not so much that which was common to the various groups which comprised Early Judaism but, instead, their idiosyncratic definitions of that commonplace (as A.F. Segal states, "root metaphors and paradigms produce socio-drama within societies").<sup>58</sup>

For this reason, it is in one sense preferable to speak not of the "Judaism" of the first century of our era but of the then-current "Judaisms". (So J. Neusner, W.S. Green and E. Frerichs, editing a recent collection of articles, entitle their book, *Judaisms and Their Messiahs*.<sup>59</sup>)

<sup>56</sup> Cf. eg., Sanders, 1985b: 213-28.

<sup>57</sup> Charlesworth, 1987: 227.

<sup>58</sup> 1986a: 33. So P. Sigal, after laying out in *two* pages "A Basic Portrait of Judaism" (along the lines of Sanders' covenantal nomism), proceeds in *forty-eight* pages to discuss "The Varieties of Judaic Religious Experience" of Early Judaism (1988: 36-86).

<sup>59</sup> 1987b. Cf. Wright, 1988: 371. Moreover, Simon notes that each form of Judaism "could

If it is true that, as a rule, Jewish texts of that period give evidence of a vibrant sense of Jewish election and covenantal self-definition, so it is also true that the understanding of the covenant varies from text to text, from situation to situation, thereby contributing to a significant degree of tension among the variety of Jewish groups of that time (cf., e.g., the way in which the covenant is understood in Pseudo-Philo with the sectarian definitions of the covenant in 1QH or Psalms of Solomon [which we read as sectarian<sup>60</sup>]). That God had called for himself a people was not in doubt, but what that people was meant to be and how they were to act was subject to interpretation. It is one thing for the historian to recognize the covenant as a common “given” of Jewish self-awareness, the foundation upon which much Jewish reflection rested. It is another thing to consider the shape which the covenant took in any given situation. When the former is emphasized, one can speak of covenantal theology, rather than legalism, as the warp and woof of Jewish identity. When the latter is emphasized, however, one is reminded of the variance within Early Judaism itself – that is, of the Judaisms which were jostling each other in their bids for recognition and dominance.<sup>61</sup> They may have shared a basic recipe, but various seasonings produced a *pot pourri* of flavours.<sup>62</sup> Evidently, it is not too much to say that what characterized the Judaisms of this time was not uniformity, but diversity. Variation and controversy arose when determining what obedience to YHWH involved and what being his covenant people meant in practice. Accordingly, whereas the modern historian sees the various groups of first-century Jews as indicating the diversity and spread of Early Judaism, those particular parties themselves often thought that they alone embodied true Judaism while the others were in grave error or had fallen away altogether.<sup>63</sup> If the covenant proved to be a commonplace throughout much of Early

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claim with some justification to represent the most authentic form of Judaism” (1967: 7).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Hann, 1988.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., Stone, 1973; Weiss, 1985: 249-50.

<sup>62</sup> This consideration has led Sanders, in reflection upon his work of 1977, to admit that his study is prone to highlight a commonality in Early Judaism at the expense of its diversity (1980: 66). In a more recent article, Sanders discusses the character of Early Judaism without once making mention of “covenantal nomism”. Instead, he speaks less rigidly of the relationship between God’s mercy and human obedience (1985a; see, e.g., 1985a: 369, 371).

<sup>63</sup> Neusner: In reconstructions of Early Judaism, “an essentially philosophical construct, ‘Judaism’, is imposed upon wildly diverse evidence deriving from many kinds of social groups and testifying to the state of mind and way of life of many sorts of Jews, who in their own day would scarcely have understood one another” (1981: 21). Cf. Charlesworth, 1985c: 67; Russell, 1967: 155; M. Smith, 1983: 302.



Judaism, it also proved to be vulnerable to definition so that, in practice, the commonplace itself became a medium towards diversity.

**1.2.4. Establishing the Issues of This Study.** This scenario of Early Judaism, as set out in 1.2. above, provides the context for formulating the primary issues of the present study, taking into account three characteristics of Early Judaism which we find to be fundamental: (1) its covenantal nature, (2) its ethnocentric focus, and (3) its social diversity. In this regard, Sanders recognizes "two pillars to all forms of Judaism: the election of Israel and faithfulness to the Mosaic law".<sup>64</sup> Covenantal perspectives, no matter their form, included these as two central components: Israel and the Torah. So also S. Sandmel comments: "Israel and the Torah constitute a blended entity; without Israel the Torah had no significance, and without the Torah Israel had no uniqueness".<sup>65</sup> These two components are so intertwined in the covenantal undergirding of Early Judaism that the one intersects directly with the other, however the covenant is defined. Accordingly, our primary interest in this project will lie in discerning how the law and the covenant people are presented by the authors of 4 Ezra and Rom 1-11, against the background of Jewish covenantalism. If these two Jews do, in fact, fall outside a common "pattern of religion", their distinctiveness will no doubt be most evident in their handling of Israel and the significance of the law. These matters, then, will provide the focus for the study of these two texts.

### **1.3. Definitions and Perspective.**

Before proceeding, a few terms which are frequently used in this project need to be cited and explained. First, although we accept as a starting point Sanders' description of Early Judaism as marked out by what he calls "covenantal nomism", it will be more helpful for this project to rename this "pattern of religion" as "ethnocentric covenantalism". We have seen how a covenantal awareness undergirds a wide selection of Jewish literature. Accordingly, it is arguable that, when formulating a descriptive phrase to characterize Early Judaism, the covenant is to take central position in that formulation and is deserving, therefore, of the position of the noun ("covenant-

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<sup>64</sup> 1983a: 208.

<sup>65</sup> 1978: 182.

talism") rather than the adjective ("covenantal").<sup>66</sup> The adjective, then, can serve to describe the kind of covenantalism which is found in particular texts. Instead of "nomistic covenantalism" (reversing Sanders' order), it is necessary for this project to highlight the ethnocentric character (cf. 1.2.2.) of Jewish covenantalism. No matter how the covenant was (re)defined, its ethnocentric character was retained throughout most Jewish texts of the time.<sup>67</sup> Even in sectarian definitions of the covenant this is true, since the members of the sect considered themselves to constitute the exclusive participants in the covenant established by God with Israel;<sup>68</sup> although the requirements for membership in the covenant proved to be open to definition, the ethnocentric character of the covenant was not called into question. As we will see, "ethnocentric covenantalism" provides the best backdrop against which 4 Ezra and Rom 1-11 should be read, since their authors argue independently of each other that an ethnic particularism of this kind involves an inherently flawed understanding of the covenant, which they then seek to repattern along different lines. We have gone far beyond ourselves here in order to demonstrate something of our motivation for coining this phrase, "ethnocentric covenantalism".

Second, we will make references on occasion to the "anthropological condition of sin" and "the covenantal corrective". Whereas the concept of "sin" can contain various connotations in Jewish literature, it has as its "coherent centre" the fundamental notion of a breach of relationship with God.<sup>69</sup> The adjective "anthropological" is employed in order to highlight the commonplace (noted above) that this condition of "sin" is not restricted to particular peoples or groups but is shared by all indiscriminately before God. As Sanders explains: "During this life, man never ceases to be 'nothing' *vis à vis* God".<sup>70</sup> Social distinctions are improper when this position of sin

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. the appropriate remarks by Davies, 1984b: 17-18.

<sup>67</sup> We do not mean to imply, however, that Jewish ethnocentrism is incompatible with a more universalistic concern, since such is not necessarily the case (although it often was). The issue is too large to enter into here since it is only a related issue, but we note in this regard Urbach's article of 1981, which demonstrates how particularistic and universalistic concerns often reinforced one another in Early Jewish perspectives.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Vermes, 1981: 163-88; Sanders, 1977: 240-57.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Stählin: "It is almost always a matter of 'offense in relation to God'" (in Grundmann, 1964: 295). Cf., in the same article, Quell, 274, 276; Bertram, 289; Stählin/Grundmann, 289.

<sup>70</sup> 1977: 279. He finds this in rabbinic and tannaitic literature, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Sirach, 1 Enoch, Psalms of Solomon, and 4 Ezra. See his index entry "Sin" on p. 626 for references.

before God is in view. The corrective, of course, comes through God's grace which re-establishes relationship through the channels of the covenant; those who are within the covenant may be vulnerable to falling out of favour with God through transgression,<sup>71</sup> but by God's grace they have been rescued from the anthropological condition in which the sinners remain. Whereas the anthropological condition of sin is anterior to the covenantal relationship, God's gracious initiative is the salvific antidote which legitimates a distinction between the righteous and the sinners. These dynamics, which were noted in 1.2.1 above, are explained by Sanders in this way:<sup>72</sup>

On the one hand, there is the sense of human inadequacy before God;...no one can be righteous or perfect before God... On the other hand, there is the consciousness of being elect; thus some are righteous (*tsaddiq, yitsdaq*), but only by the grace of God.

Accordingly, the sinful condition of all humanity is offset within the social unit of God's people (however that group be defined by various Jewish factions), established as such by his grace (cf. the structure of Gen 1-11 [the anthropological condition of sin] and 12ff [the covenantal corrective]).<sup>73</sup>

With these terms defined, several remarks need also be registered here concerning the perspective and approach of this study. First, it should be noted that this project has been motivated by a desire to explore the character and development of earliest Christianity in order to shed light on the relevance of the Christian message within a setting two millennia removed. Personal theological studies within the past decade have revealed how perplexities of scriptural texts often lose their poignancy when those texts are allowed to be heard with the historical context more keenly in mind. In this way, historical-critical study (our "first love", methodologically speaking) is here put to the task of exploring the historical roots of Christianity in order to come to a clearer understanding of what being a Christian entails in the twentieth century in a culture

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<sup>71</sup> Green: "The boastful proposition 'we are men and they are crocodiles' implies that 'we were, or could have been, or might yet be crocodiles too'" (1985: 50).

<sup>72</sup> 1977: 311-12.

<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, the blessing of God to Adam in Gen 1.26-30 to "be fruitful and multiply" is reissued after the sin of Adam and transposed onto the covenant people of Abraham's offspring. Cf. (with Gen 1.26-27) Gen 17.2, 6, 16, 22.17, 26.4, 28.3, 35.11, 47.27, 48.3-4; Exod 1.7, 32.13; Lev 26.9; Deut 1.10, 7.13-14, 8.1, 10.22, 28.11, 63, 30.5, 16. See also Neusner's study of the covenantal corrective to the anthropological state in *GenR*, a section entitled "The Fall of Adam and the Rise of Israel" (1987a: 80-85).

quite removed from that of Jesus and his first followers. Nonetheless, since this is an historical study, we have tried to minimize the influence of a contemporary theological perspective in order to allow the texts of the past to speak for themselves. An old adage provides a useful methodological principle in this regard: "The past is like a foreign country; they do things differently there". The reader is asked, then, to judge the extent to which the arguments found herein are the result of critical historical investigation apart from any theological agenda or commitment.

A second consideration needs to be noted as well. We formed the opinion early on that the historical roots of Christianity lie within Judaism and, for the most part, remained fundamentally "Jewish" at least until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. With hindsight, of course, it can be argued that a religion quite distinctive from Judaism was born with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that only time was needed to reveal the incompatibility of the old and the new, Judaism and Christianity. We suspect, however, that the divorce of Christianity from Judaism may not have been inevitable from the start, as is commonly thought. In any case, we locate the beginnings of Christianity under the umbrella of Early Judaism. As a result, in order to avoid dichotomizing Judaism and Christianity, we have chosen to speak not of "Christianity" but of the "early christian movement" within Judaism. For the same reason, we have attempted in what follows to employ the word "christian" only as an adjective (instead of "Christian/s" or "Christianity"). And, moreover, we cite it throughout with a lower-case "c" (except once in Part IV). We hope that the reader can humour us regarding these little idiosyncrasies, all of which spring from the same conviction: the christian movement of Paul's day remained (from the historian's point of view) a sect within the broad scope of Early Judaism. The extent to which this perspective has shaped the results of this project or its nuancing, the reader may judge.

The title of this project should not lead the reader to think that what follows herein is a detailed study of the *whole* of 4 Ezra and of Rom 1-11, for such is not the case. We have concerned ourselves only with those passages which are most relevant to the question of how each author interacts with ethnocentric covenantalism on matters of the law and the people of God. Different approaches are taken to accomplish this in the two texts. Although 4 Ezra is examined section

by section (since it is constructed as a piece of narrative theology), that which is not relevant to our concern is quickly passed over. The analysis of Rom 1-11 is structured thematically rather than sequentially, and no attempt has been made to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the whole of the eleven chapters. Similarly, we do not make the claim herein to have studied the whole body of secondary literature concerning these two texts: if such were necessary, the project might never have come to completion. This is especially true for Pauline studies. Our policy in studying Paul's case in Rom 1-11 has been guided by the "principle of diminishing returns"; that is, there eventually came a point wherein secondary readings became more time-consuming than enlightening, more repetitious than helpful. At that point, decisions about the text were made in view of all the available information. No doubt, the informed reader will find the inevitable gap as a consequence, but on this score we can only plead the reader's indulgence while appealing to the precedent of another, who stated: "With the explosion of publishing made possible by modern techniques, scholarship will simply have to become more selective anyway or else drown in a flood of words".<sup>74</sup>

With these considerations in mind, we set out now to examine these two texts in comparison against the background of ethnocentric covenantalism. Each author has proven to be something of a "Pandora's Box" for those who attempt to look inside. Accordingly, our hope is to highlight issues, submit proposals, and perhaps generate discussion of these exhilarating religious figures from the Judaism of the first century CE. The remainder of this project will follow a simple three-part structure. In Parts II and III, 4 Ezra and Rom 1-11 (respectively) will be analysed in relation to ethnocentric covenantalism. Each text will be approached independently of the other in order to avoid (as much as possible) allowing the interests of one text to determine the investigation of the other. Only in Part IV will a large-scale comparison of the two authors be attempted – a comparison with the aim of shedding light on Paul's situation and argument by way of another whose situation will be seen as somewhat analogous. Therein we will also include reflections concerning these two Jews in relation to Early Judaism and the emerging christian and rabbinic movements of their day.

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<sup>74</sup> Dunn, 1988a: xviii. Cf. Meeks: "So many things have been written on the theology of Paul that no single scholar can gain command of the literature" (1980: 36).

PART II: 4 EZRA

**Chapter 2:**  
**Introduction to 4 Ezra**

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**2.1. Introduction to 4 Ezra**

The book of 4 Ezra (2 Esdras 3-14) is named by J.J. Collins as “one of the greatest of the apocalypses” which was written by “a sensitive and perceptive Jew”<sup>1</sup> engaged in a profound struggle in reflection upon the ways of God. As the opening verses demonstrate, this work is the product of one Jew’s reflections upon the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE – an event which left the Jewish “religion” never the same again. The author of 4 Ezra is one of the first to grapple with the implications of this event for Jewish thought and practice, in the light of traditional beliefs concerning the faithfulness and justice of Israel’s God. Our interest throughout Part II will be to examine the author’s concerns, techniques and solutions, with a view towards fixing his case in relation to the ethnocentric covenantalism of his day.

Most scholars are agreed on three textual and structural matters. First, the original text appears to have been written in Hebrew, although no Hebrew document survives. The place of writing is most likely Palestine<sup>2</sup> (although Rome is a possibility). The Latin and Syriac translations are thought to be the most reliable extant versions, themselves produced in dependence upon a Greek translation of the Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> Second, any interpretation must take into account the dialogical format of the narrative, for different perspectives are given voice to by different characters of the story. Third, in the extant texts of 4 Ezra, the narrative progresses according to a seven-episode structure, the first three of which (I-III) are given over to lengthy and sometimes frustrating dialogues between Ezra (the questioner) and the angel Uriel (the respondent). These dialogues then give way to three visions (IV-VI) and an “epilogue” (VII).

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<sup>1</sup> 1984a: 156, 168.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., Harnisch, 1969: 15.

<sup>3</sup> See Thompson, 1977: 83-85; Knowles, 1989: 261 n. 10. The Latin text used herein is Klijn, 1983; the Syriac text is Bidawid, 1973. The English translation used herein is Metzger’s, 1983, unless otherwise stated.

Despite these points of general agreement, various estimates have been proposed concerning the purposes of the text. Especially important in this regard are the dialogues of I-III. Although the two characters are actively engaged in dialogical exchange throughout, there is no proposition which both characters formally agree upon in the end. No conclusion appears in the dialogues; they simply come to an end. The dialogue weaves in and out of issues, often without any obvious gains being made along the way. Questions are left unanswered, concerns are often ignored, and neither Ezra nor Uriel can claim to have proven his case by the end of III. The author sets up a curious tension between these characters without an explicit indication of where he himself stands. One cannot arrive at "the theology of the author of 4 Ezra" simply by blending Ezra's and Uriel's positions together.<sup>4</sup> Instead his position must be pieced together after consideration of various matters: Is there any indication that one character, Ezra or Uriel, speaks on behalf of the author? Or might it not be better to ask, instead, how Ezra and Uriel together play a role in the crafting of the author's case? What, then, is the point of these extended debates in I-III?

Similar questions may be asked concerning episodes IV-VII. What is the purpose of the visions, especially in relation to the dialogues of I-III? Is the author addressing here a second matter of concern, leaving behind his interests voiced in I-III? Is the integrity of the text to be accepted in IV-VII or has textual transmission corrupted an originally coherent work and introduced foreign material which should be disqualified from consideration?

Before setting out to answer questions of this sort, it will be helpful to note briefly the solutions of some others. The review which follows in 2.2. (below) is not meant to be exhaustive of 4 Ezra scholarship. Instead, it is meant to be representative of the kinds of solutions given to the issues cited here.<sup>5</sup>

## **2.2. A Selective Survey of 4 Ezra Scholarship.**

In his still-valuable commentary of 1912, G.H. Box contributed to 4 Ezra scholarship by applying

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<sup>4</sup> Myers tends to do this in the section "Outline of Content" of his commentary (1974: 108-133).

<sup>5</sup> For more extensive reviews, see Thompson, 1977: 85-120; Brandenburger, 1981: 22-57.



to the text the source-critical interests which were especially popular then.<sup>6</sup> Box isolated five separate sources which were collected, edited and fused together by a single redactor. The main text of episodes I-III attracted the attention of the redactor because of its “pure legalism” and “lofty individualism”. Nonetheless, the redactor appended apocalyptic visions (IV-VI) to this source, allowing their “eschatology of the nation” to provide a corrective to the “eschatology of the individual” of I-III. Finally, VII was included to attract the attention of the rabbinic school, which was supposedly hostile to the apocalyptic mindset, in order to solicit rabbinic approval for apocalyptic literature. For Box, therefore, the redactor has (at least) two concerns, which are inconsistent with each other but which are fused together to form a somewhat disjointed unity.

In reaction to this source-critical approach, H. Gunkel (1900) insisted that the author was an independent thinker whose ideas need not be attributable simply to underlying sources.<sup>7</sup> Despite the presence of source material, the book is a unity, produced by an author who wrestled with disturbing reflections concerning the problem of evil and the fate of sinners. Gunkel identified what he thought to be two independent issues which the author addressed at different points of the book: (1) religious problems and speculations, and (2) apocalyptic and eschatological mysteries.<sup>8</sup> The former is addressed in I-III. There, the dialogues between Ezra and Uriel objectify the author’s own inner struggle. Each character gives voice to one aspect of the author’s penetrating enquiry – Ezra embodying his skepticism, and Uriel his faith.<sup>9</sup> The author, Gunkel claims, speaks through *both* characters simultaneously as he grapples with his existential dilemma. Gunkel notes, however, that there is a noticeable transition between the end of III and the beginning of IV, which facilitates Ezra’s consolation in IV – VII.<sup>10</sup> There, the author’s religious problems are left behind and the eschatological mysteries are explored. In the process, the author became assured that God is in control of history, an assurance which lifted him out of his despair. The author came to expect that only in the future age will the religious problems that plagued his faith be resolved. Finally, in Gunkel’s estimation, VII is a supplement to 4 Ezra

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. also Kabisch, 1889; Charles, 1896.

<sup>7</sup> 1900: 350-52.

<sup>8</sup> 1900: 335.

<sup>9</sup> 1900: 340.

<sup>10</sup> 1900: 347-48.

which gives to the whole work "einen ästhetisch gefälligen Abschluss".<sup>11</sup>

A completely different picture is given by R.H. Pfeiffer (1949). Analysing the author's concern to be the reconciliation of the existence of evil with the existence of a righteous God, Pfeiffer thinks that the author failed to solve the matter rationally. The author came to believe that God's ways are inscrutable, and that the human intellect is unable to find an answer to doubt, a theme met already in the book of Job. But the author of 4 Ezra differs from the author of Job in his deliberate search for comfort "in the world of make-believe".<sup>12</sup> Once intellectual enquiry failed, the author resorted to a "mirage of a future golden age".<sup>13</sup> But, according to Pfeiffer, even this failed to comfort him, since his intellect was plagued by doubts which Uriel's answers could not satisfy. Pfeiffer characterizes 4 Ezra as "a work of a truly great writer and thinker, an utterly sincere and candid spirit, who strove honestly and earnestly to solve ultimate problems but finally admitted sadly his failure to explain the tragic lot of his nation – and of all human beings".<sup>14</sup> In Pfeiffer's scheme, Ezra represents the author in his search for the truth which ultimately evaded him. The author was left without a rational solution of any kind.

W. Harnisch (1969) understands Ezra and Uriel to represent not the inner wrestling of the author himself, as Gunkel had suggested, but two sides of a live dispute between the author and his opponents – Ezra mouthing the position of the author's opponents and Uriel representing the author's own view.<sup>15</sup> Harnisch considers Ezra to advocate an extremely skeptical view which sprang from a gnosticizing heresy. Ezra portrays God as distanced from his creation, and humanity as being above reproach for sin since one has no control of one's actions; each person is under the unbending control of fate. This estimation is vetoed at every point by Uriel, the author's mouthpiece. As a solution to Ezra's concerns, Uriel sets forward a doctrine of the two ages of history. Because of the corruption of the present age, things are not as they should be, but the present age will give way to another age. In that age, God will grant salvation to those who obey the law in the present age. Harnisch thinks that, in the course of the dialogues,

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<sup>11</sup> 1900: 348.

<sup>12</sup> 1949: 85.

<sup>13</sup> 1949: 86.

<sup>14</sup> 1949: 86.

<sup>15</sup> 1969: 64-65, 86-87.

Ezra is progressively won over to the angel's view.<sup>16</sup> In the beginning of IV, in fact, Ezra seems to have conceded to the angel's position and addresses the people as the angel had addressed him previously.<sup>17</sup> Three visions are then recorded by the author in order to depict the events leading up to the age-to-come. These enabled the author to end on a note of assurance concerning salvation.<sup>18</sup>

Another approach is taken by E. Breech (1973), who argues that the hermeneutical key to 4 Ezra lies not so much in the specifics of the dialogical debates but in the *form* of the work as a whole. He argues that "the structure and meaning of 4 Ezra are mutually determinative",<sup>19</sup> the whole of 4 Ezra being animated by a "pattern of consolation". While Ezra is the representative of the people and expresses the various concerns of the community, neither he nor Uriel voices the author's position *per se*. Instead, both are pawns in the author's progressive journey from distress to consolation, which takes place in the movement from dialogues to visions, from Ezra's room (I-III) to the open field (IV-VI). The visions of IV-VII are themselves "firmly rooted in the pattern of consolation",<sup>20</sup> giving assurance to the community despite their despair. VII is the necessary conclusion to this pattern since the prophet must return to the community and console them. That the author was concerned more with form than content<sup>21</sup> is obvious to Breech from the fact that Ezra's questions are never answered to his satisfaction throughout the whole work. Neither the dialogues nor the dream visions provide a propositional solution to his religious dilemma. Ezra finds his solution not through an intellectual process of problem-solving but, in the final sections of the book, through the consoling reassurance that their God is "the true source of life and death for the community".<sup>22</sup>

Admitting Gunkel's influence, A.P. Hayman (1975) suggests that the author was trying to solve two distinct problems:<sup>23</sup> (1) sin, its origin and the means by which one can escape its

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Harnisch, 1983: 477-78.

<sup>17</sup> 1969: 173.

<sup>18</sup> 1969: 248-57.

<sup>19</sup> 1973: 269.

<sup>20</sup> 1973: 272.

<sup>21</sup> Breech: One should focus "on the motif of consolation, instead of on the contents of the several sections" (1973: 270).

<sup>22</sup> 1973: 274.

<sup>23</sup> 1975: 54-55.

power to gain salvation, and (2) the sovereignty of God and his faithfulness to the promises to Israel. To answer these two issues, the author made use of two different traditions. In answer to (1), he utilized (in I-III) the dualistic doctrine of the Two Ages in which sin has so permeated this world that God has left it to itself, and only the future age and those who dwell in it are of concern to him. But this doctrine runs aground after III, evidently because the author found from it no satisfactory answer to the issue of who is worthy of membership in the future age. Ezra himself is never convinced by the argument and no conclusion is reached. In this way, we have a window into the author's view of the inadequacy of the way Judaism traditionally dealt with the problem of sin and justification. On the other hand, in answer to (2), the author made greater gains in IV-VI, where the traditional case was well suited to explain the desperate situation in which the Jewish people found themselves. Although the people are presently being punished for their sin, the future hope of a messianic era of vindication for Israel was maintained. In this way, two issues were answered by two different means. Hayman distinguishes himself from Gunkel when he characterizes the author's two distinct concerns as common elements in Hebrew literature whereby faith is stimulated by intellectual examination, and doubt is overcome by religious experience.<sup>24</sup>

In 1977, A.L. Thompson highlighted the function of 4 Ezra as a theodicy. He considered the Ezra of I-III to be the defender of humanity's case who appeals to God for mercy in the light of the desperate situation of Adam's race. Ezra, then, has a tendency towards individualism. Uriel, on the other hand, has a tendency towards Jewish nationalism and, thereby, simply mouths orthodox assurances that salvation is bestowed upon those who are obedient to the law.<sup>25</sup> Thompson thinks the author to have sympathized with Ezra's struggle to comprehend the problem of evil which plagues the whole of humanity; it is Ezra's voice which the author really wanted to be heard.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, both the book itself and the dialogues within it begin and end with a nationalistic interest. In fact, Ezra himself abandons his universalistic concerns of III in the transition episode of IV, not because his questions have been answered but because he

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<sup>24</sup> 1975: 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> 1975: 209-18, 267.

<sup>26</sup> 1977: 296.

takes refuge from his troubled heart in the knowledge that God is righteous.<sup>27</sup> Although, Uriel's "doctrinal" nationalism wins out in the end, in the dialogues between Uriel and Ezra the author has looked beyond the easy answers of traditional Judaism and perused a more fundamental condition which permeates human existence – the problem of evil. The author found no valid solution to this issue in the arsenal of Jewish theodicy but, in the process of his work, explored the outer fringes of traditional Judaism and beyond, while simultaneously retaining his place in Judaism and affirming faith in God. The author did not stray; instead, he tried to correct Jewish theology from within by forcing it to accept a more universalistic outlook.<sup>28</sup> In the end, however, he resorted to a traditional Jewish understanding whereby (notice) salvation is gained through legalistic works and merit points. For this reason, he wrote under the name of Ezra in order to keep one foot within Judaism while stepping out with the other foot from Judaism's traditional stance.<sup>29</sup> He speaks neither through Uriel nor Ezra exclusively, but together, in order to reveal the tension of his inner struggle.<sup>30</sup>

Quite differently, E.P. Sanders (1977) believes that the position of the author has nothing whatsoever to do with Ezra. In the dialogues, says Sanders, Ezra's case fluctuates greatly, while Uriel's is consistent throughout. Ezra's arguments on behalf of Israel almost always meet with negative replies from Uriel and cannot be said to represent the author's voice. Through the figures of Ezra and Uriel, the author allowed various propositions (voiced by Ezra) to be confirmed or denied (by Uriel).<sup>31</sup> What emerges from Uriel's comments is a pattern of "legalistic perfectionism" in which salvation is granted to the individuals whose obedience to the law is without fault. In the beginning of IV, in fact, Ezra drops his questioning and resigns himself to Uriel's view.<sup>32</sup> In Sanders' opinion, V and VI do not follow from the pen of the author of I-IV, but are instead the addition of a later redactor. This conclusion is based on the fact that in V and VI Sanders finds a nationalistic hope to be revived which was lacking in Uriel's position of I-III. As such, it is not inherent to the work of the original author but was tacked on later

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<sup>27</sup> 1977: 239, 340-42.

<sup>28</sup> 1977: 187, 269. Cf. Rost, 1975: 124-25.

<sup>29</sup> 1977: 269.

<sup>30</sup> 1977: 157, 215.

<sup>31</sup> 1977: 412.

<sup>32</sup> 1977: 416.

“to make it palatable and to bring it into conformity with the prevailing Jewish hope”.<sup>33</sup> A later redactor has overruled the original author.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Sanders does not think VII to be integral to the book. It too is an appendix which was added to the rest in order to make the book more acceptable to the Jewish community. Nothing in IV-VII, therefore, should be allowed to overshadow the legalism of the original author which is given voice to by Uriel in I-III.<sup>35</sup>

In his review of Jewish apocalypticism, J.J. Collins (1984) finds 4 Ezra to represent the spiritual journey of a pious Jew after the cataclysmic events of 70 C.E. In the dialogues, the author struggles with various questions concerning the covenant and the problem of human sinfulness. Although none of Uriel’s arguments console Ezra, Ezra’s despair is gradually eroded by repeated assurances from Uriel concerning the eschatological cure to the disease of sin.<sup>36</sup> Ezra learns in IV (onwards from 10.20) that if “problems cannot be solved we must look away from them and contemplate what is positive”.<sup>37</sup> Instead of reviving a nationalistic hope (cf. Sanders, Box, Gunkel, Hayman, Thompson) the visions of V and VI confirm Uriel’s insistence that eschatological salvation is based on merit apart from divine grace.<sup>38</sup> In VII the Mosaic law is supplemented by the eschatological wisdom which Ezra has received.<sup>39</sup> On the whole, the author maintains a traditional understanding of the covenant, but only by revaluing it along new lines throughout the seven episodes.<sup>40</sup>

This review of a handful of scholars highlights the various issues which will need to be addressed in the following chapters. Perhaps a few preliminary observations may be in order here concerning what we have seen from this survey. First, it needs to be noted that interpreters usually include in their estimations a differentiation of some sort in order to arrive at a consistent explanation of the text. For instance, some scholars work with a “two-issue” approach, differ-

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<sup>33</sup> 1977: 417.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Räisänen: “the concluding chapters of IV Ezra itself are designed to mitigate the rigorism displayed in the bulk of the book” (1983: 123). Syreeni, Räisänen’s pupil, argues the same (1987: 223, n. 16).

<sup>35</sup> 1977: 417-18. In a later article, Sanders maintains his belief that 4 Ezra is a composite work, “against the advice of most of my colleagues” (1983c: 454).

<sup>36</sup> 1984a: 162.

<sup>37</sup> 1984a: 168.

<sup>38</sup> 1984a: 167, 169.

<sup>39</sup> 1984a: 168.

<sup>40</sup> 1984a: 168.

entiating between the issue addressed in I-III and that addressed in IV-VII (Gunkel, Hayman, Box). Others find it necessary to differentiate between original and interpolated material within the text (Sanders), or deny that the voice of one character (*viz.*, Ezra) has any significance in recovering the author's position (Harnisch, Sanders). Still another differentiates between the form and content of the book, and tends to sit loose to the content altogether (Breech). Secondly, it is important to note that all too often investigations of the text have been carried out with an inaccurate perception of the character of Early Judaism, thereby postulating inaccurate characterizations of the book within its historical context (esp. Thompson). In our opinion, these two tendencies represent errors in the study of the text. For these reasons, we are far more appreciative of Collins' analysis, which achieves a historically-sensitive and consistent reading of the text without postulating the presence of different issues or interpolated sources. Consequently, Collins in particular reads IV-VII with the dialogues of I-III in view. As the remaining chapters of Part II will demonstrate, the general results of this project will come closest to Collins', despite the inevitable differences.

Because development is inherent in the seven-fold structure of the book, the best means of interpretation is to follow the the progression of the author's case sequentially throughout the course of the book. This approach simulates an environment closer to the one in which the author intended his work to be heard and lessens the degree to which scholastic agendas determine the approach and results. In the following chapters of Part II, each episode will be analysed individually and a concluding chapter will set out some initial reflections concerning 4 Ezra. Further reflections are postponed until Part IV, where a comparison of 4 Ezra and Rom 1-11 is set out in some detail with the interests of this project in view.

## Chapter 3:

### Episode I

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The first dialogue (I) will be analysed according to the following outline:

1. The occasion of Ezra's reflections (3.1-3)
2. God's judgement upon sinful humanity (3.4-11)
3. God's grace upon Israel (3.12-19)
4. The evil heart remains in Israel (3.20-27)
5. Why is God's grace upon Israel ineffective? (3.28-36)
6. A debate about human understanding (4.1-25)
7. The doctrine of the two ages (4.26-32)
8. The ages are determined (4.33-43)
9. How much time remains? (4.44-52)
10. The signs of the end of the age (5.1-13)
11. Ezra encounters Phaltiel, a chief of Israel (5.14-20)

### 3.1. Analysis of Episode I

**3.1.1. The occasion of Ezra's reflection (3.1-3).** Ezra begins by identifying himself as "Salathiel, who am also called Ezra," living in Babylon thirty years after the destruction of Jerusalem. Whereas the author wants his readers to think that he is referring to the first destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, the modern critic considers this to be a pseudepigraphic device which signals the actual date of writing as being thirty years after the second destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE, thereby putting the date of composition at 100 CE, or



thereabouts.<sup>1</sup>

The identification of the speaker as both Ezra and Salathiel has given impetus to source-critical analyses of 4 Ezra, the assumption being that the author has utilized an original source (an apocalypse attributed to Salathiel) in which the name of the main character is subsequently changed from Salathiel (which appears only in 3.1) to Ezra, the scribe of the Jewish scriptures.<sup>2</sup> Others postulate that, rather than intending his pseudonym to indicate this historical figure of Israel's past, the author has invented another Ezra to be the protagonist of the story.<sup>3</sup> But instead of a fictitious hero or a traditional source, it is better to understand the importance of the name Salathiel according to its Hebrew meaning. If, as most scholars now think, 4 Ezra was originally composed in Hebrew,<sup>4</sup> the name "Shealthiel" (שאלתיאל), which means "I have asked of God", would capture well the character of Ezra throughout the dialogues.<sup>5</sup> The occasion of his asking of God is described in this introduction. While lying on his bed, Ezra (alias Shealthiel) reflects upon the desolation of Jerusalem and the prosperity of Israel's captor, Babylon. Because of these disturbing reflections, he is "troubled" and "greatly agitated". It is this concern for Israel's well-being which gives him cause to state his complaint (to ask of God). What follows are his "anxious words to the Most High".

**3.1.2. God's judgement upon sinful humanity (3.4-12).** Ezra prefaces his complaint (which begins in 3.20) by retelling the ways of God from creation to the giving of the law to Israel (3.4-19). His retelling forms two parts (3.4-12, 13-19), the first of which calls to mind God's creation of Adam, Adam's transgression, the sinfulness of humanity, the destruction of the inhabitants of the world by the flood and the <sup>6</sup>rescue of the one righteous man, Noah, and his household. In all this, Ezra is following the general structure of Gen 1-11: (1) God acts and all is good, (2) humanity acts and all turns bad, (3) God destroys and begins again. Ezra, in this first section, has done nothing other than voice traditional beliefs concerning God and his

<sup>1</sup> The contents of the eagle vision in VI would suggest a similar date. See Schürer, 1973: 3.298-300.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Burkitt, 1914: 41; Brockington, 1961: 28-29.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. James, 1917. This suggestion has not been well received, but see Collins' revamped version of it, 1984a: 157.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent analysis of the textual history of 4 Ezra is Klijn, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Oesterley, 1933: xiv; J. Schreiner, 1981: 311; somewhat similarly, Lacocque, 1981: 245.

relationship with creation.

**3.1.3. God's grace upon Israel (3.13-19).** Just as the portrayal in Gen 1-11 of the creator God and his creation gives way to the portrayal of the covenant God and his covenant people in Gen 12ff, so Ezra follows the same outline. After relating the events of Gen 1-11 in brief, Ezra turns his attention to the covenant-initiating God, first evident in Gen 12. He states that the nations of the world were exceedingly sinful (cf. Gen 11), but God chose from among them one man, Abraham, whom he loved and with whom he made "an everlasting covenant" (*testamentum aeternum*), promising never to forsake his descendants (3.15). This covenant was established in two events: the exodus of the people from Egypt by means of God's intervention on their behalf (3.17), and God's giving of the law to the people on Mt. Sinai, the latter being vividly described in 3.18-19.<sup>6</sup> Here too, Ezra has followed the scriptural account of God's dealings in history, highlighting two of the most significant events in Jewish history: the exodus and the giving of the law. (His emphasis is upon the latter since it will become the point around which his argument in 3.20-36 will revolve.) This scenario contrasts with that of the sinful nations; while sin increased throughout the nations, God chose Abraham and established for the people of Israel deliverance by means of the covenant which he initiated with them.

**3.1.4. The Problem: The Evil Heart Remains in Israel (3.20-27).** At this point, the optimism of the pentateuchal review of the events surrounding Israel's election drops out of sight. Instead, Ezra, preoccupied with Israel's present situation, moves from confidence in God's election to despair concerning the ineffectiveness of the law and the covenant. He focuses directly on the problem:

You did not take away from them [Israel] the evil heart, so that your law might bring forth fruit in them. (3.20)

Here Ezra cites the complication which arose in God's plan for Israel: the nation has not escaped the sinful condition of humanity which provokes God's judgement. Adam's evil heart (*cor malignum*) has become permanent, even in the hearts of God's people. The law did not root it out (3.21-22). Returning to his review of Israel's history, Ezra notes how God took the initiative

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. PsPhilo 11.5, 23.10, 32.7-8.

once again and raised up for himself a servant, David, who built a city “for your name” – a city wherein oblations were offered up to God in the temple (3.23-25). But rather than solidifying Israel’s special relationship with God, even this epoch of Israel’s history serves merely to prove the people’s helplessness; despite their possession of the holy city and the sacrifices of the temple, Israel’s Adamic condition did not change (3.26). Consequently, God delivered the city into the hands of his enemies (3.27).

It is important to recognize the technique of Ezra’s polemic. He has already painted the anthropological condition of sin in 3.4-12, and then juxtaposed that picture with God’s initiative in establishing the covenant with Israel as the corrective to that condition (3.13-19). Already, then, the two categories laid out in ch. 1 (above) have been employed by Ezra (*viz.*, the anthropological condition of sin, the covenantal corrective). But Ezra works his case quite differently in 3.20-27, for there the covenantal corrective is said to be no corrective at all because the anthropological condition prevails.<sup>7</sup> Israel’s privileged position before God is enveloped by their Adamic condition, illustrated by the fact that in everything they did “as Adam and all his descendants had done” (3.26). Because the anthropological condition includes no ethnic differentiation, Ezra has abandoned confidence in the salvific effectiveness of the covenant for the nation of Israel.

**3.1.5. Why is God’s Grace upon Israel Ineffective? (3.28-36).** After setting in tension God’s election of Israel (3.13-19) and the desperate condition of Israel (3.20-27), Ezra completes his initial speech with a complaint: “Are the deeds of those who inhabit Babylon any better? Is that why she has gained dominion over Zion?” (3.28; cf. 3.31b). This bitter tone continues throughout the complaint,<sup>8</sup> wherein Ezra defends Israel on two grounds: (1) in comparison with all the other nations, and (2) in view of their responsiveness to God. The first leads him to note that, although Babylon’s iniquities are immense, yet it prospers. The nation of Israel, on the other hand, whose sin is much less, has been crushed by Babylon, with God’s consent. Here, Ezra does all he can to fault God himself, and accentuates this with his second

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Levinson, 1988: 117, 126-27.

<sup>8</sup> Ezra’s words are not those of lament but of complaint. See the distinction by Broyles, 1989: 40.

judgement against God; whereas Israel has “believed your covenants” (*crediderunt testamentis tuis*; 3.32)<sup>9</sup> and expected not to be forsaken by him, the other nations who “are unmindful of your commandments” (*non memorantes mandatorum tuorum*; 3.33) abound in wealth. While God endures the sins of other nations and allows them to prosper, all he sees of Israel (“your people”) is their sin. The people of Israel have not received a reward for their confidence in God but have, instead, been punished for their sin (3.33-34), despite the fact that no other nation “has kept your commandments so well” (3.35).

3.36 has, we think, proven to be a red herring for the interpretation of 4 Ezra. There, Ezra concludes this most nationalistic speech saying:

You may indeed find individual men<sup>10</sup> who have kept your commandments, but nations you will not find.

This verse has been used as evidence of Ezra’s transition from national to universal concerns,<sup>11</sup> or as an indication that Ezra hopes for the salvation of the gentiles.<sup>12</sup> Thus, J.J. Collins writes of 3.36: “If only ‘exceptional individuals’ can keep the commandments, then membership of a covenant people becomes irrelevant”.<sup>13</sup> This, however, is not Ezra’s concern at this point, nor does covenantal membership become insignificant. In fact, Ezra has not shifted his attention from his national interest at all. The main thrust of Ezra’s comments in 3.36 lies in the second half of the verse, where he claims that God will not find a nation which has kept his commandments. Although Ezra does admit elsewhere that even Israel has not kept the commandments of God, here his statement that no nations have kept them (the commandments) is not a chastisement of Israel, but a chastisement of the other nations. Ezra is calling on God to examine Israel and compare her with other nations. When God looks around with this in mind, Ezra is convinced that Israel has nothing to fear. He will find no other nation which has kept the law. Ezra’s remarks in 3.36, therefore, are meant to favour Israel. Ezra is still fighting for his people. He has

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<sup>9</sup> Here, “to believe” has more the sense of “to have confidence in” Cf. Thompson, 1977: 248, n. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Latin: *homines per nomina*; literally, “men of names”.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Thompson, 1977: 71-76, 211-12, 299, 302, 311-12.

<sup>12</sup> Box compares this verse with Paul’s portrayal of the law-abiding gentile in Rom 2.26-27 (1912: 19).

<sup>13</sup> 1984a: 160.

not abandoned Israel for the sake of the concerns of humanity. As Box states, “the point of the passage is that Israel as a people have kept the divine precepts”<sup>14</sup> at least in comparison with the pagan nations.<sup>15</sup> Israel is distinct from all other nations.

Support for this reading is also gained from the first half of the verse. There, it must be determined to whom the phrase “individual men” is referring. In this regard, J.H. Charlesworth has argued that “your commandments” in 3.36 should not be viewed as signalling the Mosaic law but, instead, the Adamic or Noachic commandments which, in Jewish thought, were applicable to the whole of the gentile world.<sup>16</sup> As such, “individual men” refers only to those gentiles who live by the standards God has established for the gentiles themselves, since the mention of “commandments” here is not a reference to the Mosaic law. This is a significant suggestion. Unfortunately, Charlesworth does not defend his suggestion, so one can only guess as to what led him to this conclusion. Herein, his suggestion will be evaluated on the basis of word usage and contextual indicators.

One can suppose that Charlesworth’s suggestion is based upon a vocabularic peculiarity in the Latin of 3.19-22, wherein the Mosaic law given by God to Israel is spoken of as *lex* (“the law”; 3.19, 20, 22) and *diligentiam* (“the commandment”, 3.19). In the Latin text of 3.36, however, the word for commandment is *mandata* (cf. *mandasti* in 3.7 of God’s command to Adam)<sup>which is used</sup> in 3.33 of God’s commandments which the nations have broken, and in 3.35 in the comparison of the nations who have not kept God’s commandments with Israel who has kept them better. Perhaps Charlesworth thinks that the different terminology signals different concepts – that is, the distinction between *lex/diligentiam* and *mandata* indicates an intentional distinction between Mosaic and Noachic laws, a distinction which will need to be evaluated on contextual grounds. Initially, however, it needs to be recognized that a distinction between the Mosaic and Noachic laws cannot be maintained in the Syriac text. Therein, the Mosaic “law” of 3.19, 20 and 22 (ܠܘܨܐ) equals the Mosaic “commandments” of 3.19 (ܠܘܨܐ), the same word which is used in 3.33, 35 and 36 to speak of the “commandments” which the nation

<sup>14</sup> 1912: 20.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. de Villiers, 1981: 361.

<sup>16</sup> Charlesworth, 1979b: 466.

of Israel has tried to observe and of which the other nations have been unmindful. In this way, the “commandments” are to be identified with the Mosaic law of 3.19.

The question remains, however, whether a distinction between Adamic and Noachic laws can be maintained even in the Latin text. We can find no evidence in support of such a distinction. In the verses which precede 3.36, *mandata* is used twice (3.33, 35), and neither reference necessitates the idea of *Noachic* commandments. This is especially true of 3.35, where Ezra can only be speaking of the Mosaic commandments, since it is this point on which Israel can be compared favourably with the other nations. Ezra states: “What nation has kept your commandments so well?” What the nation of Israel has kept better than any other nation is not the Noachic but the Mosaic law which was given specifically to her. What Israel holds dear, other nations have despised. This identification of the “commandments” with the Mosaic law in 3.35 should govern the reading of 3.36 if Ezra’s case is to have its force.

Also in this regard, the parallelism of 7.72 is significant. There, Uriel declares,

though they received the commandments (Lat: *mandata*, Syr: ܡܢܘܚܐܢܐ) they did not keep them, and though they obtained the Law (Lat: *legem*, Syr: ܠܘܗܐܢܐ) they dealt unfaithfully with what they received.

Here too, as W. Harnisch writes, “zwischen ‘mandata’ und ‘lex’ wird bemerkenswerterweise sachlich nicht differenziert!”<sup>17</sup>

In the light of this, when Ezra speaks of those “individual men” from among the nations who have kept the commandments, he means those gentiles who have obeyed the Mosaic law<sup>18</sup> – that is, he seems to be thinking of gentile proselytes to Judaism.<sup>19</sup> His reference to “individual men”, therefore, does not indicate a change in Ezra’s concern from Israel to humanity, whose rule is the Noachic law. Rather, this passage underlines the fact that Ezra is concerned precisely

<sup>17</sup> 1969: 162.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, Ezra has just argued that the descendants of Adam are unable to keep the law, but his point here is made in the context of a contrast between Israel and the other nations. He asks, What other nation has kept the commandments as well as Israel (3.35)? He answers, Except for a few converts, none (3.36).

<sup>19</sup> See Box, 1912: lvii; F. Watson, 1986: 215, n. 44. Contra Myers, who understands the “individuals” to be a few pious within Israel who have kept the law (1974: 180).

with those whose self-awareness is defined by the Mosaic law. He has Israel's welfare wholly in mind. Except for the few gentiles who have converted to the religion and ways of Israel, the nations have disregarded *en masse* God's commandments, the law that God gave to Israel as a sign of the covenant. The point of Ezra's argument, then, is this: If the gentile nations have wholly disregarded God's law – except for a few gentile proselytes – and if the people of Israel by comparison have kept the law, why is God not honouring the covenant with them? As such, the whole of 3.28-36 is permeated with ethnocentric concerns, 3.35-36 serving as the conclusion to the nationalism of the whole prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Here Ezra's opening speech concludes. In it, he has traced out God's works in relation to his creation, with Israel especially in mind. It is important to be aware of the complexities of Ezra's thoroughly ethnocentric speech. First, it should be recognized that Ezra's characterization of Israel is contingent upon the stage to which his argument has developed. That is, with regard to Israel's status *vis-à-vis* the gentile nations, Ezra's estimate varies according to the point he is trying to make. In 3.13-19, Israel is portrayed in traditional covenantal terms as the prize of God's eye, in distinction from the nations. In 3.20-27, however, such nationalistic distinctions are removed, Israel's distinctiveness being flattened out by <sup>the</sup> anthropological condition of sin. In 3.28-36, however, Ezra once again invokes the idea of Israel's distinctiveness. Although this theme has been crippled by Ezra's remarks in 3.20-27, it is again put to use in order to plead on Israel's behalf. Here Ezra argues that despite the universality of the evil heart, the other nations are much worse than the nation of Israel, which has believed and better kept God's commandments.

Alongside these various portrayals of Israel, one finds an even more complex depiction of Israel's God. Initially, God is portrayed as the one who animates life and seeks relationship with his creation, Adam: "you made him alive in your presence." With the introduction of sin, however, God became the God who judges and destroys the unrighteous. And yet, Ezra

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<sup>20</sup> Thompson's attempt to read 3.35-36 as springing from the author's concern for humanity is strained (1977: 171-76). It stands only (1) when the passage is extracted from the nationalistic context, (2) when terminological distinctions are forced (i.e., "inhabitants of the world" in 3.34 is contrasted with "inhabitants of the earth", although the same terms appear together in 7.72-74 where no distinction can apply), and (3) by a conjectural emendation to the text which is nothing but speculation. Unfortunately, Thompson makes so much of his incorrect reading of 3.35-36 throughout his book that many of his conclusions suffer accordingly.

continues, God has acted to remedy Israel's situation. Whenever history has been marked out by rebellion (i.e., between Adam and Noah, between Noah and Abraham, between Abraham and Moses, and between Moses and David), God has initiated corrective measures (the saving of Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the giving of the law, the building of Zion), most of which have Israel specifically in mind.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Ezra has set up a bad news/good news situation. The bad news is the condition of humanity in general; the good news is the works of God which he has initiated on behalf of Israel.

But the good news<sup>S</sup> is not good for long. Despite all that God has done on Israel's behalf, Israel has not escaped the human condition of the evil heart. There can be no doubt that Ezra holds God responsible for this dilemma, as is evident from his words in 3.20. There Ezra says that the law brought forth no fruit, not because the people paid no heed to it but because God did not remove the evil heart from them.<sup>22</sup> True, Israel may not have kept the law as well as they ought to have kept it (3.25), but they cannot be held wholly responsible for that since their transgression results from an underlying situation which *God* has not remedied – the evil heart.<sup>23</sup> Despite all that God has done for Israel (*viz.*, giving the law, initiating the covenant, establishing the holy city), he has not done enough. Although the people of Israel have been favoured by God, their privileges amount to nothing. In this way, Ezra makes God responsible for Israel's condition.<sup>24</sup>

That Ezra indicts God is all the more clear from his complaint in 3.28-36. There, the God of Israel is not the righteous judge who destroys sinners and rewards the righteous, as Ezra described him earlier in 3.4-12 (in his review of Gen 1-11). Instead, just the opposite is true; God has allowed sinners to prosper, while those who have "known" him and trusted his word have been destroyed. It would seem that Ezra intentionally juxtaposes these two characterizations of

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Thompson, 1977: 162.

<sup>22</sup> Harnisch's argument that Ezra advocates a theory of "den Verhängnischaracter der Sünde" is not convincing (1969: 44-51). Ezra's position is a natural result of Jewish covenantalism minus the covenantal efficacy. This will be demonstrated in 5.2. below.

<sup>23</sup> Nothing in 4 Ezra, however, approaches the extreme of Sedrach's accusation against God that "It was *by your will* that Adam was deceived" (*ApSedr* 5.1).

<sup>24</sup> Thompson: "Ezra virtually accuses God of complicity in the crime" (1977: 271). Cf. Harnisch, 1969: 20-23; Brandenburger, 1981: 166; Stone, 1981: 201; Willet, 1989: 66. Kirschner's analysis does not do justice to this aspect of Ezra's case (1985: 35-39).



God in 3.4-12 and 3.28-36 to highlight their incongruity (cf. Ps 77). In Ezra's opinion, Israel's situation is due to a fundamental inconsistency in *God's* dealings. Thus, just as in 3.20, so here, Ezra holds God responsible. But Ezra's rationale is somewhat different here than in 3.20. At this point God is faulted not for what he *has not* done (that is, his failure to remove the evil heart, as in 3.20), but for what he *has* done (that is, his allowance of the evil nations to prevail). Or, to put the emphasis differently, God is faulted not because of what he has not done *for* his people but because of what he has done *to* them. His dealings are incomprehensible. Their present state is incompatible with their favoured (*viz.*, they have known God) and superior (*viz.*, they have kept his commandments better) position. Ezra's dilemma is expressed in 3.31a, where he accuses God of not allowing anyone to understand his "way".

Although Ezra blames God for the atrocity of Israel's condition, it is of utmost importance to recognize what Ezra is *not* blaming him for, since the intention of these opening paragraphs has occasionally been misunderstood. Although God did not remove the evil heart from his people, Ezra nowhere holds God responsible for the presence in the world of evil itself. In 3.4-7, Ezra relates how God brought life out of dust. Accompanying the giving of life was the giving of one commandment which was to be obeyed. With the transgression of the commandment, death replaced life. Who is to be blamed for this? Ezra states it clearly: "he [Adam] transgressed it [the commandment]" (3.7).<sup>25</sup> The appointing of death by God is not unjust but, in fact, proves God's justice in the face of Adam's sin.<sup>26</sup>

The justice of God is again demonstrated in that Noah, the righteous one, escaped God's destruction of sinners. This portrayal of God in 3.4-12 is important for Ezra since God's temperament towards sinners as related in Gen 1-11 is wholly at odds with Ezra's estimation of the present situation in which gentile sinners prosper and the "righteous" nation, Israel, is punished. It is essential to Ezra's case, therefore, to keep God free from blame in 3.4-12. As in Gen 1-11, the presence of evil in the world is not due to God. He cannot be held accountable for it, or for the destruction of the sinners whose hearts are evil. Evil entered the created realm

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<sup>25</sup> de Villiers: "A stark contrast is depicted between the positive life-giving deeds of God and the disregarding, death deserving act of Adam" (1981: 358).

<sup>26</sup> This is made especially clear in the Armenian version of 3.7-8; cf. Stone, 1979: 45.

with Adam's transgression and is not inherent in God's own structuring of creation.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it will not do to interpret Ezra's comments in 3.4 ("you formed the earth – and that without help" [*et hoc solus*]) as problematic for the justice of God, as Gunkel and Schreiner have suggested.<sup>28</sup> Whatever Ezra intends by this, he does not think it to infer God's responsibility for the existence of evil.<sup>29</sup>

It must be clear, therefore, what God is and is not accountable for, in Ezra's speech. The presence of evil in the created order is a responsibility shouldered by Adam, through whom the evil heart was introduced into God's creation. The condition of God's people, on the other hand, is a responsibility attributed to God since (1) despite all he has done for them, he did not remove the evil heart in them (3.20-27), and (2) his justice has soured – that is, he has allowed the unrighteous to prosper and those who have trusted him to be humiliated (3.28-36).

Many other reviews of OT history are evident in Jewish literature. These operate usually in one of two ways:<sup>30</sup> (1) in praise of God who has done good things on Israel's behalf (cf. Pss 105, 135), or (2) in reproach of the Jewish people for their unfaithfulness (cf. Ps 78, Ezek 20). "By contrast," as M. Knibb notes, "Ezra retells this same history as the basis of his accusation that God has treated his people unfairly".<sup>31</sup> Ezra's point, then, is that if unfaithfulness is anyone's responsibility, it is God's. In this way, he has neither praise for God nor reproach for his people.

Despite the complexities of Ezra's opening speech, one aspect gives it coherence – his nationalistic concern. He is not interested in harmonizing God's righteousness with the existence of evil. Nor is he attempting to break out of Jewish particularism. Nor is he grappling with a humanitarian concern for the gentile nations. He has set his agenda, and it is restricted to the relationship between the people of Israel and their covenant-initiating God. This is what

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<sup>27</sup> Contra Harnisch, who argues that, in true gnostic fashion, Ezra blames the dust of the earth for the presence of evil (1969: 52). Correctly, Stone, 1965: 183; Levinson, 1988: 114-17; Charlesworth, 1979a: 79. There is no evidence in 4 Ezra that "Satan planted an 'evil seed'", or that "the ultimate cause of the evil in history could be traced to the satanic will", as Murdoch supposes (1967: 172-73).

<sup>28</sup> Gunkel, 1900: 352-53; J. Schreiner, 1981: 312.

<sup>29</sup> Is the author attempting to refute christian theological speculation about the person of Christ, or short-circuiting an angelology which the prominence given to Uriel might help to spawn, or simply affirming Jewish monotheism? It seems impossible to say.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Brandenburger, 1981: 170.

<sup>31</sup> 1979: 114. He notes that Ps 89 is the closest parallel to this. See also Knibb, 1982: 68.

motivates his speech from beginning to end, just as the setting of 3.1-3 illustrates.

**3.1.6. A Debate about Human Understanding (4.1-25).** Ezra does not get an answer in reply to his enquiry. Instead, the angel Uriel (lit: "God is my light"), who is sent to him, questioned Ezra's right even to enquire into the ways of God (4.2). The importance of this section (4.1-25) for the whole of 4 Ezra can hardly be overemphasized. It is here – immediately after Ezra's lengthy posing of his complaint and before Uriel's response really begins – that the stage is set for what will transpire throughout dialogues I-III. A fundamental difference between Ezra and Uriel is cited – a difference which promotes their lengthy disputes throughout I-III. Uriel insists that Ezra should be mindful of his place (4.13-21), for the ways of God are beyond the powers of human understanding (4.2,3-11). But Ezra insists that he has the right to question (4.22), since the ways in which God is acting in the present are inexplicable in relation to the (covenantal) ways in which he acted previously. To enquire into such matters is not to forget one's place, Ezra maintains. God has loved the people of Israel, but now they have been given to godless nations. The law, through which God established a covenant with Israel, has been to no advantage for them, for they have evidently been deemed unworthy of God's mercy. What will God do about this?<sup>32</sup> How will he redeem his name by which Israel is called? These matters, Ezra holds, *are* susceptible to human investigation (4.23-25).

These two positions are wholly at loggerheads, and they motivate the discussions that will develop in I-III. This section captures, in miniature, the dynamics of the following dialogues, and isolates the fundamental problem which will plague the entire debate: the characters of the debate maintain two incompatible understandings of the ways of God.<sup>33</sup> They have such fundamentally different perspectives on this issue that even the validity of Ezra's complaint is in doubt. What, to Ezra, is an obvious and reasonable request for explanation is, to Uriel, completely out of place since it is based on a misunderstanding of God's ways. As J.J. Collins states, Uriel's point "is that Ezra cannot hope to make sense of the world by ordinary human

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<sup>32</sup> Harnisch: "Leitend ist die Frage nach der Gültigkeit der im Gesetz garantierten Heilszusage Gottes" (1969: 40).

<sup>33</sup> Koch, 1978: 59. The same quest, as well as the juxtaposition of two ways of perceiving God's actions, pervades the book of Job. See, e.g., Lasine, 1988.

wisdom, *even on the premise of the Deuteronomic covenant*“.<sup>34</sup> Much more of this will be seen before the dialogues conclude.

Moreover, it is important to note Ezra's words in 4.12, which reveal his attitude that suffering is bearable only when one correctly *understands* one's situation. This conviction underlies the whole of his words in I-III, and it helps to explain the peculiar events later in IV.

**3.1.7. The Doctrine of the Two Ages (4.26-32).** If Uriel ever gives Ezra an answer in explanation of the ways of God it is imbedded in the two-age scheme which he propagates for the first time (*en nuce*) at this point. Uriel simply bids Ezra to wait and see what God will do (4.26-27). The evil of this age must be allowed to run its course before the good things of the next world will come (4.28-32). This age is not all there is. It is passing away, so that marvelous things will happen and evil will be rooted out.<sup>35</sup> As T.W. Willet states: “Implicit with this appeal to the eschaton, though not explicitly stated, is the idea that Ezra's complaints about the present inequities will be redressed in the eschaton”.<sup>36</sup>

**3.1.8. The Ages are Determined (4.33-43).** From this point, the dialogue proceeds not out of Ezra's nationalistic concerns but on the basis of Uriel's two-age doctrine. And so, Ezra asks, “How long and when will these things be?” (4.33). Uriel's answer is quite simple: the new age cannot be rushed (4.34-37), nor can it be delayed (4.38-43). It will come when the full number of the righteous has been registered (4.36).

**3.1.9. How Much Time Remains (4.44-52).** Here again, the dialogue remains rooted in Uriel's doctrine of the two ages. Ezra's concerns have been disqualified by the recognition that the two ages, which remain fixed, are determinative for the manner in which God works now and will work in the future. Accordingly, appeals to God's mercy are worthless, since it is not mercy which defines his actions but, rather, an established time scale into which all things are fitted. Ezra's question, therefore, is a simple one: how much time remains (4.44-46). It will be soon, Uriel assures him (4.47-50), but more than that he cannot say, and he does not know whether

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<sup>34</sup> 1984a: 160, emphasis ours.

<sup>35</sup> Willet: Uriel, “after attempting to persuade Ezra that he is unable to understand the things about which he is asking because they concern the things of heaven, ironically tries to turn Ezra's attention to the esoteric knowledge of the future” (1989: 141, n. 41).

<sup>36</sup> 1989: 67.

Ezra will be alive at the inauguration of the new age (4.51-52).

**3.1.10. The Signs of the End of the Age** (5.1-13). Here, Uriel predicts a series of events which, when they occur, will indicate that the end of this age is near.<sup>37</sup> It will be a wholly atrocious time:

The way of truth shall be hidden, and the land shall be barren of faith [or better, "faithfulness"<sup>38</sup>]. And unrighteousness shall be increased... And one country shall ask its neighbor, 'Has righteousness, or anyone who does right, passed through you?' And it will answer, 'No'. (5.1-2, 11)<sup>39</sup>

While most of the signs have to do with natural catastrophes, there is also a political note of prediction concerning the overthrow of the Roman empire (5.3-4) – perhaps a belated reply to Ezra's political concern for Israel.<sup>40</sup> After relating all the signs which he was permitted to reveal, Uriel commanded Ezra to weep, pray and fast for seven days so that more may be revealed to him.<sup>41</sup> And here the dialogue ends.

**3.1.11. Ezra encounters Phaltiel, a Chief of Israel** (5.14-20). Before the second dialogue begins, the author describes a meeting of Ezra and a leader of Israel, Phaltiel. Recognizing that Ezra's face is sad, Phaltiel reminds him that Israel has been entrusted to his (Ezra's) keeping (5.17). He urges Ezra to rise up and eat bread in order to have strength to defend Israel's cause. Without strength for the task, Ezra is like "a shepherd who leaves his flock in the power of savage wolves" (5.18). This is a curious account for several reasons. First, it reinforces the fact that Israel is in Ezra's charge and his assignment is to defend the interests of his people. His occupation is to be the ambassador of Israel before God.<sup>42</sup> Second, it creates an obvious tension between Uriel's command to fast in order to learn more and Phaltiel's command to eat in order to defend Israel properly. It would perhaps be premature to draw conclusions of any sort about

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<sup>37</sup> Harnisch thinks that the author has borrowed an older apocalyptic source (1969: 151). Cf. J. Schreiner, 1981: 132.

<sup>38</sup> J. Schreiner: "Der Sinn unserer Stelle dürfte sein: Das Land (die Erde) wird keine *Treue* kennen" (1981: 324, emphasis ours).

<sup>39</sup> See Box's analysis of the various readings of this verse (1912: 48).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Koch, 1978: 52.

<sup>41</sup> Box: "Fasting was one of the most esteemed ways for preparing the mind for the reception of a divine revelation" (1912: 49).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Koch, 1978: 58.

the author's purpose in constructing this tension. It is worth noting, however, that Ezra directs Phaltiel to leave him alone and proceeds to obey Uriel's request to fast. Ezra points out that he did "as Uriel the angel had commanded me" (5.20).

### 3.2. Summary of Episode I

Throughout I. Ezra's complaints have run along three lines: (1) Israel's failure to keep the law is due to the evil heart which resides in every descendant of Adam, a condition which God has not remedied, no matter what else he may have done for Israel (3.20-27); (2) Israel may not have kept the commandments as well as they should have done, but they are a far better nation than any other and should be protected by God (3.28-36); and (3) God has made a covenant with Israel and Israel has trusted him; has he now gone back on his word and withheld his mercy to Israel, which he has shown them in the past (3.13-19, 4.23-25)?

Each of these three issues are concerned wholly with the interests of Israel. The first digs deeper to peruse the human condition, but Ezra's concern is not to speculate about the desperate state of humanity. Scholars continue to insist that Ezra's questions "revolve round the impossibility for a man to obtain eschatological salvation on this earth",<sup>43</sup> or that Ezra "raises numerous penetrating questions centered on humanity's plight. The individual is uppermost in his mind".<sup>44</sup> But Ezra is not interested in philosophical anthropology. He is the representative of Israel's case, and his bleak survey of the human condition serves this role since it removes Israel from blame and places the responsibility of the nation's condition on God himself.<sup>45</sup> Despite their repeated offenses, God has done great things for Israel. In the end, however, he has not done anything for his people if he has not rectified the condition of their heart. Thus, Ezra is not jostling universalistic and particularistic issues at random. Instead, the universalistic issues serve his particularistic interest.

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<sup>43</sup> Lebram, 1983: 200. Likewise, he depicts Ezra as "grieving about the hopelessness of existence in the present age" (201). Cf. Collins, 1984a: 160; Thompson, 1977: 187; Charlesworth, 1979b: 466; Brandenburger, 1962: 27.

<sup>44</sup> Charlesworth, 1985: 295. Cf. Brandenburger, 1962: 27.

<sup>45</sup> Thompson's evaluation misses this point because, although he examines the nationalistic and universalistic themes in detail, he never considers how they are *related*. See, e.g., his 1977: 158-78.

In the light of this, there seems little reason to agree with Thompson's claim that here Ezra's position tends towards individualism.<sup>46</sup> Such a label has no validity when tagged on Ezra's wholly nationalistic concerns. Better, perhaps, is A. Jaubert's conclusion that the opening paragraphs of 4 Ezra comprise "le plus beau poème sur l'élection d'Israël".<sup>47</sup> Certainly, the national interest displayed in Ezra's words springs from his awareness of the unique covenant relationship which God established with Israel, his people.

Uriel's response to Ezra is commonly written off as, in Stone's words, "trite," "pat," and "evasive."<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Thompson writes: "Uriel simply appeals to divine authority with no attempt to explain".<sup>49</sup> This is sometimes construed to mean that the author cannot possibly be using Uriel as his spokesman since Uriel's answers fail to get to the heart of the issues raised by Ezra. Any estimation of this issue, however, must be judged according to the dynamics of 4.1-25. The whole point of this passage is to illustrate that, in Uriel's opinion, the manner of Ezra's probing into the ways of God is completely misguided and, therefore, undeserving of reply and explanation; one's vantage point must be proper before proper understanding can be gained. Uriel is not so much evasive as he is convinced that Ezra's complaint is fundamentally ill-founded and that Ezra's understanding is in need of radical revision concerning the ways of God. Accordingly, rather than responding to Ezra's complaint, Uriel merely introduces his own vantage point. Uriel refuses to interact with Ezra's point of view and simply imposes his own understanding upon the discussion which Ezra is expected to accept.

What Uriel puts forward is a scheme of the relation of the two ages. As soon as it is introduced, this scheme sets the agenda for the dialogue and replaces Ezra's nationalistic interests. Since the ages are determined and determinative for the way in which God acts, Ezra's conviction that God's covenant mercy should be effective before the dawning of the eschatological age is completely out of place. In other words, Ezra is asked to judge the present not in terms

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<sup>46</sup> 1977: 212; although he admits earlier that "no categorization is tidy" (211).

<sup>47</sup> 1963: 287.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Stone, 1981: 199; *idem.*, 1984: 413, n. 166. Charlesworth states: Ezra's "questions are without doubt superior here in the first vision to the vapid answers" (1985b: 295).

<sup>49</sup> 1977: 144. Better is Hayman's statement: This is not to say "that the angel makes no attempt to answer Ezra's objections, only that this is not his way of dealing with them" (1975: 47).

derived from his understanding of past history but in terms of the timetable of future events; the “particular events of the ongoing historical process are no longer the arena in which the struggle for understanding is conducted”.<sup>50</sup> In this regard, what W. Schmithals says concerning apocalyptic literature in general is especially true of Uriel’s position:<sup>51</sup>

history is made thoroughly secular, profane. *What* happened in history has no significance theologically. There is no salvation in this eon; how then is God supposed to perform saving acts in it?

With the conclusion of the dialogue, however, Phaltiel’s appearance serves as a reminder that the people of Israel are taking their cues not from future revealed events but from their covenantal history and from God’s promise never to forsake them.<sup>52</sup> Although Uriel’s two-age scheme vindicates God’s righteousness by introducing a temporal distinction between the ages, this would explain very little to the people of Israel whose perspective is shaped by a covenantal understanding of their history.

In many ways, then, the debate about human understanding stands at the heart of the whole of I. In 4.1-25, two perspectives on the ways of God collide – Ezra’s ethnocentric covenantalism and Uriel’s two-age doctrine. What preceded 4.1-25 is Ezra’s case, and what follows is Uriel’s case. Like water and oil, both are maintained in the same flask but never mix. Although Uriel gets the last word, the author reminds the reader that the people’s concerns persist. And so, the drama is sure to continue in II.

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<sup>50</sup> Stone, 1981: 198. Cf. Collins, 1974: 20.

<sup>51</sup> 1975: 81.

<sup>52</sup> Ponthot speaks of a Jewish “believing mentality” “which experiences and understands the historical condition as the place of encounter with the divine action” (1985: 161).



**Chapter 4:**

**Episode II**

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This short dialogue, as M. E. Knibb notes, has “a similar structure to the first and goes over a good deal of the same ground”.<sup>1</sup> The outline of the second dialogue (II) illustrates that well:

1. The occasion of Ezra’s reflections (5.21-22)
2. Israel’s condition is in contradiction with God’s grace (5.23-30)
3. The inadequacy of human understanding (5.31-40)
4. Why could God not have acted differently? (5.41-55)
5. Through whom will the end come? (5.56-6.6)
6. How much time will divide the ages? (6.7-10)
7. The signs of the end of the age (6.11-28)
8. Final exhortations (6.29-34)

**4.1. Analysis of Episode II**

**4.1.1. The occasion of Ezra’s reflection (5.21-22).** After several days of fasting, Ezra states:

the thoughts of my heart were very grievous to me again. Then my soul recovered the spirit of understanding. (5.21-22)

Subsequently, Ezra puts forward his opening speech, which is again an appeal to God on behalf of Israel (5.23-30).

Already, one point needs to be observed: Ezra is back to where he started in I. Again

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<sup>1</sup> 1979: 135. Cf. Oesterley, 1933: 43. Lebram finds the extensive overlap of material in I and II “somewhat monotonous” (1983: 201).

his heart is troubled by the thoughts which grieved him, as in 3.1-3. Whereas he wept over Uriel's depiction of the last days at the end of I (5.13), no longer are those images of the end times the cause of his sorrow. As Ezra's appeal in 5.23-30 will reveal, Uriel's words of seven days earlier have receded in Ezra's mind and are no longer pressing. The eschatological orientation of the latter half of I has been replaced by a concern for Israel in the present, a concern which Ezra initially exhibited in his first speech of I (3.4-36). It is almost as if the week-old dialogue had never taken place. Certainly, Uriel's two age scheme did not have much staying power, despite its initial powerful effect.<sup>2</sup>

The same point is evident from Ezra's statements that his soul "recovered the spirit of understanding".<sup>3</sup> W. Bousset understands this as a description of divine inspiration, in parallel with 2Bar 10.1 ("the word of God came to me") and Jub 12.17 ("and a word came into his heart, saying..."). He compares it with the description in 4Ez 14.37-44 wherein Ezra opens his mouth to drink a potion of understanding from God in order that he might write the words of God.<sup>4</sup> But rather than describing a "pneumatische Erfahrung", as Bousset thinks, this passage plays a subtler role in the development of the dialogues. Knibb's free translation captures the sense of Ezra's words well: "I recovered the power of thought".<sup>5</sup> The point is simply that Ezra has regained his composure and is able and willing to put his inquiry before God once again. Whereas his soul was troubled and fainted after being shown the signs of the end of the age (5.14), here it has recovered, allowing Ezra to resume the inquest which he began in I. This is a curious phenomenon in light of Uriel's insistence in I that human understanding trespasses its bounds when it undertakes to discern the ways of God. Ezra is confident once again of his "power of thought", having recovered "a spirit of understanding".<sup>6</sup> The Ezra of 3.1-36 has reappeared here in the opening of II. Accordingly, his complaint of 5.23-30 follows similar lines.

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<sup>2</sup> Willet: "Ezra again takes up his complaint showing that the talk of the eschaton has not completely satisfied his curiosity" (1989: 67).

<sup>3</sup> Latin: *et resumpsit anima mea spiritum intellectus*. The Syriac speaks not of Ezra's soul *resuming* a spirit of understanding but of *adopting* or *receiving* (  ) a spirit of understanding. Cf. also the Armenian (Stone, 1979: 71). The Ethiopic reads, "the spirit of wisdom lifted up my heart" (noted by Box, 1912: 52).

<sup>4</sup> Bousset, 1926: 396.

<sup>5</sup> 1979: 135.

<sup>6</sup> As Stone translates the Armenian version (1979: 71).

4.1.2. **Israel's condition is in contradiction with God's grace** (5.23-30). This speech is relatively simple. In it, Ezra employs a variety of OT symbols to highlight the fact that God has chosen the people of Israel from the multitude of nations and has bestowed his favour upon them alone (5.23-27) – a typical expression of Jewish ethnocentrism.<sup>7</sup> God's way has been to choose one thing over many – from the trees, one vine; from the lands, one region; from the birds, one dove; from the flocks, one sheep; and from the multitude, one people. Moreover, Ezra states:




to this people, whom you have loved, you have given the Law which is approved by all.<sup>8</sup>  
(5.27)

As in 3.19-22, so here Ezra points to the giving of the law as the means whereby God intended to bring about Israel's salvation. It is the symbol of his electing grace upon them. But for precisely this reason, the present state of Israel is inexplicable:

O Lord, why have you given over the one to the many?... And those who opposed your promises have trodden down those who believed [*viz.*, "trusted in"<sup>9</sup>] your covenants.  
(5.28-29)

Here, Israel is favourably compared to the other nations on the basis of their confidence in God's covenant grace, an argument which has already been advanced in 3.28-36. This comparison serves to point out the apparent inconsistency of God's ways: He chose the people of Israel who have trusted him, but now he allows "the many" to dominate them.<sup>10</sup> Ezra does not extol God for his great blessings of the past but petitions him to conduct himself as he ought in view of his

<sup>7</sup> Mundle: We hear from the author "den ganzen Stolz, das ganze hohe Selbstbewusstsein des Juden wiederklingen, wenn er auf die Erwählung Israels zu sprechen kommt" (1929: 233, cf. 233-34).

<sup>8</sup> Whereas the Latin speaks of the law as being "approved by all (i.e., all peoples)" (*ab omnibus probatam*), the Ethiopic says of it, "which you approved out of all (i.e., all laws)". The Syriac is somewhat ambiguous (  ) the preposition  expressing either the idea of agent ("the law which is tested to be sure by all peoples") or of partition ("the law which is tested to be sure out of all laws"). It is also possible, we think, that the Syriac refers to the law as that "which is tested to be sure in every thing" (cf.  ).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Schreiner, 1981: 327; Knibb, 1979: 136.

<sup>10</sup> The contrast between God's past and present ways is a common technique of complaint psalms; cf. Broyles, 1989: 42-51, 220-21.

previous conduct. Ezra closes his complaint bidding that, if God's people deserve punishment, they should be punished at God's own hand (5.30). In this way, Ezra illustrates that he is not questioning God simply because the people are suffering; suffering can be contained within a covenantal perspective when it is understood to be punishment for sin. Instead, Ezra's questions arise because the manner in which God's people have been treated is so extreme as to fall beyond such an explanation, calling into question the covenantal basis of Jewish self-definition itself.

Throughout his opening speech in II, therefore, Ezra illustrates his wholly nationalistic concern by concentrating completely on the discrepancy between the people's chosen status and their present condition. In many ways, this is simply a truncated version of his opening speech of I, being less sophisticated and complicated perhaps, but producing the same effect.

**4.1.3. The inadequacy of human understanding** (5.31-40). Uriel returns to Ezra to instruct him through dialogue. He asks:

Are you greatly disturbed in mind over Israel? Or do you love him more than your Maker does?<sup>11</sup> (5.33)

Ezra answers negatively. Obviously, however, he *is* greatly disturbed over Israel and has readily spoken so much before, so his denial must apply to Uriel's second query.<sup>12</sup> Both Uriel and Ezra accept that God loves Israel (although, as we will see, this is open to definition). Rather than being "a source of supreme consolation", as G.H. Box thinks,<sup>13</sup> this fact promotes Ezra's turmoil as he strives "to understand the way of the Most High" (5.34). Uriel replies that Ezra cannot comprehend God's ways (5.35). After Ezra's complaints ("Why then was I born?"), Uriel reinforces his point concerning the failure of human reason by relating a series of puzzles which, if Ezra can answer them, will prove him worthy of an answer. But Ezra admits his inadequacy ("I am without wisdom"; 5.39). In 5.40, Uriel, speaking for God,<sup>14</sup> says:

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<sup>11</sup> Although the first question is often translated as an affirmation, the Latin of the second sentence begins with *aut*, indicating that a second *question* is commencing. Cf. 5.35.

<sup>12</sup> But this is a peculiar denial, because Ezra has just called God's love for Israel into question. That was the point of his opening speech in 5.23-30: God has shown his love for Israel in the past, but now he acts in ways that contradict that. In 5.30, in fact, Ezra entertains the idea that God now hates Israel.

<sup>13</sup> 1912: 56.

<sup>14</sup> Or is it God speaking? J. Schreiner writes: "Die Rede des Engels geht in die Gottesrede

You cannot discover my judgement, or the goal of love that I have promised my people.  
(5.40)

The word "goal" (*finem*) contains the idea of a purpose yet to be manifest. Its temporal sense couples well with the sense of the verb "I have promised" (*promisi*). The Ethiopic text augments the author's meaning when it reads, "the goal of love which I await (or delay) for my people".<sup>15</sup> In this way, the temporal sense of 5.40 is reminiscent of that of 4.26. There, after Ezra had complained about Israel's fate and asked what God intended to remedy the situation, Uriel's reply was "live long and you will see". In both passages, whereas Ezra's complaint concerns the ways of God, Uriel replies that the events of the future contain the solution to the matter. Once again, then, Uriel subordinates the understanding of God's ways to a temporal condition in which the future events hold the key for understanding.

Uriel's words in 5.40 not only reiterate the point of the inaccessibility of God's ways to human inquiry but also give some assurance of God's love for Israel, although it has yet to be manifested. Accordingly, Myers' comments on 5.40 must be ruled out. He states: "The whole passage [5.31-40] ends on a pessimistic note".<sup>16</sup> Although God's ways are beyond human comprehension, it is not this point that the author wants his readers to hear so much as the fact that the God whose ways are obscure will be shown to be just in the end of this age. Uriel lifts the "incomprehensibility" theme out of the depths of pessimism and gives it a more positive character by insisting that, although God transcends the bounds of reason, he is nonetheless a righteous God, and can be recognized as such when judged from the proper (eschatological) frame of reference. For the most part, then, this section revives the dialogue already heard in 4.1-25 concerning the limits of human understanding, while punctuating it with Uriel's confidence in God whose justice will be revealed in the end.

#### 4.1.4. Why could God not have acted differently? (5.41-55). Ezra makes no

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über," (1981: 329). Box, who calls it an inconsistency (1912: 58). This sort of "inconsistency" appears often in 4 Ezra where it is almost impossible to determine whether Uriel or God is speaking. For this phenomenon discussed, see Thompson, 1977: 141-42, 330-31; Knibb, 1979: 140.

<sup>15</sup> See Box's discussion, 1912: 58.

<sup>16</sup> 1974: 200.

complaint about the limits of human reason, but asks why God's ways could not have been different. First, following up on Uriel's future-oriented assurances of 5.40, Ezra points out that God's promised love may benefit those who are alive at the end, but what benefit is it to those who are alive before that time (5.41)? Uriel replies that God's eschatological judgement will affect all the generations evenly (5.42). Secondly, Ezra suggests that God could have done things differently (that is, better). He could have created everyone at once so that the judgement might come sooner (5.43). In what follows (5.44-49), Uriel states that God's plan must be allowed to run its course and, anyway, the earth could not support all the generations at once. Third, Ezra then asks how old the earth is in order to discover how much time is left (4.50). Uriel only says that the generations get weaker as the age of the earth increases (4.51-55).

Judging by the nature of these three queries, Ezra seems to have been influenced by Uriel's eschatological orientation (or at least he neglects to challenge it), as his questions are all concerned not with Israel's present situation in the light of their covenant status but with the coming judgement. The same is true of his next three questions, which carry the reader to the end of the dialogue: (1) Through whom will the end come? (2) How much time will divide the ages? (3) What are the signs of the end?

**4.1.5. Through whom will the end come?** (5.56-6.6). To this question, Uriel assures Ezra that the one who alone set it all in motion will be the one who alone brings it to an end (6.1-6). After cataloguing the events of creation, Uriel states:

I planned these things, and they were made through me and not through another, just as the end shall come through me and not through another (6.6).<sup>17</sup>

While God is portrayed primarily by Uriel as the creator of the world, there are two significant features which maintain something of a particularistic note to it all. First, the creator is also portrayed as the one who established Zion as his footstool (6.4). Second, he is the one who sealed all those who have stored up treasures of faith, or better, faithfulness (6.5). Box clarifies this last

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<sup>17</sup> If a polemic interest is apparent in the author's stress on God's solitary rule over creation, it is not altogether clear whether it is directed against christian expectations of Christ's parousia or against Jewish doctrine of the intercessory role of the angels. See Myers, 1974: 201; Knibb, 1979: 145; Box, 1912: 63; Thompson, 1977: 186.

verse: "'Faith' in this passage seems to mean the righteousness which comes from fidelity to the law",<sup>18</sup> (just as in 5.1, 6.5, 28, 7.34, 9.7, 13.23, and just as its opposite [*incredulitas*] appears in 7.114 to signify disloyalty to the law). Thus, whereas Ezra calls into question the righteousness of God in view of his present disregard for his people, this passage acts in vindication of God. The one who will bring this age to a close has both Jerusalem and the faithful (upon whom he has put his seal) in mind. Just as in 4.26-27 and 5.40, so here the rightness of God's ways will be proven on the other side of the eschatological boundary dividing the ages.

**4.1.6. How much time will divide the ages?** (6.7-10). To this question, Uriel answers with an allusion to the birth of Esau and Jacob – the hand of one clutching the heel of the other. So shall the ages give way. While the imagery of this allusion serves primarily to show that there will be no interval between the ages,<sup>19</sup> it is possible that an underlying symbolism also plays a part in this passage. In rabbinic literature, for instance, Rome is commonly symbolized by Esau and Israel by Jacob.<sup>20</sup> If the same comparison is intended here, the import of Uriel's words would be to assure Ezra not only that the second age will immediately succeed the first, but also that, while the unrighteous rule in this age, the next age is set apart for Israel.<sup>21</sup> One cannot be sure of this symbolism, however, and it would not seem to be Uriel's main point. Nonetheless, it would be wholly consistent with Uriel's words elsewhere wherein the righteous are promised the hope of future blessings in the new age (cf. 4.26, 5.40, 6.1-6, 25-28).

**4.1.7. The signs of the end** (6.11-28). Uriel describes the horrendous conditions of the end times throughout 6.11-24. This section is a continuation of the signs of the end given at

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<sup>18</sup> 1912: 67. Cf. Knibb, 1979: 182; Myers, 1974: 196-98; J. Schreiner, 1981: 333. Box points out that some good Latin codices make the "sealing" refer to the *merits* of those who stored up *fidem* for a treasure, which would strengthen this understanding of *fidem* as "faithfulness to the law."

<sup>19</sup> This periodization does not fit well with others given by Uriel (7.26-44); see Knibb, 1979: 147. As Stone has pointed out, using 6.7-10 as evidence, the author's presentation of the end times should not be forced into harmony but is flexible according to the purpose it serves in particular contexts (1983). Cf. Ferch, 1977: 146.

<sup>20</sup> See Schechter, 1909: 99-100, 108. The Israel-Jacob connection was evident already in 4Ez 3.16, 19.

<sup>21</sup> See Thompson, 1977: 182-83; Knibb, 1979: 147; Gunkel, 1900: 365; Myers, 1974: 201-202; Bousset, 1926: 218; Buchanan, 1970: 29-30; Klausner, 1956: 352. Oesterley thinks the passage to speak only of the immediate succession of the ages, the Israel-Rome symbolism playing no part in the author's mind (1933: 52). Cf. Schürer, 1973: 3.298.

the conclusion of I (4.51-5.13; see 6.11-12).<sup>22</sup> But, whereas the “theoretical” optimism of Uriel’s words in I was somewhat muted by the wholly pessimistic description of the end at the conclusion of that dialogue, the present telling of the signs in 6.11-24 leads right into a description of the glorious new age:

whoever remains after all that I have foretold to you shall be saved and shall see my salvation and the end of my world. (6.25)

In that time, the earth’s inhabitants will be converted to a different spirit (*viz.*, a new heart!),<sup>23</sup> evil will be blotted out, and faithfulness to the law will flourish. What Uriel portrays here is the reversal of the Adamic condition, as portrayed by Ezra in I. It is the elimination of the Adamic heart which Ezra, in 3.20-27, sought for Israel in the *present* age; since God has not rooted out the evil heart in Israel, Ezra considered him not to have done enough for his people. Here, however, Uriel gives the assurance that salvation will come to the righteous, but he includes a temporal qualification that rules out Ezra’s plea for God’s intervention in the present age.

**4.1.8. Final exhortations (6.29-34).** The dialogue concludes, as did I, as Uriel commands Ezra to pray and fast another seven days in order that he might be shown even greater things (6.30-31). Moreover, Uriel points out that it is Ezra’s uprightness and purity which have allowed him to be shown these things (6.32-33). Uriel then exhorts Ezra in the following manner:

Do not be quick to think vain [*viz.*, idle] thoughts concerning the former things, lest you be hasty concerning the last times. (6.34)

By this, Uriel is again encouraging Ezra to put behind him his covenantal outlook (*viz.*, his “idle thoughts concerning the former things”) which fuels his complaints concerning God’s ways. In Uriel’s estimation, an eschatological orientation must be maintained lest Ezra jump to hasty conclusions concerning what God must do to vindicate himself. Uriel has good reason to be concerned about this, for the last time he left for a seven day period he returned to find that

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<sup>22</sup> Harnisch considers 5.1-13 and 6.18-28 to be traditional material, both appearing in 4 Ezra completely unaltered (1969: 151, n. 2). Box thinks these sections to be traditional but fragmentary (1912: 72).

<sup>23</sup> Note the Ethiopic at this point: “another heart shall be given to them”.



Ezra had reverted from an eschatological to a historical (*viz.*, covenantal) perspective concerning the ways of God. Accordingly, with his last word in II, Uriel insists that Ezra should not regress once again from the understanding he has gained through divine revelation to the idle thoughts which provoked his complaint in the first place.

#### 4.2. Summary of Episode II

It is of primary importance to recognize that the thread which unites the whole of II is Ezra's concern for Israel. Initially he pleads the people's case in the light of their despair and, in return, is assured of God's love for his people. But with this assurance comes a temporal modification: God's love for Israel will be revealed only in the age to come. Accordingly, Ezra's interests turn to the end of the age. His sights turn from Israel's covenantal history (5.21-30) to the future changing of the ages (5.41-6.28), and in this way he appears to have resigned himself to Uriel's two-age doctrine (introduced in vague terms in 5.40, but the basis of the dialogue from then on). But although his perspective has changed, his motivation has not; his eschatological interests are due only to his national interests, and the apocalyptic character of II arises only in connection with Israel's cause. Ezra's turn from Israel's condition to a broader perspective and interest in the end times should not be viewed as a diversion from Israel's interests but as an advancement of his case for Israel.

It does not take much to notice the structural similarity of I and II. And in view of this similarity, a claim made by A. L. Thompson needs evaluation. He observes that, in II, "essentially the same ground is covered as in I, but with the universalistic implications for the most part deleted".<sup>24</sup> In his interpretation of I, Thompson thinks Ezra's interests to be largely universalistic.<sup>25</sup> He considers Ezra's review of universal sinfulness to illustrate his concern for the salvation not only of God's own people but of the whole of creation. This universalistic concern was not evident in our reading of I. As was stated above (ch. 3), Ezra used the issue of the evil heart only to blame God for not doing enough for his own people who shared it with the rest

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<sup>24</sup> 1977: 181.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson: In I, concern "for Israel is overt, but there is a strong undercurrent of concern about all mankind" (1977: 187).

of humanity. Any universalistic aspect of Ezra's case served to aid his case for Israel, and was not a matter of interest in its own right. That it is not even hinted at anywhere in II supports this conclusion, especially in view of the fact that II parallels the structure and content of I significantly. Had universalistic concerns been of major importance to Ezra's inquiry, one would have expected them to appear here, where Ezra reiterates his position in I. Failing to make an appearance in II reinforces the fact that, in I, the human condition served only a supporting role in Ezra's case for Israel.

Despite the similarities of structure between I and II, the second dialogue does make some advances over I. Uriel is much more assuring in II concerning salvation in the coming age. In I, Uriel said relatively little on this matter (see 4.27, 36), whereas in II there is noticeable interest on his part to establish the fact beyond question that God loves Israel and that those whom he loves will survive this age and enter into the glories of the next age. It is then, Uriel insists, that the Adamic condition will be destroyed and God's righteousness will be vindicated.

A word of caution needs to be registered at this point. One needs to be careful not to "be hasty" concerning the identity of Israel, for although Uriel assures Ezra of an eschatological salvation for Israel, the term "Israel" is itself open to definition, as we will see from episode III.

**Chapter 5:**

**Episode III**

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The third dialogue (III) deviates somewhat from the general outline of the first two dialogues (although obvious similarities in structure remain). Moreover, the main topic of discussion in III differs greatly from that of I and II, and the position Ezra holds here takes on a new dimension from that which he advocated previously. That is to say, in III Ezra does not keep to his role as the ambassador of Israel in particular, but supplements that duty with a concern for humanity in general. Despite this advancement in Ezra's case in III, however, the point which underlies both his particularistic and universalistic interests is the same as that of I and II: the mercy of God should be effective. Uriel's position throughout III remains unchanged, but it is embellished and more revealing.

III is an extremely long dialogue,<sup>1</sup> but its length itself plays a subtle role in the author's purposes, and the dialogue contributes in important ways to the development of the issues with which he is struggling. As such, it is worthy of close examination, and is outlined as follows:

1. The occasion of Ezra's reflections (6.35-37)
2. God's faithfulness and sovereignty<sup>a</sup> are questioned (6.38-59)
3. Salvation belongs to the world to come (7.1-16)
4. Are the unworthy dealt with fairly? (7.17-25)
5. The messianic reign and the end of this world (7.26-44)
6. Only a few will be saved (7.45-61)
7. Two attitudes towards the human situation (i) (7.62-74)
8. The righteous and the unrighteous between death and judgement (7.75-101)

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<sup>1</sup> Metzger calls it "tediously wordy" (1957: 26).

9. There will be no intercession for the unrighteous (7.102-115)
10. Two attitudes towards the human situation (ii) (7.116-131)
11. A first appeal to God's mercy, and a response (7.132-8.3)
12. A second appeal to God's mercy, and a response (8.4-41)
13. A third appeal to God's mercy, and a response (8.42-62)
14. The signs of the end of the age (8.63-9.13)
15. Ezra and Uriel recapitulate their respective points (9.14-22)
16. Transition to IV (9.23-25)

### 5.1. Analysis of Episode III

**5.1.1. The occasion of Ezra's reflections (6.35-37).** As in II, so here Ezra, weeping after the previous dialogue, fasts as Uriel commanded him "in order to complete the three weeks.<sup>1</sup> This is somewhat odd, however, for the reader has been told of only one seven-day fast previous to this one (5.20). Apparently, the author considered a seven-day fast to have preceded the first vision, although it is not recorded there.<sup>2</sup> It would appear that the author has styled this on Dan 10.2f: "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips."

**5.1.2. God's faithfulness and sovereignty are questioned (6.38-59).** Ezra's initial words of III constitute an extensive recounting of the seven days in which God created the world, as recorded in Gen 1 (6.35-54). The point of this speech is given in 6.55-59, where Ezra reminds God that he himself stated that this world has been created for Israel (6.55, 59).<sup>3</sup> Ezra, calling to mind how Adam is described in scripture as the one for whom the world was created, contends that the nation of Israel is to inherit Adam's position of lordship, and yet it does not. Instead, the other nations (who are nothing, like spittle,<sup>4</sup> whose abundance is as significant as a drop

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<sup>2</sup> Most commentators are in agreement on this point. For other structural analyses, cf. Harnisch, 1983: 465-67; Knowles, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 4Ez 7.11; WisdSol 11.24ff; AssMos 1.12.

<sup>4</sup> Our author is probably indebted here to the LXX of Isa 40.15 at which point the Hebrew

in a bucket) have dominion over the world, while God's own people (his firstborn, his only begotten, those zealous for him and most dear to him) are being devoured by a foreign people. Ezra concludes, "Why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?" Ezra's point is that "the promise of Scripture as set out in Genesis 1.26 concerning man's dominion, and applied in particular to Israel, has not been fulfilled".<sup>5</sup>

Once again, Ezra begins the dialogue in defense of Israel's interests. Just as in his initial speeches of I and II,<sup>6</sup> so also here his complaint arises out of the incompatibility which he sees between Israel's favoured status and her present situation, hoping to indict God. The things God "commanded" (*imperasti*/ אִמְרַסְתָּ; 6.41, 42, 45, 46, 53) and "said" (*dixisti*/ אָמַרְתָּ; 6.38, 40) in the events of creation came to be, but the things he "said" (*dixisti*/ אָמַרְתָּ; 6.55, 56) concerning Israel have failed to take place. Ezra juxtaposes God's powerful creative word with his feeble assurances to Israel.<sup>7</sup>

It should be pointed out, however, that there is more in Ezra's words than just a nationalistic concern. He seems to be calling into question not only God's faithfulness to Israel but also his sovereignty over humanity. The incongruity between Israel's present situation and God's promises to Israel would seem to indicate that God is impotent in his dealings with humanity. This is evident in the way Ezra plays with the relationship between God's authoring word and his resulting work. With regard to the ordering of nature, Ezra proclaims, "Your word accomplished the work" (6.38), and "Your word went forth, and at once the work was done" (6.43). When, however, God stated that the world was created for Israel and his word produced nothing, his authority in his dealings with humanity – both the chosen people (7.54, 58) and the "spittle" (7.56) – is undermined directly. Thus, Ezra's complaint is not simply an appeal on Israel's behalf (although it is certainly that) but an indictment against the sovereignty of God in human affairs. If Israel's God fails to act on their behalf, might he not be altogether impotent in the affairs of humanity?<sup>8</sup> The test case of his sovereignty is that of Israel, a test which he

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"small dust" (אֶפְרַיִם) is mistranslated as "spittle" (σῖελος = אֶפְרַיִם). Cf. also 2Bar 82.5; PsPhilo 7.3, 12.4.

<sup>5</sup> Rowland, 1982: 216. Cf. Levinson, 1988: 223, n. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rössler, 1960: 76, n. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Steck, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that Ezra is defending the interests of humanity at this point; contra

appears to have failed.<sup>9</sup>

**5.1.3. Salvation belongs to the world to come (7.1-16).** Uriel appears again in order to respond to Ezra. He first gives two analogies, both with the point that, although the goal is much to be desired, the means by which one attains to that goal is enormously difficult (7.1-9; cf. the needle's eye analogy in Mk 10.25, *par*). These analogies provide the background for much of what Uriel will go on to state throughout III. In them, he emphasizes the necessity of great human effort and endurance in attaining to the goal. The same condition applies to Israel, says Uriel (7.10), now in direct response to Ezra's complaint. He agrees with Ezra's comment that the world was created for Israel, but goes on to say, however, that when Adam sinned the order of the world changed and came under God's judgement.<sup>10</sup> Now, the ways<sup>11</sup> of the present world are filled with many hardships, while only those of the "greater" world are "broad and safe, and really yield the fruit of immortality" (7.13). To get to that greater world, however, everyone must first pass through the difficulties of this world (7.14).

Here, Uriel's point is that God's original intention has been revised. Whatever was promised to Israel has now been emended by a temporal condition. The question, in effect, is not, "Why has Israel yet to 'possess' the world?" but rather, "Which world will Israel possess?" (and, as we will see, "Who will constitute Israel?"). Thus, just as Uriel has modified Ezra's quest for understanding in I-II by introducing a temporal (eschatological) condition, so here he encourages Ezra to turn his attention to "what is to come, rather than what is now present" (7.16),<sup>12</sup> for Adam's sin has caused salvation to be withdrawn from this age, only to be transferred<sup>13</sup> to the age to come.<sup>13</sup> In this way, Uriel answers Ezra's charges against God's faithfulness to Israel and his sovereignty over humanity.

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Harrelson, 1980: 33.

<sup>9</sup> So Harnisch writes of 6.38-59 (as of 5.23-27): "die kritische Frage nach der Macht Gottes [erhebt<sup>sich</sup> als Frage nach der geschichtlichen Evidenz seines Erwählungswortes" (1969: 31, his emphasis removed; cf. 26). Cf. Brandenburger, 1981: 174.

<sup>10</sup> Myers: "The world was indeed made for Israel but Adam's violation of the divine stipulations brought about *another world* which was judged" (1974: 252, emphasis ours).

<sup>11</sup> See Knibb's defense of the translation "ways" (1979: 162).

<sup>12</sup> Myers: "The affairs of this world... must be placed in proper perspective. The direction of one's thoughts is important for the writer" (1974: 252).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rössler, 1960: 74.

Uriel's case in 7.1-16 can be easily contrasted with Ezra's case in 3.1-36. In I, Ezra portrayed the desperate situation of sinful humanity in order to underline God's salvific initiative on behalf of Israel in particular (3.4-27); it is *God's mercy alone* which is able to overcome the Adamic condition. In III, Uriel argues that, in fact, Adam's sin caused the order of the created world to be replaced by a new order. Accordingly, the present world is despaired of and deliverance is expected only with the coming of the future age. Uriel holds that the effects of Adam's sin were so destructive that, in the present order, God's mercy cannot be appealed to and ethnic particularism cannot be maintained. Instead, *human persistence* is upheld as the vehicle to salvation in the next age (7.3-9, 10-14). Thus, whereas Ezra pleaded for God's covenant mercy despite the human predicament, Uriel disqualifies the mercy of God altogether in the light of the pervasiveness of evil. In this way, the temporal clause inherent in Uriel's definition of the ways of God overrules any ethnocentric clause which Ezra expects to be operative in ~~the~~ *this* age.

**5.1.4. Are the unworthy dealt with fairly?** (7.17-25). Uriel has already shifted the focus of attention away from Israel's present predicament to the future state of salvation in the next age. In the process, his two-age doctrine has deflated the uniqueness of Israel in the present age. The effects of this change of agenda are immediately recognizable in Ezra's words. To Uriel's scheme of the two worlds, Ezra has this objection: The situation is not fair to the many who are wicked for they suffer the toils of the present world and will not live to see the easier days of the next world (7.17-18).<sup>14</sup> This prefigures much of the discussion that follows, in which Ezra tries to reconcile the punishment of the vast number of wicked with the justice of God? Here, Ezra is not functioning as Israel's own representative. Instead, he has become the spokesperson for the many. It is not the desperate situation of Israel that Ezra pleads for but that of the wicked.<sup>15</sup> This is unparalleled in all that has gone before in the dialogues.

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<sup>14</sup> Willet argues: "The angel attempts to change the direction of the dialogue at this point towards the events of the end time (7.16), but Ezra will not turn from his subject" (1989: 61). The final clause of Willet's statement is incorrect; Ezra's pronouncements in 7.17-18 are motivated by Uriel's shift to an eschatological perspective.

<sup>15</sup> Box thinks 7.17-18 to refer to Israel (1912: 98); cf. Meyer, 1974: 252. But this view is problematic. Box must postulate that, whereas Ezra distinguished between the righteous and the wicked within Israel herself (7.17-18), Uriel changes the distinction to involve Israel and the heathen nations. But this does not fit well with Uriel's emphasis already in 7.10-16 on all the "living" and the condition of humanity which provokes Ezra's rebuttal. Others who think, as we do, that Ezra here has abandoned his nationalistic tone include Thompson (1977: 193), Russell

Uriel reproaches Ezra for his objection (7.19-25), for can he claim to be a better judge of things than God? It is better in God's sight, Uriel states, to cause the many to perish than to allow his law to be disregarded (7.20). The next few verses all uphold obedience to the law as the means whereby punishment can be avoided. God commanded "what they should do to live" (7.21), but the ungodly were disobedient. The answer to Ezra's objection, then, is that the wicked do not deserve to see easier days. Since they have "ignored his ways", "scorned his law", "denied his covenants", "been unfaithful to his statutes", and "not performed his works" (7.23-24).<sup>16</sup> Many commentators think that Uriel's point is founded upon the idea that the law was offered by God to other nations of the world but was accepted by none except Israel.<sup>17</sup> Although this may be so, Uriel does not work his case here in Israel's favour. He merely makes the point that the observance of the law is the only corrective to the Adamic condition. God's law is the bridge from this world to the next,<sup>18</sup> and those who have disobeyed God's commandments will not arrive at his salvation.

Once again, a contrast between Uriel's case in III and Ezra's in I is revealing. As 7.19-25 and 3.4-27 illustrate, both characters agree that the law is the means out of the desperate condition of the human race and that the law is not well obeyed. Nonetheless, Uriel's speech in III differs from Ezra's in I in the determination of where the blame for the neglect of the law is to be placed. Uriel places the blame directly on those who do not live by the law.<sup>19</sup> Ezra, on the other hand, placed the blame on God for not removing the evil heart, thereby rendering it nearly impossible to obey the law. He argued that there is more to the issue than obedience to the law, for God's mercy to Israel is a more fundamental matter. In Uriel's words, however, there is no such clause to fall back on. Obedience to the law is the all-important factor.

**5.1.5. The messianic reign and the end of this world (7.26-44).** Uriel then gives an elaborate description of the coming of the Messiah, his 400 year reign,<sup>20</sup> and the judgement

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(1964: 300, 302), Knibb (1979: 162).

<sup>16</sup> Schreiner: Uriel "stellt nicht die Frage, ob der Mensch das Gesetz erfüllen könne. Er stellt nur fest, dass es nicht erfüllt wurde" (1981: 344).

<sup>17</sup> See Moore's defense of its prevalence at an early date, 1927: 1.277.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Harnisch, 1969: 146-55; Mundle, 1929: 227-29, 232-33.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Harnisch, 1969: 149; Knibb, 1979: 164.

<sup>20</sup> For a review of interpretations concerning the number 400, see <sup>3</sup> Schreiner, 1981: 345.



that follows in the age to come (7.26-44). In that time, a city which at present remains hidden shall be revealed (7.26; cf. IV), "the world, which is not yet awake, shall be aroused" (7.31), and righteousness will replace unfaithfulness (7.35-36). Judgement will be meted out, recompense and reward being determined on the basis of righteous and unrighteous deeds.<sup>21</sup> This section does not contribute much to the dialogue itself but supplies more details about the end, the time with which the argument is now primarily concerned.<sup>22</sup> It fills out Uriel's case by interweaving "argument and information about the end".<sup>23</sup> In both Uriel's "argument" and "information", works in accordance with the law appear as the prerequisite for salvation (7.37), and the mercy of God is nowhere mentioned. Instead, Uriel defends God's intention to destroy the wicked and to judge according to one's works apart from mercy.

**5.1.6. Only a few will be saved (7.45-61).** Ezra is disturbed by what Uriel has predicted, and the dialogue, abandoned after 7.25, is resumed. He ponders once again the effect of the evil heart on humanity:<sup>24</sup>

For who among the living is there that has not sinned, or who among men that has not transgressed your covenant? (7.46)

The evil heart has alienated almost everyone from God and has brought them into the ways of death (7.48-49). Ezra said the same in his opening statement of I (3.4-12). There, however, he went on to cite God's gracious initiative on Israel's behalf as the corrective to the problem (3.12-19). Nothing of the sort appears here. Ezra is upset about the destruction of the many wicked (almost all humanity<sup>25</sup>), and he seems unable to reconcile this with his understanding of God's justice.<sup>26</sup>

After giving something of a prefatory remark (which is most often cited as the center-

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<sup>21</sup> Nickelsburg and Stone: "Here the testimonies of righteous and unrighteous deeds function as defense and prosecuting attorneys" (1983: 143). Cf. Münchow, 1981: 93-95.

<sup>22</sup> This section may be seen as a continuation of the description of the end that brought II to a close (6.11-28; cf. the similarities between 6.25 and 7.27).

<sup>23</sup> Knibb, 1979: 166. Cf. Myers, 1974: 253; Oesterley, 1935: 158; Stone, 1983.

<sup>24</sup> Willet: Ezra broadens his perspective "to include not only the fate of the Jewish nation, but also that of humanity, since all have sinned" (1989: 61).

<sup>25</sup> On the exception "almost", see Thompson, 1977: 300-301.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Knibb, 1979: 174.

piece of Uriel's two-age scheme:<sup>27</sup> "The Most High has made not one world but two", 7.50), Uriel gives two responses: (1) It would be unjust to add the wicked to the number of righteous (7.51-53);<sup>28</sup> (2) What is rare is more precious than what is plentiful (7.54-58). As a result, there is no reason to question the fact that only a few will be saved (7.59-61), for, Uriel says, "I will rejoice over the few who shall be saved" (7.60), and "I will not grieve over the multitude of those who perish" (7.61).

**5.1.7. Two attitudes towards the human situation (i) (7.62-74).** But Ezra's agitation is not dispelled and he replies with a profound lament on behalf of all humanity (7.62-69):

Let the human race lament. . . For all who have been born are involved in iniquities, and are full of sins and burdened with transgressions. (7.65, 68)

Ezra's anthropology is wholly in line with traditional Jewish views concerning the condition of sin which engulfs the whole of humanity. Israel as a subset of humanity, however, is nowhere in view. The predicament is pathetic because (1) humanity knows its condition (7.62-67),<sup>29</sup> and (2) no one is capable of correcting that condition (7.68-69). The angel, however, turns Ezra's case on its head. The predicament of the wicked is *certainly pathetic* but not for the reasons Ezra has given. Instead, it is precisely because they have understood God's ways but have failed to live by the law (7.72) that the many are in a desperate situation. The responsibility of their condition is wholly theirs. God is, in fact, very patient with them in this age – not for their own sake, but because he has ordained the ages to be so (7.70-74). Uriel's remarks here make no significant gains over that of 7.17-25.

**5.1.8. The righteous and the unrighteous between death and judgement (7.75-101).** Because almost all humanity is destined to undergo severe judgement, Ezra's thoughts turn

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<sup>27</sup> Koch, citing the two-age scheme as "*das wesentliche Thema des 4. Esrabuches*", goes on to say: "Der Satz 7,50. . . gilt weithin als der 'Grundsatz,' mit dem die Argumentationen des Verfassers stehen und fallen" (1978: 46).

<sup>28</sup> Most texts, however, are corrupt at this point.

<sup>29</sup> In 7.62-63, Ezra speaks of the human mind having been created out of dust. Harnisch thinks this to be an indication of Ezra's gnostic allegiance, whereby he blames the material world for the presence of the evil impulse (1969: 156-69). But Ezra's speech does not support such a thesis; the mind is problematic for Ezra not because it is the origin of sin (cf. Levinson, 1988: 225, n. 39), but because it is able to foresee the result of sin.

to the issue of the soul's condition between death and the new age when judgement awaits (cf. 4.35, 7.32, 121).<sup>30</sup> This provides Uriel with the opportunity to describe in vivid detail (1) how the righteous and unrighteous will be recompensed, and (2) what distinguishes the righteous from the unrighteous. Uriel first tells Ezra that he should not number himself among those who will be tortured (7.76). What has allowed Ezra to escape the fate of the majority of humanity? The answer is immediately supplied: "You have a treasure of works laid up with the Most High" (7.77), thereby escaping the anthropological condition of sin. Uriel describes two groups – those who will be tormented and those who will be blessed – in terms of their faithfulness to the law. The former have scorned the law of God and failed to keep it (7.79, 81). They will grieve because, seeing "the reward laid up for those who have trusted the covenants of the Most High" (7.83; cf. 7.85), they await their torment without the possibility of repentance (7.84, 86-87). The latter have "kept the ways of the Most High" (7.88). If Uriel's words to Ezra in 7.76 have pricked the reader's hopes for salvation, here he elaborates on what keeping the ways of God entails:

During the time that they lived in it [the mortal body], they laboriously (*cum labore*) served the Most High, and withstood danger every hour, that they might keep the Law of the Lawgiver perfectly (*perfecte*)...they have striven with great effort to overcome the evil thought...they faithfully (*per fidem*) kept the law which was given to them.<sup>31</sup>  
(7.89, 92, 94)

Two things need mentioning at this point. First, it is by keeping the law "perfectly" that the few are saved, just as it was said that Ezra has "a treasure of works laid up with the Most High". In both statements, salvation has nothing to do with membership in a particular community but is determined wholly by one's merits. The responsibility is entirely on the individual to laboriously show strict observance to the law and thereby store up treasures with God. As M. Knibb well writes, Uriel holds that

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<sup>30</sup> See Harnisch, 1969: 125, n. 2.

<sup>31</sup> The translation of 7.94 is ours; cf. Box, 1912: 149-50. It is often translated, "they kept the law which was given them in trust (*per fidem*)". Whether *per fidem* modifies the keeping or the giving of the law is ambiguous. The Armenian text leaves no doubt in this regard: "with great faith he observed the Law which was given to him" (Stone, 1979: 121). Moreover, in the Armenian text, Uriel promises "a treasury full of goodnesses" (7.77) to those who are "full of good deeds" (7.89) (Stone, 1979: 119).

by the strict observance of the law it was possible for an individual to acquire, as it were, a credit balance of good works and to earn thereby the reward in the world to come of life.<sup>32</sup>

No mention is made of God's mercy or initiative in the process of salvation, whether on behalf of humanity, Israel or the individual. In Uriel's eyes, the way of God includes not only a temporal aspect (*viz.*, God has made not one age but two) but a specific object of his "affection" – that is, the few who will be saved according to their own achievements.

Second, those who keep the law perfectly are said to have overcome the evil heart which was formed in them. In Ezra's opening complaint in I, he had stated that the evil heart had not been removed by God and therefore the law was to no avail (3.20-27). Here Uriel agrees that the evil heart is the problem to be overcome, but he states that doing the law perfectly is still a possibility despite the human predicament, thereby undermining Ezra's complaint against God uttered in I. There, the problem was humanly insurmountable in Ezra's eyes and, therefore, the solution could only come from God. In Uriel's handling of the same theme in III, however, the problem is not insurmountable and the individual himself has it within his own means to ensure his own solution. Although the evil heart remains, God is not to blame, for he has given the law as a corrective measure which can, in fact, be kept by diligent effort. The responsibility is placed firmly on the individual to accord himself strictly with God's law.<sup>33</sup>

**5.1.9. There will be no intercession for the unrighteous (7.102-115).** Ezra, seemingly unsatisfied with Uriel's brute individualism, asks if the righteous will be able to intercede for the unrighteous (7.102-3). The answer is definite; no, for everyone is responsible for his own actions (7.104) and in the day of judgement "everyone shall bear his own righteousness or unrighteousness" (7.105). But Ezra cannot justify this with what has been allowed in the past, as the

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<sup>32</sup> 1979: 182. Oesterley argues, however, that despite the emphasis on works in 7.77 and elsewhere, the author of 4 Ezra did not consider good deeds to be essential for salvation. He finds the proof of this in 8.36, where God's mercy is emphasized (1933: 87). But Oesterley has paid no attention to the speakers of these respective passages; 7.77 is spoken by Uriel, whereas 8.36 is a plea for God's mercy by Ezra. In the voices of Ezra and Uriel, one witnesses the struggle between two incompatible understandings of God's ways. These two voices cannot simply be combined, as Oesterley does here, without doing great injustice to the text.

<sup>33</sup> Uriel's position accords with the rabbinic view that the evil *yetzer* could be overcome by adherence to the law: "The Law wears away the *yetzer ha-ra'* as water wears away stone" (*Sukk* 52b).

scriptures illustrate,<sup>34</sup> when righteous men (Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Hezekiah, "and many others") made intercession for the ungodly.<sup>35</sup> Will this not be the case in the judgement as well (7.106-111)? Uriel, however, does not allow Ezra to abstract principles from the past and expect them to apply in the future (7.112). There is another age to come – an age when infidelity to the law will be cut off (7.114), and mercy will not be shown to anyone who is condemned (7.115). As W. Harnisch states, Uriel maintains "dass... nicht die Zugehörigkeit zum erwählten Volk, sondern allein die auf Grund des Gehorsams gegenüber dem Gesetz erworbene Gerechtigkeit die Bedingung für die Heilsteilnahme darstellt".<sup>36</sup>

**5.1.10. Two attitudes towards the human situation (ii)** (7.116-131). In what follows, Ezra, in ways not unlike that of 7.62-69, offers up a sympathetic lament for the race of Adam. It would have been better for the multitude of sinners never to have lived at all than to live in the shadow of torment, all the while knowing that the glories which are offered to the few are out of their (the sinners') reach (7.116-126).<sup>37</sup> As in his response in 7.70-74 (cf. 7.19-25), Uriel states that that is simply the way things are. There will be great joy over the salvation of the few, but no grief will be shown over the damnation of the many (7.126-31). Uriel stresses, in contrast to Ezra, that it is within one's capabilities to secure salvation. Although it is a difficult struggle ("a contest"), if one is victorious (*viz.*, by living according to the law) he will inherit life (in the next age). The responsibility is one's own.

Uriel's remarks are not surprising. He has said it all before. What is novel, however, is Uriel's appeal to Moses and the prophets in support of his position. After stating that one's reward is determined by his effort in the contest, Uriel claims:

For this is the way of which Moses, while he was alive, spoke to the people, saying, 'Choose for yourself life, that you may live!' But they did not believe him, or the prophets after him, or even myself who have spoken to them. (7.129-130)

Throughout the dialogues, Uriel has consistently urged Ezra to look to the events of the future to

<sup>34</sup> J. Schreiner: "Wahrscheinlich ist an das Finden in der Heiligen Schrift gedacht" (1981: 356).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. TAb 14.1-15.

<sup>36</sup> 1969: 246. Cf. Myers, 1981: 256; Box, 1912: 154.

<sup>37</sup> Knibb: That is, "the conditions of life imposed on man by God are unfair" (1979: 191).

understand the ways of God properly. The interpretation and application of scripture in answer to Ezra has not entered into Uriel's presentation or defense. Here, however, the message of Moses and the prophets is claimed as the precedent to Uriel's own (perhaps in response to Ezra's appeal to Moses as one OT example of how the righteous can intercede for the ungodly; cf. 7.106), and the proof of his allegation is found in  $\overset{e}{D}t_{\wedge}$  30.19, or so he claims.

In  $\overset{e}{D}t_{\wedge}$  30.11-20, Moses called the people of Israel to be faithful to the law of the covenant in order that they might live, increase and possess the land which God promised to Abraham's descendants. He affirmed that the law is not too difficult to do nor is it beyond one's capabilities. The people are commanded to keep the law, "in order that you and your descendants ( $\text{לך ולביתך}$ ) might live" ( $\overset{e}{D}t_{\wedge}$  30.19).

Uriel is probably using the proof text of Deut 30.19 to refer to Moses' assurances to the people that the law is not too difficult to do (cf. esp. Deut 30.12-14), as he himself has argued (7.92). The rest of Uriel's case is not evident from the original context of Deut 30.19. Uriel has denied anything other than a stringent individualism (which explains his omission of the guarantee in  $\overset{e}{D}t_{\wedge}$  30.19 that life will be bestowed upon one's descendants along with one's self). Moreover, used in support of Uriel's position, the quotation is extracted from its covenantal environment. Uriel infuses it with the promise of an *eschatological* life to those who choose correctly to live by the law in order to be granted the reward of life in the next age. Uriel reads this verse, therefore, as confirmation of his two-age schematization, and so he aligns Moses and the prophets with himself.<sup>38</sup>

**5.1.11. A first appeal to God's mercy, and a response (7.132-8.3).** Ezra is not satisfied with Uriel's glib lack of concern for the perishing, since such an attitude does not square with what he knows of God's merciful character.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps in reaction to the way Uriel legitimated his position by appealing to Moses and the prophets, Ezra reflects on God's merciful and compassionate nature in words which appear indebted to Ex<sup>od</sup><sub>א</sub> 34.6-7, a passage which fueled much of this sort of reflection.<sup>40</sup> Ezra's comprehension of God's ways, which is rooted in the

<sup>38</sup> A recent analysis of 7.129 appears in de Boer, 1989: 179-80.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Box, 1912: 164; Myers, 1974: 257.

<sup>40</sup> See Num 14.17-18, Neh 9.17, Joel 2.13, Jon 4.2, Ps 86.15, 103.8, 145.8, Eccl 2.11, Wisd

scriptural accounts of God's merciful dealings with Israel, is incompatible with Uriel's flippant disregard for the unrighteous. His speech in 7.132-140 is not merely an implicit rebuttal of Uriel's position but an appeal to God to live up to the qualities which Ezra catalogues.<sup>41</sup> But Ezra is answered quite briefly: This world is for the many, the next is for the few. Many have been created but few will be saved (8.1-3). There is nothing here which advances beyond Uriel's words in 7.49-61.

**5.1.12. A second appeal to God's mercy, and a response (8.4-41).** In a long speech, Ezra's words exhibit an intriguing transition from an appeal to God to have mercy on humanity (8.4-14), to a request for God to save his people (8.15-33), back to an appeal for humanity (8.34-36).

In the first section where he appeals on behalf of all humanity (8.4-14), Ezra traces the stages of human development and cites God as the director of the entire process. God is present at every point. He wonders, therefore, what purpose there could be in the destruction of humanity? Uriel's pronouncement in 8.1-3 that only a few will be saved is not acceptable to Ezra, who once again pleads humanity's case.<sup>42</sup> But he resolves to leave humanity in God's hands while he pleads especially for Israel – God's people, his inheritance. Thus, Ezra states:

About mankind you know best; but I will speak about your people, for whom I am grieved, and about your inheritance, for whom I lament, and about Israel, for whom I am sad, and about the seed of Jacob, for whom I am troubled. (8.15-16)

In his prayer for Israel's salvation (8.20-33, after the transition of 8.15-19), Ezra returns to a nationalistic frame of mind which has not played any part of the dialogue since the early paragraphs of III (6.55-59). Ezra's appeal works in two parts. First, he asks God not to look upon the sinners of the nation, but to be merciful by allowing the righteousness of the few within

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Sol 15.1. Ezra's words share many features of penitential liturgies of traditional Judaism. See Boyarin, 1972; Simonsen, 1911.

<sup>41</sup> See Thompson, 1977: 202; cf. p. 127. Thompson thinks that Ezra is appealing for God to be merciful *in the final judgement* (p. 263). But see Collins' criticisms, 1979: 354.

<sup>42</sup> Myers' contention that Ezra is really thinking of God's nurturing of Israel (rather than all humanity) is not convincing (1974: 258). It fails to take account of Ezra's concern for "every mortal who bears the likeness of a human being" (8.6). Thompson's handling is much better (1977: 202-204).

Israel to benefit the whole people (8.20-30).<sup>43</sup> In 8.31-33, however, Ezra does not continue with this same argument. This second section includes no reference to the existence of a righteous few who can act for the benefit of Israel's many unrighteous. Instead, changing the nature of his logic, Ezra appeals directly to the mercy of God without mention of the merit of the few. God is simply requested to ignore Israel's sin. Although the deeds of the righteous have salvific import for the righteous few – that is, their many works are laid up in heaven “and they shall be rewarded according to their own deeds” (8.33) – Ezra does not plead here that their redemptive value be mercifully applied to sinners as well. Instead, God's mercy is invoked for its own sake:

For we and our fathers have passed our lives in ways that bring death, but you, because of us sinners, are called merciful. If you desire to have pity on us, who have no works of righteousness, then you will be called merciful. (8.31-32)

Thus, although Ezra's logic in 8.20-30 and in 8.31-33 may run along somewhat different lines,<sup>44</sup> the constant in them both is the call upon God's mercy on behalf of Israel.

The first two sections of Ezra's speech may appear to be quite unrelated – the first pleading humanity's case (8.4-14), the second pleading Israel's case (8.15-33). In fact, however, their relationship is that of two parts of a *qal wah<sup>o</sup>mer* argument: If God can be said to be responsible for the salvation of humanity (8.4-14), how much more responsible is he to effect the salvation of Israel (8.15-33). One would expect God to be merciful to humanity – his creation – and, therefore, all the more so to Israel – his own people. Although he might refuse to do the former, he cannot refuse the latter. Of course, Ezra has already learned from Uriel that God is not responsible to save anyone, but the rhetorical argument is strong in his eyes. And so he proceeds to suggest two ways in which God might save his people; (1) by his mercy, he could allow the merits of the righteous to benefit the rest (8.20-30), or (2) by his mercy he could simply pity the sinners for their own sake (8.31-33).

In 8.34-36, however, Ezra pushes his plea for Israel into the service of yet another plea for humanity:

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<sup>43</sup> In ExR 15.4, God is reported as saying, “If I am to scrutinize the deeds of Israel, they will never be redeemed; I will therefore fix my regard on their holy ancestors”.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Thompson, 1977: 194-95.



[T]here is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly, and among those who have existed there is no one who has not transgressed. For in this, O Lord, your righteousness and goodness will be declared, when you are merciful to those who have no store of good works. (8.35-36)

Ezra seems to be making the point that, if God can be merciful to the unrighteous within Israel, he can surely find it in himself to be merciful to all sinners, regardless of ethnic status. He can argue this because, when the anthropological condition of sin is in view, ethnic distinctions are illegitimate.

Ezra's whole speech in 8.4-36, although marked by noticeable shifts in logic and perspective, works towards his plea for God's mercy upon all sinners in 8.34-36, and the nationalism that appears in the middle of the speech serves that universal interest. The Ezra of III is not the Ezra of I and II. Israel's defendant has become the defendant of the human race. Israel is still a part of the picture, and holds a unique place in Ezra's concern, but the human condition has taken center stage in Ezra's prosecution. Nonetheless, the ground of his defense has not changed; he expects God to be merciful to sinners, for that is God's reputation, and his justice and goodness are at stake.<sup>45</sup>

The reader is not surprised to hear Uriel's response to Ezra. Whereas Ezra asked God not to regard *the sin* of the unrighteous (8.26-30), Uriel rather coldly replies that, in fact, God will not regard *the unrighteous* at all, because of their sin;<sup>46</sup> God is not concerned with the sinners, but rejoices over the salvation of the righteous (8.38-39). A parable follows to prove this point; although many seeds are sown, only a few grow (8.41). In essence, Ezra's appeal has fallen on deaf ears. His prayer was for mercy when dealing with sinners, but, in response, he is told that God is concerned solely with the righteous, who are distinguished from the rest of humanity by the absence of sin.

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Cook, 1988: 96-97. Broyles demonstrates that in many Psalms of personal or communal distress, praises to God are meant to encourage God to live up to his reputation in order that the psalmist might continue to praise him (1989: 112). He cites Pss 22, 39, 42-43, 44, 60, 80, 88, 89, 90, 102, 108.

<sup>46</sup> Knibb: "the words of Ezra's petition in verses 26-30 are used against him in a contrary sense to that intended" (1979: 206). The same device appears in 7.71-72 (cf. 7.64).

**5.1.13. A third appeal to God's mercy, and a response (8.42-62).** Ezra once again objects (8.42-45). He is not convinced by Uriel's parable of the seed (8.41), and thinks it to be a faulty analogy. First, seed is dependent upon the proper amount of rainfall, which is in God's control. Evidently Ezra thinks that Uriel's analogy proves his very point – creation needs its creator in order to survive. In effect, Ezra again implies that God should be merciful lest he be unjust.<sup>47</sup> Second, Ezra does not think that seed can be compared to humanity, since God created the latter in his own image. If God nourishes seed, how much more will he save humanity.<sup>48</sup> Both points spring from the fact that the creature is wholly dependent upon the creator and is not able to sustain itself.<sup>49</sup>

By now, the reader of this dialogue will not be surprised if Uriel's reply follows the same lines as his previous replies, and if that reply itself does not quite "connect" with Ezra's point. He says:

Things that are present are for those who live now and things that are future are for those who will live hereafter. (8.46)

For the most part, that is his answer – a simple restatement of the two-age scheme. The assurance is given that God loves his creation (8.47), and Ezra is said to be numbered among the righteous, while the wicked are assured of future punishment for their contempt of God and his law (8.56; cf. 7.127-31). Although it was not God's intention to destroy humanity, those who have defiled his name have decided their own fate (8.48-61). Ezra is explicitly told to ask nothing further of the fate of sinners (8.55).

**5.1.14. The signs of the end of the age (8.63-9.13).** As in I and II, a series of signs of the end times are given near the end of the dialogue. Here again there appears a description of the righteous and the sinners, and here again it is the law that determines the fate of individuals.

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Thompson, 1977: 128.

<sup>48</sup> Earlier, Ezra had belittled humanity as insignificant before God, with the hopes of restraining God's anger against them (8.34); here, Ezra argues the opposite with the hopes of invoking God's mercy upon them. Moreover, Ezra does not miss the chance to put in a good word for Israel at this point: If you have mercy on your creation, then spare your people (8.45) – an argument similar to that of 8.4-19.

<sup>49</sup> Levinson: "Since Ezra cannot plead the human or Israelite cause on the basis of their righteousness, he pleads their cause on the basis of their creatureliness" (1988: 115).

The righteous one will be saved on account of his works or “on account of the faithfulness (*fidem*) in which he has put his trust (*in qua credidit*)”<sup>50</sup> (9.7). The wicked, conversely, have scorned the law (9.11). Once again, Ezra is told not to inquire about the ungodly, but to consider the salvation of the righteous (9.13).

**5.1.15. Ezra and Uriel recapitulate their respective points (9.14-22).** Ezra does not heed the call to concern himself exclusively with the righteous. Instead, he makes his last appeal, which is less an appeal than a statement of non-satisfaction. He states, “I said it before, and I say it now, and will say it again”,<sup>51</sup> after which he complains, “There are more who perish than those who will be saved” (9.15). Evidently, Ezra remains unconvinced by Uriel’s case, which he cannot reconcile with God’s mercy.

In reply, Uriel holds that those who will be destroyed are deserving of their fate. The world is lost and those in it are lost (9.17-20). And yet God has spared some “with great difficulty” (9.21) and has perfected them “with much labour” (*cum multo labore*) (9.22). Here it is *God* who has worked hard for the salvation of the righteous. We should not think that Uriel has surrendered his earlier conviction that salvation is granted to those who laboriously (*cum labore*) and perfectly served God in order to overcome evil and complete the contest victoriously (7.89, 92, 127-28). Uriel has not suddenly changed his tone to affirm that salvation will be granted entirely on the basis of God’s grace.<sup>52</sup> He seems, instead, to be wrapping his position in language which affirms God’s sovereignty and justice. And this is not unjustifiable on his part for, as the three visions which follow will reveal, God will show himself to be the deliverer of those who have made themselves worthy and acceptable to him. Whatever effort God may expend is not “grace” in its traditional sense, however. He will “save” some, no doubt, but they are those *who have merited his effort* which he will exercise only at the end of the age. Uriel’s attention is towards this eschatological aspect of salvation, addressed in IV-VI, wherein God acts decisively for the sake of the remnant who are deserving of salvation. In this way, he can talk about God’s own

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<sup>50</sup> Our translation; cf. Box, 1912: 203. That *fidem* here has the sense of “faithfulness” is also suggested by Thompson, 1977: 313. But see Mundle, 1929: 229-31.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson calls this “the seer’s final thrust at God before the transition episode IV begins” (1977: 127).

<sup>52</sup> Contra Thompson, 1977: 348, n. 42; Box, 1912: 205; Myers, 1974: 261; Knibb, 1979: 217.

participation in eschatological salvation. Otherwise Uriel's position remains unchanged: those who will be saved are few in number. They are not humanity, nor Israel, but only one grape out of a cluster (9.21-22) – a remnant. Let the multitude perish, for there is a precious remnant who will be saved.

That the "grape" and "plant" imagery in 9.21-22 symbolize *the remnant* is an assertion which will need some support in the light of Thompson's contention that these symbols do not represent the few who are righteous but the nation Israel. He supports this by noting that the "use of national election terminology is unmistakable" and "obvious".<sup>53</sup> But is it? Firstly, it must be noticed that Thompson's suggestion makes for a very disjointed reading. Thompson is forced to see here "a partial merging of the concepts of national and personal salvation".<sup>54</sup> This is because the phrase "I spared some with great difficulty" refers (as he recognizes) to individuals, while the "one grape out of a cluster" he thinks to refer to the nation of Israel. This important switch in the object of God's salvation would seem clumsy, and there are no indicators to suggest that such a reading is appropriate in 9.21. Second, it would seem unnecessarily awkward, even problematic, for Uriel to resort to some sort of nationalistic particularism at this point. His "two-age doctrine" has been unpacked in III to reveal that it is not Israel who will be blessed in the next age but only a very few by means of their perfect and laborious fulfillment of the law. That he should suddenly defend the position he has all along attempted to negate is not to be expected, nor can it be properly defended from the text.

This is confirmed, most significantly, when the imagery Uriel uses is compared with popular nationalistic symbolism of the author's day, which Ezra draws upon in 5.23 when he begins his first complaint of II:

O sovereign Lord, from every forest of the earth and from all its trees you have chosen one vine.

Recent studies have reinforced the significance of the vine and the grape cluster as vital and potent nationalistic symbols,

full of meaning for a time of national crisis and emerging when high hopes of

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<sup>53</sup> Thompson, 1977: 192; cf. 210-11, 264.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, 1977: 192.

military victory over Rome, Messiah's coming, eschatological salvation, and political freedom were entertained.<sup>55</sup>

Jewish coins of the Roman period commonly bore the symbols of the vine or grape cluster – symbols apparently easily appropriated to support the nationalistic tendencies which arose in Jewish circles especially in times of foreign domination. Significant also are the descriptions recorded in Josephus and the Mishnah of the golden vines which stood above the golden gate into the sanctuary of the Herodian Temple, “from which hung branches as big as a man”.<sup>56</sup> The vine as the symbol of the nation Israel is also apparent in various Jewish literary works of the author's time, including the targums, Pseudo-Philo (in which it occurs seven times in extended imagery) and in 2 Baruch (in which it represents the messiah who acts as Israel's representative to overthrow the forest of God's enemies).<sup>57</sup> After examining the textual evidence of the vine imagery of first-century Judaism, R. Hayward appropriately concludes that the vine symbolizes

Israel as God's never-to-be-destroyed people, on whose existence the creation depends and for whose sake it has come into being; Israel as the one people who glorify God and are promised eternal life.<sup>58</sup>

From this evidence, there is little reason for surprise when Ezra begins his thoroughly nationalistic complaint in II by likening Israel to the vine which God selected from all of the trees in the forest (5.23). What is significant, however, is Uriel's recasting of this imagery in diminutive terms in 9.21-22. Out of the forest, God has chosen one plant, says Uriel. This is not the great “cosmic vine, reaching from the underworld to heaven, linking the Abyss with God's Throne of Glory”,<sup>59</sup> as it is commonly portrayed in Early Jewish literature.<sup>60</sup> And if this is not enough, what Uriel identifies as the object of God's salvation is not a cluster of grapes – a popular symbol of Israel – but one single grape from the whole cluster of grapes. Certainly, when the significance of the vine and the grape cluster as established nationalistic symbols are reduced to the image of one single grape, one can hardly suppose, in the light of Jewish symbolism evident in the first

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<sup>55</sup> Hayward, 1990: 7. Hayward, following Porton (1976) suggests that, especially after the first Jewish revolt of 66-70 CE, this imagery took on nationalistic significance.

<sup>56</sup> Josephus, *Wars* 5.210-211. Cf. Josephus, *Ant* 15.395; m. *Mid* 3.8.

<sup>57</sup> For a good discussion of the vine and grape cluster imagery of these documents, see Hayward, 1990.

<sup>58</sup> 1990: 12. Cf. Rowland, 1982: 61.

<sup>59</sup> Hayward, 1990: 4.

<sup>60</sup> PsPhilo 12.8-9; cf. 18.10, 23.12, 28.4, 30.4, 39.7; 1QH 6.14-17.

century C.E., that Uriel intended the one grape to signify the nation Israel. Of course, Uriel's contrasts between the cluster and the grape and between the plant and the forest<sup>61</sup> works along the same lines as affirmations found elsewhere in Judaism concerning the uniqueness of Israel in distinction from the gentiles,<sup>62</sup> but Uriel transforms this nationalistic contrast and reduces the scope of its boundaries significantly to include only the few (cf. 7.60). This seems to be conclusive evidence that, despite Thompson's claims to the contrary, Uriel exhibits no nationalistic interest at this point.<sup>63</sup> (It may also be noted that, in structural terms, Uriel gets the final word, without rejoinder from Ezra. This has been true of each dialogue.)

**5.1.16. Transition to IV (9.23-25).** Before the dialogue ends, Uriel tells Ezra to prepare for yet another divine visitation after a seven-day interval. This time, however, Ezra is not told to fast as he was at the conclusion of I and II (5.20, 6.31, 35) but to move out to an open field and eat the flowers therein: "taste no meat and drink no wine, but eat only flowers" (9.24). This change of situation (*viz.*, from Ezra's room to an open field) and of instruction (*viz.*, from fasting to feasting on flowers) foreshadows a significant transformation in the tone of the book, as Ezra, in what follows, moves from anxiety to consolation.<sup>64</sup>

## 5.2. Summary of Episode III

Uriel has had the last word and has maintained his position unswervingly; only a few will be saved. This is the very point which Ezra has tried to amend throughout this dialogue. Uriel's position falls outside Ezra's conviction that God is merciful. Yet, despite his various attempts, Ezra has not received an explanation suitable to him. In spite of his lengthy exchanges with Uriel, Ezra remains unconvinced at the end of III (i.e., "I said before, and I say now, and will say it again"). In our estimation, the sheer length of III looks to be a device used by the author

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<sup>61</sup> The Latin reads "tribe" (*tribu*), evidently reading the Greek ὄλη ("forest") as if it were φυλή ("tribe").

<sup>62</sup> J. Schreiner: "Von der Terminologie... scheint auf die Erwählung Israels verwiesen zu werden," but Schreiner adds: "In V.22 jedoch dürfte die Rettung weniger Menschen in Endgericht angesprochen sein" (1981: 373).

<sup>63</sup> It should be noticed that most commentators would not agree with Thompson on this point. See, esp., Harnisch, 1969: 140.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Gunkel, 1900: 347ff; Knibb, 1979: 218; and Breech, 1973: 272.

to break Ezra's (and the reader's) bold and enquiring spirit to understand God's ways, leaving only discontentment behind. Ezra's queries are never answered to his satisfaction and much of his frustration is sustained by what he would consider to be superfluous and repetitive responses on Uriel's part. It is almost as if, once the respective positions are defined, the content of these positions is secondary. In one sense, more important is the reader's recognition of the impasse which the two characters can never get beyond and of the despair which Ezra feels accordingly. Their cases are so mismatched that their incompatibility precludes real dialogue and progress. But perhaps there is method in the author's apparent madness. He sustains a dialogue which has the appearance of a potentially productive debate but which never develops into much of anything, the purpose being to provoke in the audience an emotional response; the longer the dialogue remains at a standstill the more the reader is to be drawn into Ezra's own frustration.

In the process of this dialogue, Ezra has adopted a concern for all humanity. In I and II, Israel's own situation predominated. In III, however, that particularistic concern has given way to a more fundamental one of the anthropological condition. After his opening remarks, Ezra rarely focuses on Israel's situation (except in 8.15-31, 45). Although Ezra has not abandoned Israel's cause completely, it must be recognized that his plea on Israel's behalf (8.15-31) is brought into the service of his defense for all humanity (which surrounds it on both sides; 8.4-14, 32-36). He may be Israel's spokesman, but he has become more than that, for he has taken on humanity's case in the process. There is progress in III, then, since Ezra's agenda has changed, and nationalistic complaints have been deferred in the light of the anthropological problem.<sup>65</sup>

Nonetheless, although in III Ezra pleads for the whole of humanity rather than for Israel alone, his line of defense is along the same lines as it was in I and II; God should be merciful (whether to Israel or to humanity). Uriel's position is just as consistent; God cannot be held responsible for the fate of sinners since that responsibility lies solely with the individual. The righteous are those few people who, through strenuous effort, keep the law perfectly, thereby laying up treasures of deeds by which they merit salvation.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Thompson, 1977: 216; Willet, 1989: 143, n. 68.

<sup>66</sup> For characterizations of Ezra and Uriel on this point, cf. Cook, 1988: 98-99. It is not correct to say, with Harnisch (1983: 477-78) and Münchow (1981: 77), that Ezra is progressively won over to Uriel's position.

Several other points need to be made in reflection upon this dialogue and the dialogues as a whole. First, it should be noted that when Uriel's words in 9.21-22 are understood aright, Thompson's evaluation of the author's project cannot be easily maintained. It has already been pointed out that Thompson considers the imagery of the grape in 9.21-22 to symbolize the nation Israel. With this as evidence, Thompson thinks the dialogues, and 4 Ezra itself, to move from nationalistic to universalistic and finally back to nationalistic concerns. Episode III is thought to exhibit this same structure – the first and final speeches in III enunciating nationalistic interests while the dialogue which transpires between them dares to investigate the anthropological condition. In this way,

the author gives himself, by means of the dialogue, plenty of leeway to explore the fringes of faith and doubt, but he is safely in the fold at the beginning and at the end.<sup>67</sup>

But III does not end on this nationalistic note, and so neither do the dialogues as a whole. III concludes without a nationalistic resolution, and one must look beyond Thompson's explanation to understand the author's intention.

Second, it is necessary to determine the identification of "Israel", since it appears to have a different reference for Ezra than for Uriel.<sup>68</sup> Those with whom Ezra concerned himself initially could be defended collectively since they were united by the covenant of God's mercy. As such, when Ezra uses the title "Israel", it designates a distinctive ethnic group. The case is different for Uriel. He rules out the idea of God's mercy in the present age, and, with his rigid individualism, undermines the basis of a covenantal conception of Israel. If the designation "Israel" is meaningful at all for Uriel, it is as a reference to the few who earn their way into the next age through their faultless obedience to the law.<sup>69</sup> W. Schmithals' analysis of apocalyptic literature corroborates these results:<sup>70</sup>

The fact that...in apocalyptic thought Israel as a nation recedes in comparison with the true Israel is due to the loss of the sense of history by apocalyptic, which can no longer do anything with the historical nation of the Old Testament...How could one historical entity be chosen, when in fact history in its entirety stands under God's "No"?

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<sup>67</sup> Thompson, 1977: 209.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. esp. Levinson, 1988: 223, n. 22.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Harnisch, 1969: 174.

<sup>70</sup> 1975a: 87, his emphasis removed.



This position is given voice to in 4 Ezra by Uriel, in contrast with Ezra's ethnocentric conception of Israel.

Third, we must remark on W. Harnisch's portrayal of Ezra as one who voices a type of gnostic skepticism, maintaining that all of human existence is under the control of fate and that the individual is a pawn whose life is wholly determined by the powers which lie outside of his control. There is some truth to Harnisch's characterization, for Ezra does portray a skeptical attitude towards human ability to keep the law on account of the pervasiveness of sin throughout humanity. But to say that Ezra propagates a gnostic determinism is a misjudgement on Harnisch's part, especially in view of the commonplace in Early Judaism concerning human inadequacy before God and the recognition that, if God's salvation is to be enjoyed, it must result from God's merciful initiative alone. We saw this 1.2.1., and recall one passage from 1QH to reinforce the point:

Righteousness, I know, is not of man, nor is perfection of way of the son of man; to the Most High God belong all righteous deeds. The way of man is not established except by the Spirit which God created for him to make perfect a way for the children of men.  
(1QH 7.29-32)

It is precisely this point (*viz.*, that salvation comes only by means of divine mercy) which Ezra articulates throughout I-III. There is nothing characteristically gnostic in Ezra's conviction that the law can be kept by (almost) no one. That this conviction arises out of an awareness of the inescapable grasp of fate which determines one's destiny and from which no one can break loose is not evident from the text. Instead, Ezra's conviction – that “there is no person who does not go astray” (1Kngs 8.46) – has strong parallels in the literature of Jewish religious expression.<sup>71</sup>

It is precisely when this Jewish conviction is in view that Ezra's progression from the concerns of Israel to those of humanity can be explained. In Jewish literature, the fact that no

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<sup>71</sup> Hayman: “the views presented by Ezra in the dialogue seem to me to be perfectly acceptable in the mouth of an orthodox Jew. They are neither heretical nor gnostic” (1975: 52). So Hayman disputes Harnisch's position: “it is difficult to understand why the author should choose as the mouthpiece of an heretical viewpoint the venerable Ezra, the great restorer of the Law, and founder of the Synagogue” (1975: 50). Mundle shows well “[d]en allgemeinen jüdischen Horizont” of Ezra's complaints (1929: 224).

one is righteous before God is offset by the recognition that God has established his covenant with Israel. In his opening speech of I Ezra makes this point exactly; although the human situation is hopeless, God has initiated a covenant relationship with Israel as the corrective to the anthropological situation. Throughout the dialogues, however, Uriel takes the opposite position, denying that God's mercy can be experienced at all in the present age. On this point he is insistent. Moreover, in III, Uriel goes further than he does in I and II, unpacking the practical aspect of his temporal qualification of God's ways. That is, he defines the objects of God's affections to include only the few who have laboriously overcome the evil heart and keep the law perfectly. This excludes all ethnocentric groups altogether and introduces a rigid individualism. Had Uriel promised that God's mercy would fall upon Israel, *even if only in the next age*, Ezra would not have needed to expand his defense to include all humanity, for his ethnocentric perspective would have remained intact with only a temporal emendation, and his concerns would have been answered. But Uriel makes no such pronouncement. Consequently, for Ezra, Israel's own interests fail to be of particular significance; without God's covenantal mercy, the people of Israel stand alongside the rest of humanity. Whereas in I and II, Ezra questioned why the covenant has been ineffective, in III he laments the human condition since, apart from God's mercy, the whole of humanity stands together in a desperate state.

There is no reason, then, to think that human sinfulness has motivated Ezra's troubled heart. It comes up on his agenda only once God's covenant mercies are ruled out as the corrective to human sinfulness. Collins rightly states in this regard:<sup>72</sup>

The basis of salvation is individual merit, not membership of a covenant people. Accordingly, the focus shifts from the specific destiny of Israel to the more general problem of human inability to satisfy the law.

The sinful condition of humanity was recognized in the broader circles of Early Judaism and is nothing unique to Ezra. His case is unique only in that he has learned that there is no redemptive corrective in the covenant.

In this way, Ezra cannot be properly understood as a gnosticizing skeptic (Harnisch), nor as one attempting to break through the boundaries of Jewish exclusivism to peruse the

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<sup>72</sup> 1984a: 162.

desperate situation of all humanity (Thompson). Instead, his position represents the inevitable collapse of Jewish covenantalism when the foundation upon which it was established (the mercy of God) is removed.

Lastly, it should be noted that many of Uriel's statements concerning obedience to the law approximate similar statements made elsewhere in Jewish scripture and in the literature of Early Judaism. Nonetheless, Uriel's pronouncements on this issue are made in a different theological context or system of thought than most of those which they parallel. Uriel removes obedience to the law from its traditional context, so that it no longer symbolized the response to God's love by one who has already experienced grace within the covenant community. Instead, for Uriel, obedience to the law is initiated by the individual whose interest is to secure God's eschatological favour through his own efforts. Thus, Uriel replaces Ezra's "reacting nomism" with his own "acting legalism"<sup>73</sup> or "individualistic legalism", thereby removing the law from the context of God's covenant mercy.

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<sup>73</sup> To use R.N. Longenecker's terminology (1964: 78).

**Chapter 6:**  
**Episode IV**

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As this episode (IV) commences, it has the appearance of yet another dialogue between Ezra and Uriel. As it progresses, however, the dialogue format disappears and is replaced by the first in the series of visions. With this vision, Ezra enjoys the first increment of satisfactory assurance concerning God's ways. Accordingly, IV is something of a transitional episode, initially taking its cues from the debates of I-III while going beyond them. It will be analysed according to the following outline:

1. The occasion of Ezra's reflection (9.26-28)
2. Ezra blames the people and honours the law (9.29-37)
3. Ezra affirms God's justice, despite his sorrow (9.38-10.24)
4. A vision of the heavenly city, and Ezra's distress (10.25-37)
5. The interpretation of the vision (10.38-59)

**6.1. Analysis of Episode IV.**

**6.1.1. The occasion of Ezra's reflection (9.26-28).** As Uriel had commanded, Ezra went into a field (Ardat<sup>1</sup>) and "ate the plants of the field." Another seven days passed while he remained in this condition, after which his heart "was troubled as it was before," prompting his words to God.

The mention of Ezra's diet seems significant. D.S. Russell notes that divine relation "is sometimes associated with a special food or diet."<sup>2</sup> The change in his diet from fasting (5.13, 20, 6.31, 35) to eating flowers of the field (9.24, 26) would seem to signal that the events of this

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<sup>1</sup> Despite various attempts to explain this place name, the significance of "Ardat" and its variations remains ambiguous. See J. Schreiner's review, 1981: 374.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 1967: 226.

episode will take on a different character than those of the previous three dialogues. This will be confirmed as the episode progresses. The change of location – from Ezra’s room to the open field – serves the same function. Nonetheless, at present Ezra’s heart remains troubled, as it was at the beginning of each episode heretofore (3.1-3, 5.21, 6.36).

**6.1.2. Ezra blames the people and honours the law (9.29-37).** In his opening words of IV, Ezra begins by recounting God’s appearance to Israel’s forefathers and his giving of the law to Israel in order to glorify them. Ezra’s historical review in 9.29-31 in many ways parallels his historical review of 3.16-19.<sup>3</sup> The similarities between these passages are so apparent that the two could easily be interchanged without interrupting the flow of Ezra’s words on either occasion. Thus, one wonders whether Ezra is back where he began? Has nothing which transpired in I-III had any effect upon him? Is IV to be yet another sustained dialogue between two ill-matched rhetoricians?

The answer is given immediately as Ezra continues in 9.32-37. There, the problem is cited: the people failed to keep the law. In 3.20-27, this problem functioned in precisely the same way: the people’s failure to keep the law has frustrated the salvific potential of the law. Nonetheless, something radically new appears in Ezra’s words of IV which contradicts his point in I. In 3.20-36, Ezra argued that, in fact, God is to blame for the inefficiency of the law. In 9.32-37, however, the point is made repeatedly that the failure of the law’s potential is due solely to the people’s disobedience, and there is no recourse to blame God. The responsibility falls directly upon the sinner; “complaint has vanished and the blame is shifted. Now it is man who simply must perish because he sins”.<sup>4</sup>

In 9.34-37, Ezra illustrates his point. There, he gives a general rule which is learned from experience and evident in nature; a container is not spoiled when its contents spoil. Although this is “the rule”,

yet with us it has not been so. For we who have received the Law and sinned will perish, as well as our heart which received it; the Law, however, does not perish but remains

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Harnisch, 1981: 96.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, 1977: 125.

in its glory. (9.36-37)

Is this another complaint against God? Is Ezra indicating that God has broken a general rule to Israel's detriment?<sup>5</sup> Or, conversely, is Ezra simply stating the fact that, although the rule involved in Israel's case is contrary to the general principle observable in nature, it is nonetheless applicable in this instance?<sup>6</sup>

It would seem that the latter is more appropriate. Ezra's initial complaints have never been subtle. He has always confronted God directly, calling on him to take account of his ways. But nothing of the sort appears here, thereby suggesting that Ezra's words in 9.34-37 should not be considered as a somewhat vague indictment of God.<sup>7</sup> Ezra is stating a general principle learned from nature and experience: the container is greater than that which it contains. Yet this principle cannot be applied to the people (the container) and the law (that which is contained). The law does not conform to the general categories of life for, in fact, it is God's law (9.31-32), and, unlike the people themselves, it is imperishable (9.32, 37) and glorious (9.32, 37).<sup>8</sup> As G.H. Box says, Ezra is making a contrast

between what belongs to the corruptible present Age and that which belongs to the eternal order. The Law belongs to the latter; it has been sown in the corruptible vessel of the human heart of Israel, which perishes.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, the law cannot be held within the confines of human judgement and principles abstracted from ordinary human existence.

This, of course, is reminiscent of Uriel's point (in response to Ezra's initial speeches of I and II) that God's ways transcend the limits of human reckoning (4.1-21, 5.31-40). On Ezra's lips, this point is completely unprecedented, and involves a reprioritization on his part.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As Knibb thinks (1979: 221). Cf. Collins, 1984a: 164.

<sup>6</sup> As Myers thinks (1974: 277).

<sup>7</sup> The argument that the indictment against God is *implied* (cf. Harrelson, 1980: 28-29) runs against the structural grain of 4 Ezra; if Ezra has *not* undergone a transformation at this stage, one expects an *explicit* opening indictment against God, as in I, II and III. Only if Ezra has been transformed, as we will argue, can his opening statement be an explicit indictment (as in I, II and III), but the target of the indictment has changed with his transformation. That is, it is no longer God but the people who are charged, and charged explicitly.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Paul's remarks in Rom 7.14: "The law is spiritual, but I am fleshly".

<sup>9</sup> 1912: 214. Box appropriately labels this section "The Abiding Glory of the Law, and Israel: A Contrast."

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Willet, 1989: 71, 143, n. 75.

Throughout I-III Ezra pleaded for the people of Israel and for humanity (the container), but nowhere was he concerned to affirm the honour of the law at their expense.<sup>11</sup> Here, however, he acknowledges the glory of the law at the expense of the people: the latter are subordinate to the former. And, again, this has been Uriel's point throughout the dialogues, as is most evident in his words of 7.20:

Let the many perish who are now living, rather than that the law of God which is set before them be disregarded.

As such, Ezra's illustration in 9.34-37 does not constitute a subtle complaint against God. Instead, it amounts to nothing other than an implicit affirmation that the ways of God are just. Although Ezra has admitted that he is troubled by his people's condition, he nonetheless accepts that all is in order and that God is above reproach since the people themselves are to blame. As A.L. Thompson well writes:<sup>12</sup>

Israel has neither kept the law nor observed God's statutes (9:32, cf. 9:36). Presumably, Israel deserves to perish. There is no mention of the evil root or of any other element which might implicate God in Israel's disobedience and resultant demise.

Ezra's opening statement of IV, therefore, is somewhat shocking in view of the three previous speeches which initiate the dialogues in I-III. IV begins, as did the three previous sections, with the statement that Ezra's heart is troubled. But in I-III, because of his troubled heart, Ezra lodges an explicit complaint before God, demanding an explanation or stating that things should be otherwise. The pattern has been established that, whenever Ezra initiates a new dialogue, he begins with a covenantally-motivated appeal to God on behalf of Israel. In IV, however, no such appeal appears. Instead, Ezra simply peruses the situation without appeal to a solution or an explanation from God; those who do not keep the law will perish. He has no expectation that things might be changed.

Evidently, then, during the seven day interval between III and IV, Ezra has resigned himself (offstage) to Uriel's insistence that there can be no recourse to divine grace, except for the

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<sup>11</sup> As Thompson notes, the law has previously been a somewhat neglected theme in Ezra's remarks (1977: 130, 220).

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, 1977: 219, cf. 125, 218, 258. See also Rowland, 1982: 130; Harnisch, 1981: 96.

fact that God has given the law to Israel. Ezra is still troubled, but appears to have accepted that the situation is as Uriel described it. At the conclusion of III, Ezra was unconvinced by Uriel's argument. His perspective may have expanded in III beyond a nationalistic to a universalistic scope, but his line of argument remained consistent: salvation cannot come except by God's grace. Here in IV, however, Ezra has relinquished his own case, has assented to Uriel's,<sup>13</sup> and does not plead for God's mercy.<sup>14</sup> Despite the significant events of Israel's history, Ezra does not argue, as he had previously, that the honour of their forefathers or the giving of the law should enable Israel to have special consideration. Moreover, not only are Ezra's words in IV unlike his words in I-III, they could easily have been expressed by Uriel at many places throughout the previous dialogues. Ezra's words in 9.36-37 are almost identical to those of Uriel in 7.20, and his speech parallels Uriel's in 7.20-25, 70-74 and 127-31.<sup>15</sup> If those whose hopes rested with Ezra were to know of this metamorphosis, they could not help but feel disheartened. Not only has Ezra made no progress on their behalf in the dialogues with Uriel, he now appears to have forsaken his task altogether by conceding to Uriel's position.

**6.1.3. Ezra affirms of God's justice, despite his sorrow (9.38-10.24).** After his opening speech, Ezra encounters a woman who is mourning for her deceased son. She tells him that although she had been barren, she sought out God who pitied her condition and gave her a son. In return, she gave God glory. On the day of the son's wedding, however, he died. Consequently, the woman mourns and longs to die herself (9.38-10.4).

Although the woman in this vision will later be transformed into a heavenly city (10.25-27) and plays a symbolic role in Uriel's interpretation (10.38-55), at this point the woman functions in a different role. In the descriptions of the mourning woman, there is a striking resemblance between her condition and that of Ezra in I-III: She is "mourning and weeping with a loud voice," "deeply grieved at heart" (9.38), "embittered in spirit and deeply afflicted" (9.41);

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Harnisch, 1983: 478; *idem.*, 1981: 96.

<sup>14</sup> Harnisch: "Der Appell an die göttliche Gnade ist aussichtslos. Das unheilvolles Geschick, das den Sündern am Ende dieses Äons widerfährt, ist die zwangsläufige Konsequenz ihres geschichtlichen Verhaltens" (1969: 174).

<sup>15</sup> Harnisch: "Was der Seher 9,29-37 im Stil der Klage vorträgt, steht sachlich durchaus im Einklang mit der Position, die der Offenbarungselig ihm gegenüber zur Geltung bringt. . . Wenn er nun zu Beginn der 4. Vision Konzediert, dass niemand schuldlos ins Verderben geht, so ist offenbar auch dies eine Folge der Belehrungen des Engels" (1969: 173). Cf. Hayman, 1975: 51.



although she previously sought out God and gave him great glory for his graciousness (9.44-45), she now refuses to be consoled; although others had tried to soothe her troubled heart (10.2-3), she would not be comforted; instead, she intends to “neither eat nor drink, but without ceasing mourn and fast until I die” (10.4).

So Ezra, too, has repeatedly announced the fact of his troubled heart (3.1, 5.34, 6.36, 9.27), his distress (6.37), his agitation (3.3) and his grief (5.21, 34); in the light of the destruction of Jerusalem and God’s apparent betrayal of his people, Ezra, like the woman, could give no glory to God and found no comfort or consolation in Uriel’s explanations of God’s ways; just as the woman now fasts, so too did Ezra in I-III. Although the woman is fasting since she would prefer to die, her fast symbolizes her single-mindedness with regard to the issue which torments her. Without relief from her troubles, there is no reason to carry on with life. This sounds much like Ezra’s great lament over humanity in 7.116-126, where his point is made repeatedly, What good is it to live? He voices exactly the same attitude on at least two other occasions as well. In the first occasion, Ezra cries out:

It would be better that we had never come into existence than to come here and live in ungodliness, and to suffer and not understand why.<sup>16</sup> (4.12)

The second occurs, like the first, immediately after Ezra is told that he cannot comprehend the ways of God. He complains:

Why then was I born? Or why did not my mother’s womb become my grave, that I might not see the travail of Jacob and the exhaustion of the people of Israel? (5.35)

With a few substitutions of terms, what Ezra mouths in these two passages could easily have been recited by the woman in her initial condition of IV.

How then is Ezra portrayed in this episode? We have already seen from 9.29-37 that he is no longer the man he was in I-III. So, as A.P. Hayman states, 9.29-37, “in the mouth of Ezra,

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<sup>16</sup> The first half of this verse is Knibb’s translation (1979: 122), the second half is Metzger’s (1983: 530). Metzger’s translation of 4.12a (“It would be better for us not to be here”) loses the point, which most think the Ethiopic text rightly embodies when it speaks of being “created” or “born”. See, for instance, Oesterley, 1933: 33.

represents the view elsewhere expressed by the angel".<sup>17</sup> The same characterization holds true in 9.38-10.24. Whereas the woman in this section assumes the position held by Ezra in I-III, Ezra now takes the place held there by Uriel. The two injunctions at the end of Ezra's two speeches of rebuke (10.6-17, 19-24) illustrate this again. Ezra instructs the woman:

Now, therefore, keep your sorrow to yourself, and bear bravely the troubles that have come upon you. For if you acknowledge the decree of God to be just, you will receive your son back in due time. (10.15-16)

Therefore shake off your great sadness and lay aside your many sorrows, so that the Mighty One may be merciful to you again, and the Most High may give you rest, a relief from your troubles. (10.24)

What Ezra means in 10.16 by "you will receive your son back in due time" is best understood as an affirmation that she will find the consolation which eludes her. He does not expect a return of the dead,<sup>18</sup> but a return of her emotional health, as 10.24 confirms with its promise only of "relief from your troubles".<sup>19</sup> The road to recovery, says Ezra, involves bearing bravely the sorrow which had caused her to glorify God no longer. Evidently, as 10.16 implies, her troubled heart had undermined her confidence in God's justice. In I-III, Ezra has already exhibited the same attitude as the woman of IV. And in response to him, Uriel portrayed the future age as the proof of God's justice. Uriel could give the assurance that Ezra's distress will be relieved only by looking to the future age since he was convinced that God's justice will be exhibited in the events of that age.<sup>19</sup> The connection, therefore, between affirming God's justice and enjoying relief from distress is obvious in Uriel's case of I-III, just as it is in Ezra's assurance to the woman.

We have suggested that the mourning woman and the reassuring Ezra of IV parody the mourning Ezra and the reassuring Uriel of I-III,<sup>20</sup> thereby capturing in narrative drama the fact of Ezra's conversion to Uriel's perspective, as was illustrated in 9.29-37. Three other characteristics of 9.38-10.24 would seem to support this conclusion. First, the manner in which

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<sup>17</sup> 1975: 51.

<sup>18</sup> Contra Gunkel, 1900: 387.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. 4.26, 5.40, 5.56-6.6, 6.25-28, 33-34, 7.15-16, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Brandenburger, 1981: 75; Harnisch, 1983: 478-79; Knowles, 1989: 271-72.

Ezra rebukes the woman should be observed. When he contrasts the woman's loss of her son with Zion's tragedy and with the destruction of the multitude, in spite of his lament there is no sense here that Ezra is pleading for the case of Israel or of humanity. Instead, he is simply putting the woman's mourning into a broader perspective. In a way similar to Uriel's case in I-III, Ezra states that the woman's focus is too limited, and he attempts to expand the horizons of her vision. His words function along the same lines as Uriel's claim that Ezra's perception in I-III was out of focus.<sup>21</sup> Second, Ezra seems aware that his response fails to penetrate to the level of the woman's sorrow, as evidenced by his words in 10.12-14.<sup>22</sup> After stating that the earth (who has lost a multitude of offspring) has more to grieve over than the woman (who has lost only one son), Ezra recognizes that she will not accept his argument as valid, since the real issue cannot be reduced to numerical comparisons. She will say that her one son is more precious to her than the multitude is to the earth (cf. 7.54-58). In reply to this possible objection, Ezra simply states that this is not true. Third, the woman's response to Ezra is the same as that of Ezra to Uriel in I-III. After Ezra's first speech to her, the woman defiantly ignores Ezra's assurances and refuses to see things his way. just as Ezra's last statement of III began "I said it before, and I say now, and will say it again" (9.15; cf. 7.45, 116). Ezra's case has been as unpersuasive for the woman as Uriel's was for Ezra in I-III. These three points support the view that Ezra, from the beginning of IV, has been transformed and now stands in the position held by Uriel in I-III.

Moreover, this encounter scene introduces a distinction between proper and improper modes of mourning and grief. Before his opening speech of IV, Ezra admits his troubled heart, but he goes on to affirm in 9.29-37 that it is proper for the sinners to be destroyed due to their disobedience to God's law. Although he is disturbed, he nonetheless affirms God's justice. Similarly, in 10.6-24, where Ezra portrays the woman's loss as insignificant when compared to the loss of Zion (10.6-8) or to the loss of "almost all" who go to perdition (10.8-15), Ezra's sorrow for Israel and humanity is evident, but he does not allow his remorse to degenerate into an accusation against God, as he had in I-III.<sup>23</sup> Whereas Ezra insisted in 4.12 that suffering is unbearable when

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Collins, 1984: 165.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Myers, 1974: 278.

<sup>23</sup> Knibb: "It is important to observe... that despite his continued grief, Ezra no longer blames God for these events (contrast 3:28-36)" (1979: 226).

there is no understanding of God's ways, now he understands God's ways and is able to bear his sorrow and be comforted. In contrast, however, the woman's mourning stifles her ability to affirm that God is just. It is only because her grief has undermined her confidence in God that Ezra rebukes her. There is nothing wrong with mourning itself, as he himself states (9.27, 10.8). In fact, in 10.39 (cf. 10.50) we hear that God looks favourably upon Ezra precisely because he has "sorrowed continually" for Israel, and "mourned greatly over Zion." Grief is acceptable when it does not trespass the certainty of God's righteousness.

Before moving beyond this section, it is important to explain the significance of Ezra's statements in 9.39 and 10.5. When he first encountered the distraught woman, Ezra stated:

Then I dismissed the thoughts with which I had been engaged. (9.39)

After she explains her sorrow, Ezra makes the same point:

Then I broke off the reflections with which I was still engaged. (10.5)

These transitional indicators do more than signal a thematic change. They signal a significant development in Ezra's character and perspective. As we have seen in 9.29-37, Ezra, despite his troubled heart, accepted that Israel's sinfulness necessitated their destruction. The reader is prepared to hear from him a complaint concerning God's ways, or an appeal to God's mercy on their behalf, as has been his practice in his opening speeches of I-III. Ezra has consistently cited a problem and held God responsible to solve it by means of his mercy. Since no such appeal to God's intervention appear in 9.29-37, the implication is clear: God's ways are above reproach, for things are as they should be. When Ezra states that he has dismissed his thoughts with which he had been engaged (9.39), he is making his point explicitly by announcing that he has ended his words to the Most High (9.29-37). In them, contrary to the precedent he has set, no complaint or appeal appears.<sup>24</sup> And none are to follow. Ezra has spoken his mind in 9.29-37, and there is nothing more to come; sinners perish in order that the law might retain its glory. He sees no reason to amend this situation.

The same motivation lies behind the second occurrence of this phrase (cited above) in

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<sup>24</sup> Thompson: "On the analogy of the previous episodes, this would be the place for the lament and complaint, but here, Ezra dismisses his thoughts" (1977: 220-21).

10.5. After hearing the whole of the woman's case (which imitates his own in I-III), Ezra stands firm in his resolve that complaints and appeals are inappropriate. Rather than empathizing with the distraught woman, as he might have done in I-III, Ezra does not waver from his new-found acceptance of God's ways. He fails to petition God on her behalf or to join in her resentment. Instead, he answers her "in anger", and instructs her to affirm God's justice. Once again, then, Ezra's position is clear: no appeals to God are appropriate. There is no complaint to follow his opening speech and, unlike the woman, Ezra has resolved that God's ways are not to be questioned.

In effect, then, when he states that he has dismissed the thoughts that had engaged him, Ezra is affirming that he will entertain no indictment of God. What he has dismissed are the complaints against God and appeals for change which constitute the main thrust of his opening statements in I-III.

Throughout 9.38-10.24, therefore, one witnesses an Ezra radically different from the Ezra of I-III. Whereas two positions were defined in I-III, the one he advocated there is the one he abandons in IV. The Ezra of IV has accepted the main <sup>thrust</sup> of Uriel's case (9.26-37), has put aside his indictments of God (9.39, 10.5) and now preaches what he had not allowed himself to practice: that God's ways are just. He assures the woman that, if she too will affirm this, God will be merciful to her<sup>25</sup> and she will be comforted. Here the patient has become the doctor, and the medicine he prescribes is that which he himself had earlier refused. And by his own prescription, because he now recognizes that God is just,<sup>26</sup> so can he now expect to be consoled.

**6.1.4. A vision of the heavenly city, and Ezra's distress (10.25-37).** As soon as Ezra instructed the woman to put aside her sorrow, to his amazement, her face shone and "flashed like lightning" (10.25). At this, Ezra is frightened ("my heart was terrified") and he did not understand what had happened. Then the woman gave a "loud and fearful cry" (10.26) and was transformed into a great city, "a place of huge foundations" (10.27). Ezra, again afraid, cries out with a loud voice:

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<sup>25</sup> This is not the mercy which Ezra sought from God on Israel's behalf in I-III; contra, e.g., Willet, 1989: 71,75.



<sup>26</sup> Cf. Knibb, 1979: 219, 227.


Where is the angel Uriel, who came to me at first? For it was he who brought me into this overpowering bewilderment; my intention has been destroyed (or “come to nothing”) and my plea has become shame.<sup>27</sup> (10.28)

Throughout 10.29-37, Ezra continues in this frame of mind. He blames Uriel for his condition (10.28, 32), begs him not to forsake him (10.34) and asks for an explanation of what he does not understand (10.32, 35-37).

This characterization of Ezra is intriguing, and is marked by dramatic irony. He has been proclaiming that, by affirming God’s justice, one will find relief from sorrow. Ezra has already affirmed God’s justice in this episode; what is still to come, then, is his consolation. But instead of being consoled, Ezra sees a vision which he cannot comprehend and which frightens and troubles him more than ever.<sup>28</sup> Despite all his complaints of I-III, Ezra has taken the only option open to him and appropriated Uriel’s understanding of God’s ways in order to find comfort. Nonetheless, he feels himself to have been abandoned by Uriel.

Ezra’s play on words highlights this point. Whereas he claimed to have “forsaken” (Lat: *dereliqui*; Syr: ) his attitude of complaint against God (10.5, cf. the Syriac of 9.39) and then proceeded to affirm God’s justice in order that he might find relief from his sorrow, he now finds himself even more upset than previously and thinks, therefore, that Uriel has “forsaken” him (Lat: *dereliquisti me*; Syr: , 10.32). He believes that he has been made the fool, feeling that the joke is on him. For this reason he cries out, “my intention has been destroyed [or ‘come to nothing’] and my plea has become shame” (10.28). Understandably, therefore, he blames Uriel for his present distress, for when he conceded to Uriel’s position he did not expect to experience further frustration, but reward through consolation. What he

<sup>27</sup> The last two phrases (28c, 28d) are our translation. Two points need mention in this regard. First, most Mss agree with the Latin *finis* ( , which can mean either “end” (cf. Metzger) or “purpose,” “goal,” “aim,” “intention.” So it is translated by Gunkel as “Absicht” (1900: 388). Second, whereas the Latin reads *factus est... in corruptionem*, the Syriac reads , which, as we will see, captures Ezra’s sense well when read as “became ruin”. Despite various proposals for textual emendation, the point seems to be simply that Ezra’s intentions have been frustrated.

Concerning 10.28d, the Syriac ( ) has the sense of “shame” or “disappointment”, which well-suits the context, as we will see.

<sup>28</sup> Nowhere has Ezra expressed his anxiety more explicitly.

fails to realize, however, is that the vision which now troubles him greatly is, in fact, the first step in the process whereby he finds his consolation, as will become apparent to him from the interpretation to follow (10.38-59).

This irony has been noted by many scholars who recognize that what Ezra had hoped for was granted to him in the vision, although he failed to understand the significance of the vision.<sup>29</sup> Yet what it was that Ezra eagerly expected has often been misunderstood. Several scholars have found in Ezra's words of 9.29-37 an expectation that, despite Israel's present destruction, the people of Israel will nevertheless enjoy a eschatological salvation. For instance, Box<sup>30</sup> considers Ezra's point of 9.29-37 to be that

after the body and heart have perished – belonging as they do to the present corruptible order – the result of the acceptance of the Law by Israel will be realised in a blessed immortality in the incorruptible world – and this, in spite of the shortcomings of the fathers, and the failure of the chosen people to live up to the divine command.

None of this is evident from the text, however, and necessitates some degree of imagination when applied to Ezra's words. Instead, in 9.29-37 Ezra simply juxtaposed the sinners and the law, attributing destruction to the former without recourse to any future correction to this situation. Accordingly, Ezra's frustration is not due to the fact that the vision in 10.25-28 gives him no assurance of Israel's future glorification, for surely he expected nothing of the sort. Instead, what he expected was relief from his troubled heart, in return for his acceptance of Uriel's perspective. A heart free from distress would be the proof he needed to consolidate the fact that his acceptance of Uriel's position was appropriate to comprehend God's ways. But his augmented bewilderment and fear suggests to him that his new-found understanding has failed him ("my intention has been destroyed/come to nought"). Accordingly, he pleads with Uriel to explain how this vision *confirms* his new demeanor, lest he should die. And Uriel obliges him in the interpretation which follows.

**6.1.5. The interpretation of the vision (10.38-59).** In his role as angelic interpreter of the visions, Uriel is no longer Ezra's dialogical opponent, as in I-III, but now functions as Ezra's

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Gunkel, 1900: 388-89; Box, 1912: 232; Oesterley, 1933: 124; Knibb, 1979: 230.

<sup>30</sup> 1912: 214.

partner, an ally who lends assistance to Ezra's quest.<sup>31</sup> And so, he interprets the vision so that Ezra, who has constantly mourned over Zion (10.39, 50), now can understand and be comforted. It comes as no surprise, then, when Uriel concludes his interpretation with the words, "Therefore do not be afraid, and do not let your heart be terrified" (10.55).

Not all the details of what Ezra has seen are explained in the interpretation,<sup>32</sup> but the basic point is this: The woman represents the heavenly Jerusalem who is mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem, but who herself remains great and splendid (10.38-59).<sup>33</sup> Ezra is shown "the brightness of her glory, and the loveliness of her beauty" (10.50), and is commanded to go into the city "and see the splendor and vastness" (10.55). (Notice that the temple is unmentioned in this vision of the eschatological Jerusalem.) In the process, Uriel expects Ezra to leave behind his troubled heart.

It should be pointed out that twice in III Uriel has spoken of this great city (7.26, 8.52). In each case, this heavenly city is a benefit to be enjoyed in the age to come by the righteous few who are faithful to the law. Here then is the first confirmation of Uriel's descriptions in I-III of the age to come; the heavenly Zion is in existence now and will be revealed to those who are deserving in the age to come.<sup>34</sup> It serves as proof that Ezra was right to exchange his own perception for Uriel's. Whereas comfort eluded him while he held to the former, now that the substitution of the latter has taken place, he is shown a vision and finds in its interpretation the satisfaction that he desired.<sup>35</sup> His conversion is not mocked, as Ezra initially thought, but is honoured; that a glorious Zion has been preserved serves both to give Ezra comfort and hope,

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Harnisch, 1983: 468; Brandenburger, 1981: 68. This change of roles is not surprising in view of the fact that Ezra stands in the place held by Uriel in I-III.

<sup>32</sup> Because the interpretation does not fit all the points of the vision (for details, see Knibb, 1979: 226; Oesterley, 1933: 115-16), most scholars suspect that the author is drawing upon a traditional folk-tale (cf. Tob 6-8). This hypothesis also explains the fact that Jerusalem is represented here by a son, since it is usually depicted as a daughter or woman. See Thompson, 1977: 221.

<sup>33</sup> Most have followed Kabisch (1896: 83-85) in interpreting the woman as the heavenly city of Zion. For an analysis of other interpretations, see Box, 1912: 232-33; Thompson, 1977: 254, n. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Willet's comment is very peculiar: "Section IV introduces the heavenly Jerusalem, but its mention is not concerned with eschatological thought" (1989: 74).

<sup>35</sup> Brandenburger: "Erst muss die Wandlung Esras sich vollziehen, bevor das Offenbarungsgeschehen voranschreiten kann" (1981: 87).



and to certify that he was right to accept Uriel's understanding as his own.

The two visions that follow (V, VI) also confirm Uriel's views of I-III, while expanding upon what Ezra has already seen. Thus, Uriel concludes:

tomorrow night you shall remain here, and the Most High will show you in those dream visions what the Most High will do to those who dwell on earth in the last days. (10.59)

That is, the next two visions will reinforce Ezra's eschatological perspective by describing how God deals with humanity in the last days.

## 6.2. Summary of Episode IV

Episode IV has been shown to represent the dramatic turning point in Ezra's pilgrimage. The comfort that eluded him in I-III has now been awarded to him. The prerequisite of this comfort and hope was twofold. First, Ezra surrendered his complaint against God and his appeals to God's mercy. The reader has come to expect these at the beginning of each episode, and their absence here cannot be overstated in importance. Second, although he was still disturbed, he put his concerns behind him and, accepting Uriel's description of God's ways, acknowledged God's decree to be just. As a result, comfort and hope are his recompense, and his new perspective affirmed.<sup>36</sup>

It must be noted that there is nothing in this episode which assures Ezra of Israel's eschatological salvation. Ezra finds comfort from the vision not because he sees in it the depiction of God's future vindication of Israel, but solely because it consolidates his new understanding, thereby proving God's justice and giving him hope. In I-III, what Ezra sought to dispell his misery was understanding (cf. 4.12). Uriel insisted that true understanding could be gained by dropping his covenantal perspective and adhering to an eschatological perspective in which the individual is stripped of all allegiances and judged according to personal merit without recourse to divine mercy. After Ezra's conversion, the vision of IV provides the eschatological verification that he was right to accept Uriel's description of God's ways. This vision is the first of three which

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<sup>36</sup> It is not enough, then, to say simply that in IV "Ezra becomes cautiously optimistic" (Levinson, 1988: 113). The real issue is *why* Ezra's demeanor is transformed in IV; the answer lies in his change of perspective.



lead him out of his misery (perpetrated by his previous understanding) to praise and glorify God (13.57). Ezra's conversion is evidenced in 9.29-10.24, and the confirmation of the validity of his new perspective is granted in 10.25-59. Confirmation of the same sort continues in the next two episodes.

## Chapter 7

### Episode V

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In this episode (V), Ezra is given further evidence to consolidate his new understanding. What began with the vision of IV is expanded upon here. This episode will be analysed according to the following outline:

1. The eagle vision (11.1-12.3)
2. Ezra pleads for an explanation (12.4-9)
3. The interpretation of the vision; a remnant will be saved (12.10-34)
4. A distinction between the worthy few and the collective people (12.35-50)

#### 7.1. Analysis of Episode V

**7.1.1. The eagle vision (11.1-12.3).** As V begins, Ezra is shown a vision of an eagle rising up from the sea (cf. Dan 7.3) with three heads and twelve wings. The imagery is detailed and need not detain us. In short, the eagle is said to have an oppressive reign which engulfs the whole world. At the end of the age, however, a lion arises and roars accusations at the eagle. He announces that “the Most High has looked upon his times, and behold, they are ended, and his ages are completed” (11.44). Meanwhile, the last of the eagle’s heads and wings disappear and its body is burned.

For our purposes, two things should be noted. First, it is readily apparent that the eschatological expectations present in this vision do not square perfectly with the eschatological expectations found elsewhere in IV Ezra. In particular, both the problem and the solution seem to be cast wholly in political terms.<sup>1</sup> Scholars usually attribute this to the fact that the author seems to be drawing upon an already-established tradition. Apparently, the author found at his

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, here the messiah figure actively campaigns against the political oppressors, whereas his appearance in 7.28 is wholly passive.

disposal a contemporary symbolic tale about an eagle – that is, Rome – and its demise which is brought about by a great lion – that is, the Messiah of Israel. G.H. Box says of the author of this tradition:<sup>2</sup>

[He] is no cosmopolitan philosopher, but... a Jewish particularist. The unit of his conception is not the individual man, but the people, the nation; it is the divinely chosen nation of Israel that is confronted by the panoplied wickedness and godlessness of imperial Rome.

While the extremes of Box's source-critical research are to be avoided, his source-critical sensitivities allow him to make a good point here. The vision is marked by a national particularism, and the hope of a political salvation is held out for the oppressed nation of Israel, whose political (Davidic) Messiah destroys the evil empire. These nationalistic expectations are not what we have come to expect to hear within 4 Ezra, and the distinctiveness of the tradition easily shows through the pages.

Second, and more importantly, it must be asked how the author used this tradition, which seems so unrepresentative of his thought? What did he do with it, and where did he leave his own impression on the tradition? All too often in analyses of 4 Ezra this issue has been left largely unprobed and, accordingly, the author's purposes have gone unrecognized. In our estimation, the author wants to give little import to the vision itself. In fact, in the interpretation which follows, he edits it significantly to suit his overall project. Thus, the author's position must be extracted not from the details of the nationalistic vision but from the interpretation that he gives to the vision.<sup>3</sup> Where there are differences or incongruities between the two, it is the interpretation of the vision, not the vision itself, which should inform our understanding of the author's purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> 1912: 246.

<sup>3</sup> Stone argues that the author is himself the creator of the vision and its interpretation in V (1968). Better, however, is Collins' apparent rebuttal of Stone on this point. Collins notes that both the eagle vision of V and the man from the sea vision of VI are indebted to the vision of Dan 7. Accordingly, "we should expect that the author would have combined them in a single vision if he were working *de novo*." It would seem, therefore, that in both visions "the author is working with traditional material, for which he has supplied new interpretations" (1984a: 166). For Danielic dependency in episodes V and VI, see Lacocque, 1981; Kee, 1981.

Contrary to Stone's position, Harnisch postulates that V and VI are not integral to the original form of 4 Ezra (1983). For criticisms of his view, see Lebram, 1983: 199, n. 110. As we shall see, V and VI are of central importance to the author of I-III.

**7.1.2. Ezra pleads for an explanation (12.4-9).** At the sight of this vision, Ezra awakes "terrified" (12.5) and "in great perplexity of mind and great fear" (12.3, cf. 12.5). As in IV, so here the vision does not immediately facilitate the comfort for which he had hoped. He blames his own spirit for his condition because, in its inquisitive manner, it "searched out the ways of the Most High" (12.4). Because he is afraid, he calls upon God to show him "the interpretation and meaning of this terrifying vision, that you might comfort my soul" (12.8). Evidently he has learned from his experiences of the previous night that comfort will be granted him by means of divine explanation.<sup>4</sup> As such, the vision's import remains ambiguous until the interpretation which follows. It is the interpretation that the author wants his readers to hear and understand, just as Ezra now longs for it himself.

**7.1.3. The interpretation of the vision; a remnant will be saved (12.10-34).** The explanation is complicated and not easily understandable.<sup>5</sup> It is quite possible, in fact, that the interpretation (itself largely traditional) has been updated on occasion in order to renew the significance of the original vision.<sup>6</sup> In its present state, the interpretation is permeated with allusions to the political rule of Rome's successive leaders (12.10-30). The lion is identified as the Messiah (cf. Rev 5.5) of the tribe of David who will destroy the evil reign of the eagle (12.31-33), and save a remnant of God's people (12.34).

This last feature of the interpretation – the fact that a remnant will be saved – is most significant for two reasons; (1) it is both extraneous to the vision itself, and (2) it has precedents earlier in 4 Ezra. Concerning this first point, it is obvious that the tone of the vision itself was vindictive; those who have put down Israel will themselves be put down by Israel's representative.<sup>7</sup> In the interpretation, this same political flavour is, to some extent, maintained. The Messiah, for instance, acts to the demise of Rome. Nonetheless, those who<sup>Λ</sup> he saves are not

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Myers, 1974: 297.

<sup>5</sup> For a review of possible historical counterparts to each the eagle's features, see Myers, 1974: 299-302. But see the cautions by Gruenwald, 1979: 115; Box, 1912: 281; Torrey, 1945: 118-120.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Torrey, 1945: 118-120; Box, 1912: 248. A similar phenomenon is evident in the NT in Luke's redaction of Mk 13 (assuming Marcan priority); whereas Mark's gospel expects the end of this world to occur with the inevitable destruction of Jerusalem, Luke contemporizes Mark's eschatological hope by divorcing it from Mark's unrealized expectations (Lk 21). See, e.g., Dunn, 1977: 346-47.

<sup>7</sup> See Nickelsburg & Stone, 1983: 166-68.

the nation Israel, but “the remnant of my people” (12.34), which includes members of Israel, but (and here is the point) *not all Israel are delivered*. It is precisely at this point that the author’s reworking of the tradition is most apparent.<sup>8</sup> The divine interpretation has introduced the concept of a remnant into what originally constituted a vision confident of the whole nation’s future salvation. The tradition had Israel in its sight, whereas the divine interpretation discards the nation for “the remnant of my people” (Lat: *residuum populum meum*, Syr: ܠܒܢܝ ܐܝܪܐܠ ܕܥܝܠܝܢܐ), those who have been saved “throughout my borders” (Lat: *super fines meos*, Syr: ܟܘܠ ܗܘܢܝܢܐ).

Concerning the second point, it is of utmost importance to recognize that, here again, it is Uriel’s position of I-III that is being endorsed, for it was he who introduced into the dialogues the idea of a remnant who will be saved (6.25, 7.27-28, 9.7-8).<sup>9</sup> In 6.25, Uriel speaks of those who will survive (Lat: *omnis qui derelictus*<sup>fuerit;</sup> Syr: ܠܒܢܝ ܐܝܪܐܠ ܕܥܝܠܝܢܐ) the messianic woes and who will see salvation and the end of the world. Similarly in 7.27-28, he mentions a group who will be delivered from the messianic woes and who remain (Lat: *qui relicti*<sup>sunt;</sup> Syr: ܠܒܢܝ ܐܝܪܐܠ ܕܥܝܠܝܢܐ) to enjoy the 400 year reign of the Messiah. This group is contrasted with the many who disregard the law and who have no righteous deeds to their favour (cf. 7.19-25) – that is, they are the collection of the few individuals who have “laboriously served the Most High, and withstood every danger every hour that they might keep the Law of the Lawgiver perfectly” (7.89). In 9.7-8, Uriel again speaks of those who survive (Lat: *omnis qui salvus*<sup>factus fuerit;</sup> Syr: ܠܒܢܝ ܐܝܪܐܠ ܕܥܝܠܝܢܐ) the messianic woes. They constitute a group of individuals, each one having merited salvation on his own, “on account of his works, or on account of the faithfulness in which he has put his trust” (9.7). That one remains (Lat: *Is relinquetur*; Syr: ܠܒܢܝ ܐܝܪܐܠ ܕܥܝܠܝܢܐ) to enjoy salvation “within my borders (Lat: *in finibus meis*; Syr: ܟܘܠ ܗܘܢܝܢܐ).

Thus, throughout II and III, there is a noticeable consistency in the author’s handling of the concept of the remnant; it is applied to the group of individuals who have stringently kept the law and who have accrued works before God. There is little reason to think that anything

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Box, 1912: 247, 274.

<sup>9</sup> The mention of God’s mercy in 12.34 does not preclude this interpretation. Again, this is the eschatological “grace” which Uriel pronounced in 9.21-22; God is gracious to the remnant, the few who have earned his saving grace by their efforts and stored treasures of good works.

different is meant by the same concept in V. When this evidence is used in conjunction with the first point (*viz.*, that the remnant idea is completely foreign to the vision) the obvious conclusion is that, specifically at 12.34, the author has left his own fingerprint on the tradition which had originally been used to encourage the collective people by assuring them of their future salvation. The divine interpretation of this traditional vision states that, although the evil empire will be crushed by the Messiah of Israel, the salvation he effects will be only for the few who have gained the eschatological favour of God by their strict adherence to the law. In this way, what was originally an apocalyptic vision concerning the vindication of the nation of Israel in the face of her enemies is turned to the service of the author's case for an individualistic legalism, apart from any ethnocentric context.<sup>10</sup> These unique individuals are cited collectively as "the remnant of my people". Within the confines of 4 Ezra "the remnant" represents the puny number of those who have merited salvation apart from ethnic consideration.

There is another point which combines with the two already mentioned in suggesting that the remnant theme is itself the *crux* of the author's interpretation of the eagle vision. Not only does this theme (1) fail to have a counterpart in the vision itself and (2) have strong parallels with the position advanced by Uriel throughout 4 Ezra, it also is the final point of the interpretation. After this point is made, the divine interpretation breaks off. Only when this extraneous aspect has been incorporated into the interpretation is the divine explanation allowed to conclude. These three factors would suggest that the author's hand is most evident in the interpretation of the vision specifically at 12.34.

**7.1.4. A distinction between the worthy few and the collective people (12.35-50).** 12.35-50 is an important passage for two reasons. First, in 12.36, Ezra is said to be the only one worthy to learn "this secret" of God. This is reminiscent of Ezra's words in 12.4 where he recognized that these things had been shown to him specifically because he has "searched out the ways of the Most High". Apparently, then, Ezra's worthiness is due to the fact that he has converted his perspective in his quest to understand the ways of God. In the process, he

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<sup>10</sup> Contra Thompson: "the interpretation continues this same [nationalistic] approach with some elaboration" (1977: 236); Gruenwald: The point is that the "destruction of Rome will be followed by the final redemption of the People of Israel" (1979: 113); Schoeps, 1950: 157.

is considered to be unique in relation to the rest of the people, a distinction which will become progressively important in the remainder of the book.

More important for the present discussion are the author's words in 12.37-39. Here again the concept of the remnant makes an appearance of a different kind, for in these verses Uriel makes a distinction between the few and the many within Israel. Ezra is commanded to write what he has seen in a book and keep the book hidden, revealing its teachings not to all the people but only to the wise who can understand them and keep them hidden (12.37-38). Only the few who are wise are worthy, as was Ezra (12.37), to learn the secret ways of the Most High. The collective people, however, are not able to understand, and so remain oblivious to God's secret ways.

The very next event which is narrated, however, is Ezra's encounter with *all* the people of Israel (12.40). The technique employed by the author is dramatic irony. Ezra is first instructed to reveal the secret only to the wise, not to the whole nation (12.37-39), and then he finds himself surrounded by all the people, who urge him not to forsake their cause since he is their only representative (12.40-45).<sup>11</sup> They all voice, in strains reminiscent of those of Ezra in I-III and of the woman in IV, the sentiment that, without hope, life itself is meaningless:

If you forsake us, how much better it would have been for us if we also had been consumed in the burning of Zion. (12.44)

One senses that the author intended to heighten the dramatic irony by such qualitative descriptions as "*all* the people", "*they all* gathered together", "*from the least to the greatest*".<sup>12</sup> The effect of all this is to underline the fact that Ezra's news, while encouraging to the few individuals within Israel, is hardly positive for the majority of the nation. Now Ezra is faced with a problem. There is comfort in knowing that Israel will be avenged, but this translates into a salvific hope for only the very few. The reader is drawn into the tension of the moment when all Israel gathers around him to discover how the deliberations were proceeding. Ezra simply does as God has just commanded him to do – that is, he does not reveal the secret of how things

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<sup>11</sup> Here they liken Ezra to "a cluster of grapes from the vintage", thereby utilizing the grape-cluster imagery in a context different from the nationalistic context of Ezra's words in 5.23 and the individualistic context of Uriel's words in 9.21.



really are, but assures them that God has them in remembrance. The same advice which was given to the mourning woman of IV is given here to all Israel in their sorrow: "Take courage, O Israel, and do not be sorrowful, O house of Jacob". Ezra states that he has not failed Israel but is actively pursuing her interests:

I have neither forsaken you nor withdrawn from you; but I have come to this place to pray on account of the desolation of Zion and to seek mercy on account of the humiliation of our sanctuary. (12.48)

It must be admitted that what Ezra proclaims to the people is somewhat misleading. Ezra has long given up representing the concerns of the people of Israel, and he has long put aside arguments and pleas for mercy. In the process of his own development, such interests have been discarded. He has learned much and been shown the secrets of God which must be kept hidden from the masses – even the nation Israel – and can be revealed only to the wise.<sup>12</sup> This theme will become of major importance in VII. Here in V, it makes its first appearance in dramatic fashion.

## 7.2. Summary of Episode V

At present, it is necessary to indicate how the interpretation advanced here differs from most. M. Knibb's interpretation is representative of many and will be used here to illustrate the important differences. Most fundamentally, Knibb fails to recognize the significance of the remnant theme, mentioned in 12.34. He identifies them simply as "those who survive the woes which will occur at the end of this age".<sup>13</sup> This is certainly correct, but it is not enough, for although Knibb notes the parallels with 6.25, 7.27-28 and 9.7-8, he fails to take account of the fact that in each instance the speaker is Uriel who argues *against* Ezra's nationalistic hope,<sup>14</sup> insisting instead that only

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<sup>12</sup> The subtlety of this section (12.35-50) is extremely important and has not had the recognition in 4 Ezra scholarship which it deserves. Most scholars find here the occasion of Ezra's comforting the people (cf. Willet, 1989: 63, 72). But this is a far too simplistic understanding of the subtlety which the author creates by means of his distinction between the wise few and all the people.

<sup>13</sup> 1979: 252.

<sup>14</sup> Contra also Willet, who argues: Ezra's "complaints are replaced by the confident assurances that God remembers his people" (1989: 72).

a very few will be saved. Uriel has propagated a rigid legalistic individualism to counter Ezra's appeals to God's mercy and has used the concept of a remnant<sup>N</sup> to identify the righteous few with one designation. If there is a parallel in 12.34, the significance of Uriel's statements within the context of the debate must be taken into account, which Knibb fails to do.

Due to this error, others follow. Knibb misses the irony of Ezra's words to the people in 12.46-49, considering them to be a sober assurance to Israel that God has them in mind. This is possible, Knibb thinks, because Ezra has been satisfied in IV that Israel will experience an eschatological salvation.<sup>15</sup> But as we have seen, there is no reason to think that Ezra considered the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in IV to imply the eschatological salvation of Israel. In fact, just the opposite is closer to the truth, for Ezra finds in it the confirmation of the position defended by Uriel in I-III. Moreover, although Ezra assures the people that God has them collectively in mind, he has learned privately in V that such is not the case, for, rather than the nation, only a remnant will be saved.<sup>16</sup> Here again is confirmation of Uriel's position in I-III.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, one cannot accept Ezra's words to the people as sincere.

This leads to another problem in Knibb's (and others') interpretation, this time relating to 12.36-38. Knibb explains these verses in this way:<sup>18</sup>

The command to write down an account of the vision and to hide it in a secret place is part of the apocalyptic technique; it is intended to explain how Ezra's revelation, which supposedly dated from the period of the exile, only became known at a much later date, i.e. at the end of the first century A.D.

Knibb thinks that the book to be concealed contains the interpretation of the end time events (an explanation which is shared by most commentators). But to identify the secret *merely* with the end time events is to miss the real point of the secrecy motif. Knibb is right to call the secrecy motif an "apocalyptic technique", but this common technique has been utilized in 4 Ezra for a purpose which Knibb's explanation misses, as will be shown from the following paragraph.

In 12.36-38, Uriel commanded Ezra to reveal the secrets only to the wise among the people who will understand them. As we have seen, it is this which prepares the stage for the

<sup>15</sup> 1979: 255. Cf. Buchanan, 1970: 30.

<sup>16</sup> This point is completely missed by Thompson, 1977: 236.

<sup>17</sup> Properly, Collins, 1984: 167.

<sup>18</sup> 1979: 253.

encounter between Ezra and the whole people in 12.40-50. Uriel has already made a distinction between the many and the few within the nation Israel itself, and determined that the secret which Ezra has learned is to be restricted only to the few. Thus, when Ezra meets with “all the people”, he cannot reveal, under divine command, what he has learned. What, then, does he tell the people? That God has not forgotten them. But what has he learned in the vision? Quite the opposite; that only a remnant will be saved. There is, then, noticeable incongruity between Ezra’s speech to the people and his real belief. What Ezra does not reveal to them are not mere details about the end times but, in fact, the knowledge that only a remnant will be saved. First and foremost, it is Ezra’s newly-found perspective, which strikes right at the heart of Jewish covenantalism, which is consigned to secrecy, under divine orders. To bring this point out in full view, the author has the people ask, not about the events of the end times, but, ironically, about their own well-being before God.

Although the secrecy motif is a common technique in apocalyptic literature, its appearance in V is of great consequence. In 12.36-38, it represents the first serious attempt by the author to explain why the view first propagated by Uriel and now assented to by Ezra has little currency among the people. In VII, this motif appears again, but fully blown, and seeks to explain why Ezra’s new understanding has little grounding in the Jewish scriptures in which God’s ways are depicted in completely different terms. These attempts at authentication will be analysed in more detail below. For now it is enough to note the significance of the secrecy motif for episode V. Although the people carry on collectively under the impression that their covenantal expectations will be satisfied in time, the reader knows the “inside story” and watches as Ezra, who was commanded by God to keep the inside story to himself and to the wise, shields the people from the truth that he has learned.<sup>19</sup> He assures them of his commitment, but the reader knows enough to realize that this is only lip service.<sup>20</sup> Such are the secret ways of the just

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<sup>19</sup> For similar dramatic technique, see Gen 22.8, where Abraham assures Isaac that “God will see to the lamb for himself”. Berlin makes the comment: “the irony is great, for although Abraham speaks from his point of view and means one thing, the reader interprets it from a different point of view with a significance that is quite different. Actually the irony here is double. Abraham himself is being ironic, because he means the phrase one way but knows that Isaac will understand it another way” (1983: 52). The parallels with 4Ez 12 are almost exact.

<sup>20</sup> Saylor notes that Ezra’s response is only superficial (1984: 132). Similarly, Thompson states that Ezra’s reassurance that he is continuing to pray for Jerusalem and for the temple has

God.

By way of summary, then, whereas IV began an upward turn in Ezra's progress, it is continued in V where a description is given of a messianic revenge on the culprit who destroyed Israel. But, unlike the traditional expectation, the divine interpretation of the vision does not give the assurance that all of Israel can rejoice in the hope of a future salvation, for only a remnant will be saved from among them. In the broader context of 4 Ezra, this refers to the few spoken of by Uriel who, by their own means, have gained the privilege. It might be that what the author does in 12.34 is illustrative of his whole project – that is, he reworks a traditional nationalistic vision of the end times, sanitizing it of its ethnocentrism and utilizing it in support of his individualism, with its emphasis on merit by works.

Of equal significance is the first appearance of Ezra's new dilemma. He himself knows the mysteries of God's ways. He has long ago left behind his nationalistic perspective and has acquired a perspective, shaded by individualism and legalism. His dilemma is that he is not permitted to reveal this truth to the people, who therefore remain in ignorance. Although he is both the spokesman *for* the people and *to* the people, he is no longer well-suited for the former role, and is forbidden to reveal God's true ways in the latter role.

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nothing to do with the author's argument but "is simply a literary device to maintain the proper staging of the book as a spontaneous lament from the midst of the ruined city" (1977: 266).

**Chapter 8**  
**Episode VI**

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In this episode (VI), Ezra receives further consolidation of his new perception of God and his ways, just as he had in IV and V. This episode will be analysed according to the following outline:

1. The vision of the man from the sea (13.1-13a)
2. Ezra pleads for an explanation (13.13b-20)
3. The interpretation of the vision; a remnant<sup>N</sup> and a multitude will be saved (13.21-52)
4. Ezra is commended for forsaking his ways (13.53-58)

### 8.1. Analysis of Episode VI

**8.1.1. The vision of the man from the sea (13.1-13a).** After a seven day interlude, Ezra experiences another vision. This time, he sees “the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the sea” (13.3) who rises up with the clouds of heaven (cf. Dan 7.13). A multitude of men gather to war against him, but he carves out a mountain upon which he stands. From there, he destroys the multitudes with a stream of fire from his mouth. After this, he descends the mountain and calls to himself another multitude, a peaceable one.

As all commentators agree, this vision and the interpretation which follows it (13.25-53) most probably consist of traditional material which the author has utilized.<sup>1</sup> Here the culprit is not a political entity (i.e., Rome) as in V. Instead, all the nations of the world are the villains<sup>2</sup> whom the messianic figure destroys at the end of the age. Both the vision and its interpretation give evidence of the vitality of Jewish nationalistic fervour in the author’s day.<sup>2</sup> As we saw

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<sup>1</sup> Box: The source “included not only the Vision proper (vv. 1-13a), but also its interpretation (vv. 25-53)”, although the latter has undergone some redaction by the author (1912: 284).

<sup>2</sup> In all probability, the gathering of the peaceable multitude (13.12) was originally a reference to the salvation of the Judean Jews, while the gathering of those who come from afar

in V, however, it should not be assumed that the author is using this tradition in the same manner. One must determine where the author's own distinctive impression has been left upon the tradition lest his purposes be misunderstood. As we shall see from the interpretation of the vision, the author has redacted the tradition so substantially as to give it a dynamic completely at odds with its traditional purpose.

**8.1.2. Ezra pleads for an explanation (13.13b-20).** Again Ezra is afraid (13.13b) and asks for an interpretation of the vision. He includes in his request the observation that, while those who survive the messianic woes have to witness great dangers and distress, those who do not survive are much worse off since they "pass from the world like a cloud" (13.20). Although this is not a brilliantly perceptive observation, Ezra's words are important for the development of the author's case: Because Ezra does not simply make a request for an interpretation but comments on those who do and do not survive, Uriel is able to preface the interpretation with his remarks on "those who survive", which is precisely the point on which Uriel's interpretation diverges from the original intent <sup>of</sup> the nationalistic vision.

**8.1.3. The interpretation of the vision; a remnant and a multitude will be saved (13.21-52).** Having made mention of two groups – those who survive (Lat: *qui derelicti*<sup>fuert, <sub>λ</sub></sup>, Syr: <sup>ܩܘܝ ܕܪܥܝܩܝܢ</sup>) and those who do not survive (Lat: *qui non sunt derelicti*, Syr: <sup>ܩܘܝ ܕܠܐ ܪܥܝܩܝܢ</sup>) the perils of the last day (13.16-19) – Ezra is answered. "As for what you said about those who are left (Lat: *qui derelicti*<sup>sunt,</sup> Syr: <sup>ܩܘܝ ܕܪܥܝܩܝܢ</sup> <sub>λ</sub>), this is the interpretation" (13.22).<sup>3</sup> Uriel, first interpreting Ezra's words before interpreting the vision, states that the Messiah will protect some who will survive the perils (13.23). He describes them as those "who have works and faithfulness (*fidem*) before the Almighty" (13.23).<sup>4</sup> We have heard of these people throughout I-III from Uriel. They are the righteous few who will inherit

(13.13a) represented the return of the diaspora Jews who, upon their return to the holy land of Israel, share in glory of the messianic age. See Klausner, 1956: 360-61; Gunkel, 1900: 395.

<sup>3</sup> There is a textual discrepancy here. The Latin text speaks only of "those who survive", while the Syriac and Arabic [1] speak of "those who survive" and "those who do not survive." We have followed the Latin since it is "those who survive" with whom Uriel is concerned in 13.21-24.

<sup>4</sup> Our translation. Thompson also recommends reading *fidem* here as "faithfulness" (1977: 313). Knibb translates 13.23b as "who have works and fidelity laid up to their credit with the Most High" and notes elsewhere that what is intended here is "faithfulness to the law" (1979: 261, 182).

eschatological salvation because they have “stored up treasures of faithfulness” (6.5), “a treasure of works laid up with the Most High” (7.77). Uriel has declared that everyone who will be saved from the messianic woes “will be able to escape on account of his works, or on account of the faithfulness in which he has put his trust” (9.7; cf. also 7.24, 35, 114 and Ezra’s understanding of Uriel’s position in 8.33). His words in 13.23 are no different whatsoever, leading to the conclusion that when Uriel talks of “those who are left”, he has in mind the same group of which he spoke in 6.25, 7.27-28, 9.7-8 and 12.34 – the remnant, the collection of the few individuals who are deserving of salvation by reason of their merits.<sup>5</sup>

Two things need mention. First, it is important to notice that the vision itself made no mention of a remnant. The author has introduced this idea into the discussion by having Ezra, between the vision and the interpretation, make mention of those who survive and those who do not survive. Second, because it had no part in the vision itself, the remnant motif is treated initially as an additional concern. Uriel makes a distinction between the interpretation of the vision and his comments concerning the remnant (13.21-25). This distinction does not last long, however, and, when the interpretation itself begins, the remnant motif appears right alongside elements essential to the vision. In this way, the author has doctored the original import of the vision by introducing into the interpretation an element which is foreign to the vision itself.



In the interpretation of the man from the sea vision, beginning at 13.25, the Messiah is said to deliver his creation and to “direct those who are left” (13.26). Here, then, is the first instance in VI in which the remnant motif is interwoven into the interpretation of the vision. The interpretation continues, describing how the Messiah stands on the top of Mount Zion, from where he makes war on the multitudes. There on Mount Zion, the great city Zion (which was first revealed to Ezra in IV) will be established (13.36), and from there God’s Messiah will destroy his enemies “with the law” (13.38).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Klijn has argued that the issue of the Thessalonian community to which Paul wrote – the status of those who have died and those who are left – is evident also in many apocalypses (1982: 70-71). His point is valid, but his evidence from 4 Ezra is not, since the author of 4 Ezra means something different by “those who are left” than Paul does. For Paul, “those who are left” *will be joined by others* who have died and are deserving of life in the next age. In 4 Ezra, “those who are left” are the very few who are righteous and who *alone* enjoy the eschatological age.

<sup>6</sup> The Latin “and the law” (*et legum*) is almost certainly corrupt. See Desjardins on the

The interpretation then identifies the peaceable multitude – in distinction from “those who are left” – as the ten tribes of Israel who had been led into exile in another land (13.40-41), a reference to the events of 2Kngs 17.1-6. These ten tribes, we are told, left that land of their own accord to go to a more distant region “where humanity had never lived” (13.41) in order that they might keep the statutes of the law “which they had not kept in their own land” (13.42).<sup>7</sup> Uriel, assured of both their existence and their inaccessibility, describes their crossing of the Euphrates River by means of divine intervention. Because they kept the statutes of the law in a distant land, God will again intervene on their behalf and lead them back, gathering them in peace to enjoy the eschatological salvation (13.47).

After this, the interpretation focuses once again on the remnant, “those who are left who are found within my holy borders” (Lat: *intra terminum meum sanctum*, Syr:   ) (13.48; cf. 13.49).<sup>8</sup> Here the remnant motif makes yet another appearance, despite the fact that it has no precedent in the vision itself. Accordingly, it must be recognized as of utmost importance to the author, who has weaved it into the nationalistic fabric of the vision by means of the interpretation (13.21-24, 26, 48-50). This is not surprising in view of the fact that the same phenomenon was evident in the interpretation of the eagle vision in V. The interpretation of the man from the sea picks up the remnant motif of 12.34 and elaborates it. The two interpretations, therefore, overlap on the remnant motif and reinforce each other, although the motif has no correspondence in either of the visions. Where the interpretation of V ends, the interpretation of VI begins. It is as if the visions themselves matter little to the author's case.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps all that is really necessary are the interpretations of the visions – specifically, the remnant motif which completes the interpretation of the eagle vision and which runs throughout

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significance of the law in this passage (1985: 35).

<sup>7</sup> In all probability, the ten tribes assimilated the ways of their captors and lost their Jewish identity, but the belief that the ten tribes still existed “beyond the Euphrates – countless myriads whose number cannot be ascertained” is evident from several Jewish writings (Josephus, *Ant* 11.133; cf. 2Bar 77.22, 78.1; m. *Sanh* 10.3).

<sup>8</sup> The mention of “those who are left” in 13.49 has sometimes been identified with both those who survived the messianic woes in the land and those who return from a distant land. See, e.g., Myers, 1974: 312; Knibb, 1979: 270. But this position cannot be maintained when it is recognized that the phrase is used consistently to refer solely to the collective group of individuals who are worthy of salvation due to their merit. The phrase “within my holy borders” supports this identification (cf. 9.8, 12.34).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Nickelsburg & Stone, 1983: 183; Knibb, 1982: 70. But see Collins, 1974: 15.



the interpretation of the man from the sea vision. Accordingly, the nationalistic interest of each vision is deflated when Uriel introduces the concept into his explanations of the visions. As C. Rowland writes,<sup>10</sup> in the interpretations of V and VI the promise of salvation

is reserved for the righteous alone. *There is no relaxation of the rigorous attitude taken by the angel in the dialogues.* The great multitude which assembles on Mount Zion (4 Ezra 13.40ff) is there, not because it happens to be the elect people but because it has kept the statutes of God. The future glory is for the righteous alone, and no one who has acted impiously, *whatever his religious affiliation*, can escape the coming wrath.

Whereas Ezra distinguished between two groups – (1) those who perish, and (2) those who survive – Uriel has a threefold distinction between (1) those who perish, (2) the ten tribes who return, and (3) the remnant who survive the messianic woes. The third group are those who have what is required for salvation: works and faithfulness to the law. The second group also are said to have kept the law, but they kept it in a distant land. This is peculiar in that, in the covenantalism of Early Judaism, “doing the law” included the offering of sacrifices, thereby making atonement for sin. Those sacrifices were to be offered at the temple in Jerusalem. Uriel, however, describes the ten tribes as keeping the law, but they are said to have kept it *better in a distant land than they had in their own land* (13.42). While on one level this provides for a tidy explanation of an awkward event of Israel’s past (the exile of the northern kingdom), it certainly plays a far more significant role within the context of 4 Ezra. The author is not concerned to sew together the rips in Israel’s history; if the reader has been listening to the author’s case throughout I-VI and keeps in mind both his argument and his post-70 C.E. situation, the account of the ten tribes is a well-crafted narrative employed to substantiate the author’s main point, as we will illustrate below.

We noticed in Part I above that in Early Judaism God’s covenantal mercy was thought to correct the anthropological condition of sinfulness; although everyone is a sinner before God, those who are members of God’s covenant people enjoy God’s mercy and, thereby, take on a new identity as the righteous. It was a commonplace recognition that, inevitably, even the righteous sin. Nonetheless, the righteous maintain their status by “keeping the law” of the covenant, which included making atonement for sin by means of sacrifice and repentance. In this way, they are

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<sup>10</sup> 1982: 131, emphasis ours. Cf. Collins, 1984a: 167.

renewed in the covenant of God's mercy. "Doing the law", in this scheme, includes the practice of making atonement for sin.

In contrast to this, we have seen repeatedly how, in 4 Ezra, Uriel has ruled out at every step an ethnocentric covenantalism, arguing that God's mercy is not available to any except those few who, in contrast to the sinners, have "a treasure of works laid up with the Most High" (7.77). Uriel, unlike most Jews of the first century C.E., does not posit that the sinner can become righteous by means of God's mercy. For Uriel, the only corrective to the anthropological state of sinfulness is personal persistence in amassing works for one's own benefit. In contradistinction with traditional Jewish covenantalism, "doing the law" means being free from sin altogether, without having need of atonement. This goes beyond the anthropological view common throughout Early Judaism and explains the significance of the great multitude who kept the law outside Israel.<sup>11</sup> This is more than just a pious rereading and explanation of embarrassing historical events. It serves to fill out the author's portrayal of what "doing the law" does *not* entail. Having come to the conclusion that it is not God's mercy which rescues one from the desperate human situation but being wholly free from sin, the author came to regard the destruction of the temple as being of little consequence. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the author, struggling with the fact of the destruction of the temple, came to the conclusion that one must now be wholly free from sin in order to enjoy salvation. Either way, keeping the law does not depend on the existence of the temple, the priesthood or any sacrificial offerings. This point is made in the portrayal of the lifestyle of the ten tribes, a (negative) model of religious practice in a post-destruction setting; keeping the law does not entail temple sacrifices. And, in fact, keeping the law has never depended upon sacrificial offerings, as is illustrated by the saving of the few who have stored up works to their own credit before God (13.23). Thus, whereas the ten tribes illustrate what is *not* necessary to keep the law (temple sacrifices), the remnant illustrate what *is* necessary (works). If some Jewish groups found means to complement (*viz.*, the Pharisees<sup>12</sup>) or substitute (*viz.*, Qumran<sup>13</sup>) the temple sacrifices, the author of 4 Ezra finds no

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<sup>11</sup> In Tob 1.4-5, 2Bar 77.4 (cf 1.2-3), TMos 3.4-5, 4.8-9, the ten tribes are chided for their idolatry and corruption, without mention of the correction of their ways.

<sup>12</sup> Neusner, 1973: 81-96.

<sup>13</sup> Klingzing, 1971; Sanders, 1977: 299-305; Newton, 1985: 10-51.

need to replace temple sacrifices with another means of atonement since the need for atonement itself indicates one's unsuitability for eschatological salvation.

Together, these two groups – the ten tribes and the remnant – enable the author's innovative case to be authenticated in the light of traditional Jewish expectations. Despite the fact that the two exiles of the northern (722 B.C.E) and southern kingdoms (587 B.C.E.) wreaked havoc upon the tribal ordering of the Hebrew people, the concept of a twelve-tribal structure outlasted the reality (as is evident from the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*). So, after reviewing the pertinent literature of Early Judaism, E.P. Sanders writes, "in the first century Jewish hopes for the future would have included the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel".<sup>14</sup> The same hope is evident in 4Ez 13, the ten tribes and the remnant embodying the two components of this twelve-tribal structure: whereas the ten tribes represent the northern kingdom of Israel who were exiled from the land,<sup>15</sup> the remnant who are saved "within my holy borders" almost certainly represent the two tribes of the southern kingdom.<sup>16</sup> Apparently, then, the author considered those who will be saved to constitute a twelve-tribe entity. In this way he maintains the traditional tribal composition of Jewish patriarchal history in his depiction of eschatological salvation. Although Jewish covenantalism has been disqualified, and with it the hope of salvation for the ethnic people of Israel, the group to enjoy the eschatological blessings are themselves members of that ethnic group and representatives of its whole constituency. Thus, to some extent, while breaking out of an ethnocentric view of salvation, the author hopes to keep his case within traditional lines.

The appearance of the ten tribes is, in some ways, the author's "ace up the sleeve". As A.L. Thompson states, only in VI is it revealed that "the number of the saved constitute an innumerable multitude, rather than the paltry few over which Ezra and Uriel debate in the earlier episodes".<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the assurance that a multitude will be saved is not intended to encourage the nation Israel, for of their numbers only a remnant will be saved. Instead, it is

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<sup>14</sup> 1985b: 98; see his discussion, 1985: 95-98.

<sup>15</sup> The Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian and Arabic [I] all read "nine and a half" (cf. 2Bar 62.5, 77.19, 78.1) rather than "ten," as the Latin reads (cf. 2Bar 1.2). The discrepancy seems to have arisen from confusion with the identity of the tribes who lived beyond the Jordan (cf. Josh 22.7-10). For a review of the issue, see Box, 1912: 296.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Box, 1912: 300.

<sup>17</sup> 1977: 237.

meant to satisfy any lingering hesitations concerning the justice of God. Lest there still be some doubt over the justice of the fact that only a few will be saved by means of their own efforts, the ten-tribe multitude is introduced from "offstage" in order to allay any dissatisfaction which might remain, thereby mitigating against anything less than complete confidence in God's justice. The appearance of the multitude does nothing to revise the situation of ethnic Israel, but strengthens Ezra's new-found certainty that God is just. As such, the episode ends with Ezra walking in the field, "giving great glory and praise to the Most High because of his wonders" (13.57).

**8.1.4. Ezra is commended for forsaking his ways** (13.53-58). After the interpretation finishes, Uriel tells Ezra:

you alone have been enlightened about this, because you have forsaken your own ways and have applied yourself to mine, and have searched out the things of the law.<sup>18</sup>  
(13.53-54)

It is often thought that this verse includes a commendation of Ezra's righteousness before God, just as he had earlier been commended for the same reason (6.32-33, 12.36). To forsake one's own ways for God's way is, in this understanding, equivalent to being obedient to God's law.<sup>19</sup>

Although this is a possible reading, it does not, we think, wholly grasp the author's meaning. There is more to this particular verse than simply the acclamation of Ezra's righteousness. First, it needs to be noticed that there are others too (a remnant) who are righteous before God. Nonetheless, Ezra alone is singled out as the sole recipient of the mysteries of God. He alone is deserving. This suggests, therefore, that righteousness is not the sole prerequisite for receiving the revelations; perhaps another quality is being alluded to when Uriel speaks of Ezra forsaking his ways.




There is better reason to think that the revelations which were given to Ezra were not meant as a reward for his righteousness *per se*, but for the manner in which he, within the confines of 4 Ezra, has undergone a metamorphosis. Ezra is commended for forsaking his own ways and applying himself to the ways of God. Although the phrase "the way(s) of the Most




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<sup>18</sup> Our translation, following the Syriac; the Latin reads "my Law".

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Thompson, 1977: 237; Knibb, 1979: 271.

High” has been used in III to refer to the divine commandments which one must obey (7.79, 88, 129, 8.56, 9.9; cf. 14.31), it has also occurred frequently in the earlier dialogues in a different sense, referring to the manner in which God himself acts in the world.<sup>20</sup> In episodes I-VI, one watches as Ezra, seeking to “understand the way of the Most High” (5.34; cf. the way this phrase is used in 3.31, 4.2, 10-11, and notice 4.23-25), experiences a transformation of his perception of God’s dealings. After the vision and interpretation of V, Uriel tells Ezra that he *alone* is worthy to learn the secret of the Most High (12.36) – *viz.*, that only a remnant will be saved – just as Ezra himself acknowledged that he was shown this vision because he “searched out the ways of the Most High” (12.4). This is not a reference to Ezra’s obedience to the law or righteousness. Instead, it refers to his intellectual quest. 12.4 and 12.36 reinforce each other to demonstrate that Ezra was worthy because, seeking to understand how God’s ways can be comprehended, he abandoned his own perspective for Uriel’s. In recompense, he was shown the way things really are by means of a vision-interpretation sequence, which reinforced the fact that Uriel’s explanation of God’s ways is satisfactory after all.

The same point is intended in 13.53-54. If IV and V serve as indicators, one expects the vision of VI to reveal that Ezra’s outlook and attitude are now acceptable to God. Just as it was said earlier of Ezra that he was the *only* (Lat: *solus*, Syr: ) recipient of these revelations (12.36) because he had *forsaken* (Lat: *derelinqui*, Syr: ) his previous understanding (9.39, 10.5) and *searched out* (Lat: *scrutas*, Syr: ) God’s ways (12.4; cf. 5.34), the same is said here in 13.53-54:

you alone (Lat: *solus*, Syr: ) have been enlightened about this because you have forsaken (Lat: *derelinquisti*, Syr: ) your own ways and applied yourself to mine, and have searched out (Lat: *exquisisti*, Syr: ) my law.

The terminology is the same (or, in one case, synonymous) because the point being made is the same as that in IV and V – the visions are Ezra’s reward for accepting Uriel’s explanation and are given in order to consolidate Ezra’s new perspective.<sup>21</sup> This interpretation finds immediate

<sup>20</sup> Brandenburger: “Man darf dieses Leitwort nicht speculativ ausdeuten. Gedacht ist an etwas sehr Konkretes: an das Procedere, das Verfahren<sup>N</sup>, das Wirken Gottes im Weltgeschehen” (1981: 166).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Myers’ translation of 13.54: “Because you have relinquished you<sup>f</sup> [own interests],

confirmation from 13.55 where the intellectual aspect of Ezra's worthiness is explained: "for you have devoted your life to wisdom and called understanding your mother".

From all this, the issue which runs consistently throughout I-VI is the manner in which God's ways can be properly comprehended. It is this same issue, more than any concern to highlight Ezra's personal righteousness, which should inform our reading of 13.53-55. There, Ezra is said to be worthy of observing God's mysteries not simply because he was one of the few righteous, but, more specifically, because he had relinquished his initial covenantal perspective (cf. 9.39, 10.5) and accepted a new understanding of God's ways.

## 8.2. Summary of Episode VI

This episode has given further evidence of the author's view of the mechanics of salvation. The law could be kept in <sup>a</sup>distant land – that is, apart from the temple and without sacrifices – by storing up works which make the individual worthy of salvation before God. The ten tribes and the remnant respectively illustrate all this. Moreover, although he is convinced that those who will be saved are themselves representatives of each of the twelve tribes of Israel, the author entertains no hope for ethnic Israel as a whole. Despite claims to the contrary,<sup>22</sup> there is no nationalistic optimism even at this point. The radical individualism and legalism of former episodes is not overturned but is reaffirmed in this episode. Finally, Ezra is said to have had these revelations because he relinquished his own views and came to accept God's perspective on the matter. Thus, in return for transforming his understanding of God's ways, evident throughout the book, Ezra receives in this vision compensation in full, and praises God in the confidence that he is just.

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and devoted yourself to mine" (1974: 30).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Schürer: The author sought "to comfort the people in their distress, to revive their courage and zeal with a prospect of sure and imminent redemption." (1973: 1.527).

## Chapter 9

### Episode VII

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The final episode (VII) does not continue in the same vein as the previous episodes, but is nonetheless essential to the book. In it, the author seeks to justify the case he has made in I-VI, authenticating his innovation with regard to Jewish scriptures. This episode will be analysed according to the following outline:

1. Prepare, for the end is near (14.1-18)
2. Ezra asks to restore the law (14.19-26)
3. Ezra speaks to the people (14.27-36)
4. The ninety-four books and their distribution (14.37-48)

#### 9.1. Analysis of Episode VII

**9.1.1. Prepare, for the end is near (14.1-18).** As VII begins, God reveals himself to Ezra in the same manner that he revealed himself to Moses – speaking to him from a burning bush (14.1; cf. Exod 3). Ezra is told that, when Moses was on Mount Sinai, he was shown “many wondrous things” and “the secrets of the times” (14.5). But Moses did not reveal them to the people, for God commanded him, “These words you shall publish openly, and these things you shall keep secret” (14.6). This introduces a contrast which is to run throughout VII between the things which are revealed and the things which are kept hidden – a contrast already encountered in V where Ezra was not permitted to reveal the secrets to all the people, but only to the wise. At present, this contrast indicates that what Moses revealed to the people after his encounter with God was not a complete record of what he had learned on Mount Sinai; the Mosaic law is not the complete revelation of God’s ways for there is more in the secrets of the end times which have been kept hidden.<sup>1</sup> Although Israel are here identified by God as “my people”, he does not

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Russell, 1987: 108; *idem.*, 1964: 86.

wholly reveal himself to them.

Because the end is approaching (14.10-12, 16-18),<sup>2</sup> Ezra is instructed to take to heart all that he has seen (14.7-9) and to reprove his people, comfort the lowly, and instruct the wise (14.13). Moreover, the Most High takes the opportunity himself to exhort Ezra to live a righteous life, saying:

And now renounce the life that is corruptible and put away from you mortal thoughts; cast away from you the burdens of man and divest yourself now of your weak nature, and lay to one side the thoughts that are most grievous to you, and hasten to escape from these times. (14.14-15)

The author has inserted these exhortations within the context of warnings that the end is near. They represent his pastoral call for a decision; since the end is near, one should decide to live in the manner described by these verses.<sup>3</sup> The verses themselves say nothing about what things should be actively done, but concentrate only on the things which should be avoided. Significantly, they include the thinking of grievous thoughts, which would seem to echo Uriel's instruction to Ezra in I-III and Ezra's instruction to the woman in IV.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the description of things to avoid closely resembles Uriel's description in 7.88-99 of things avoided by those who laboriously kept the law perfectly.<sup>5</sup>

**9.1.2. Ezra asks to restore the law (14.19-26).** Ezra accepts God's commission to reprove the people of his generation (14.20). But since that will be to no avail for future generations, he asks for permission to write down what he has been shown so that they too might be enlightened.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the author is modelling his portrayal of Ezra on the historical

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<sup>2</sup> Although the future orientation of the traditional visions in V-VI substituted for a full-blown two-age scheme, that scheme holds the same place of importance in 14.10-18 that it held in Uriel's descriptions of I-III. See Brandenburger, 1981: 136.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. le Roux, 1981: 50. On the ethical and paraenetic intention of eschatological portrayals in apocalypses, see Schmithals, 1975a: 38-40; Münchow, 1981; Mueller, 1981; Ponthot, 1985: 157-8, 163; Lebram, 1983: 175; Collins, 1974: 11-12; Silbermann, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Brandenburger, 1981: 137.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Brandenburger, 1981: 136 n. 138.

<sup>6</sup> Ezra has already been assured that the end is near, but he has also been told that two and a half of the twelve periods of history remain. The claim that the end is near facilitates the author's pastoral exhortations; the claim that two and a half periods remain facilitates the giving of the law to the future generations, as the rest of VII describes.



Ezra who made accessible the Mosaic law to the post-*exilic* Jewish community. But one may wonder what the Ezra of 4 Ezra has in mind when he speaks of wanting to restore the law? What does he mean by the law? It was his covenantal understanding of God's ways as recorded in the law which caused all his problems in the first place. Is it this same law which he now wants to restore?

His words of 14.21-22 are not especially clear in this regard, and there would seem to be two possibilities. The first is that Ezra now considers the law itself to include not only the Jewish scriptures but also the account of the end-time events of which he has learned in the course of his encounters with Uriel. Ezra has been told that Moses too was shown many wondrous things, including the secrets of the end times, and that Moses was instructed to keep secret those things which Ezra has since learned by divine revelation – that is, the secret things of the end. Ezra now asks for permission to reveal both “the things which have been done” and those things which “will be done by you” (14.21), in order that he might reveal “everything that has happened in the world from the beginning, the things which were written in your Law” (14.22). Does this indicate that Ezra now understands the law itself to be more than the traditional Jewish scripture, and includes the eschatological mysteries?<sup>7</sup> D.S. Russell considers the “law” here to include “not only the ‘open’ books of the Law, but the ‘secret’ books as well”.<sup>8</sup>

A second possibility is that Ezra maintains a traditional identification of the law with the Jewish scriptures. But in this case, although the concept of the law is not expanded to include the secrets which Ezra has learned in I-VI, it would seem to have taken on a different character than Ezra originally attributed to it in I-III. We need only remember Uriel's words of 7.129 to see how the law could be understood to substantiate the claim that the individual is responsible for, and capable of, earning entry into the eschatological life. Uriel considered his case to be validated by the message of Moses and the prophets and to be summed up by Moses' words of <sup>eu</sup>Dt 30.19: “Choose for yourself life, that you may live”. Ezra's words of 14.22 are not much different; he hopes to restore the law to the people in order that “those who wish to live

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<sup>7</sup> Knibb: “here it is quite clear that ‘law’ is being used in a very general sense” (1979: 278).



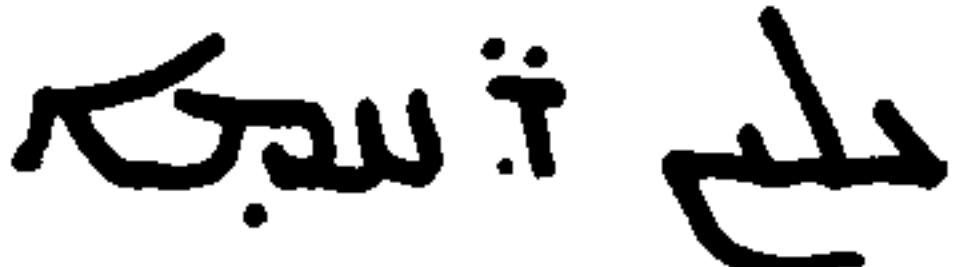
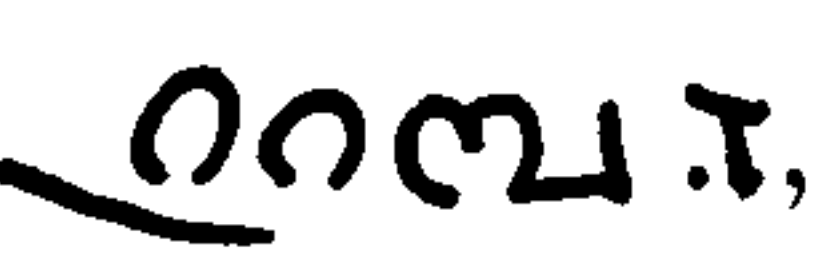
<sup>8</sup> 1987: 109.

in the last days may live". If Ezra is echoing the view of the law expressed by Uriel in 7.129, he no longer perceives the law as the account of God's merciful dealings with Israel but as the individual's guide to the "path" towards salvation.

The issue, therefore, is the manner in which Ezra, after abandoning his covenantal perspective, modifies his understanding of the law. Is it modified in extent or in character? In the former case, the law would come to include the secrets of the end times, which rule out a Jewish covenantalism. In the latter case, the law would become a sourcebook for personal piety – again ruling out Jewish covenantalism. Either, or perhaps both, can be understood from Ezra's rather vague words in 14.21-22.

The divine reply in 14.23-26 clarifies the issue somewhat. Ezra is commanded to leave the people for forty days, during which time he will be given "the lamp of understanding" in order to write many tablets. But one significant condition goes with the task. Ezra is told, "Some things you shall make public, and some you shall deliver in secret to the wise" (14.26). By renewing the contrast between the things which are and are not to be revealed to the people, this command helps to illuminate both the character and extent of the law. Although Ezra will write many things, only some of them will be eligible for public viewing. A distinction can easily and properly be made here between what might be called the "public law" and the "private law". The extent and character of the one differ from the extent and character of the other. The public law was first given by Moses to the people, and Ezra is to reissue this law. The private law, however, was kept secret by Moses, but is now to be revealed by Ezra, even if only to the wise. If the divine command of 12.36-38 provides any kind of a precedent, the private law, no doubt, contains the details of the end times which, within 4 Ezra, have substantiated Uriel's case of I-III, thereby perpetrating a legalistic individualism (in distinction from the public law). Accordingly, the conflicting positions of Ezra and Uriel in I-III are documented in the public law and private law respectively.

**9.1.3. Ezra speaks to the people (14.27-36).** This section records Ezra's parting words to the people. In them, his conversion-perspective is evident in two ways. First, although he reviews much of the same events of Israel's history as he did in his opening speech of I, his

point here is much different. In his first speech of the book (3.4-36), Ezra charged God with injustice; the people were not able to keep the law because God had failed to act decisively on their behalf. Here, however, Ezra puts the responsibility for the people's condition wholly on them, accusing them and their forefathers of not keeping the law (14.28-31) and charging them to "rule over your minds and discipline your heart" (14.34), an echo, perhaps, of Uriel's description of the righteous few in 7.92 (cf. 14.14).<sup>9</sup> Second, although he assures the people that there is the possibility of obtaining God's mercy after death (Lat: *misericiordiam consequemini*; Syr: , , "mercies shall be received by you"), what he means by "mercy" is different from what he meant by it in 4.24, where he questioned why Israel was not worthy of obtaining God's mercy (Lat: *misericiordiam consequi*; Syr: , , "that mercies shall be upon us"). In 4.24, "mercy" is a component of Ezra's covenantal perspective, whereas in 14.34-35 it is an eschatological reward which is granted on the basis of one's deeds,<sup>10</sup> much like Uriel's description in 12.34 of God's eschatological mercy upon the remnant who will be saved due to their works (cf. 9.21-22). Thus, as A.P. Hayman states, "in Ezra's parting speech to his people before his assumption (14.27-36) the standpoint espoused by Uriel in visions I-III is clearly expressed".<sup>11</sup> But, despite all this, in his farewell exhortations, Ezra does not get to the point of I-VI – the overthrow of a covenantal understanding of God's ways. Although the reader recognizes that Ezra's words of VII differ from those with which he began his quest, every aspect of his speech could just as easily appear in a prophetic call for the people to be obedient to their covenant God. Although the reader is aware of Ezra's transformation, the people remain unaware of it since his speech lacks the "bite" of Uriel's words in I-III. It is not that Ezra is an ineffective communicator, but simply that he has been charged by God to refrain from enlightening the people (14.26). According to the command of 14.26, God has willed the classified information to be withheld from the people.

<sup>9</sup> Knibb calls 14.27-31 "a deliberate contrast" to Ezra's speech in 3.4-36, which gives the reader "a clear indication of the way in which the attitude of the author has changed" (1979: 279). Cf. Münchow, 1981: 86.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson notes that several scholars, failing to come to grips with Ezra's position in VII, identify 14.35 as a later individualizing interpolation into the text (1977: 98). Individualistic it is; an interpolation it is not.

<sup>11</sup> 1975: 47. Cf. Brandenburger, 1981: 65, 80.

Between 14.26 and 14.27, therefore, there appears the same dramatic irony which was evident between 12.37-38 and 12.40-45. In each case, Ezra is first commanded to announce the secrets which he had been shown only to the wise (12.37-38, 14.26), and is then immediately surrounded by "all the people" (12.40, 14.27). Without the initial command to secrecy, one would expect Ezra to instruct the people in the ways of God which he has learned throughout 4 Ezra. But because he is charged with secrecy, no such instruction is possible. Instead, on each occasion, Ezra's words trivialize the situation.

**9.1.4. The ninety-four books and their distribution (14.37-48).** Herein is described the manner in which Ezra and his five scribes produce ninety-four books during a forty day period (compare the forty day period which Moses spent on Mount Sinai when he received the law from God; Exod 24.18, 34.28; Dt 9.9, 11). After the completion of the ninety-four books, Ezra is commanded,

Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. For in them [the seventy books] is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge. (14.45-47)

And the book ends, "And I did so" (14.48).<sup>12</sup>

The identification of the twenty-four books<sup>13</sup> is not controversial. They doubtless refer to the books of the Hebrew scriptures. Both the worthy and the unworthy are allowed to read them. It is the identification of the seventy books which is not as readily apparent, and which is of great importance for this project.

It needs first to be observed that, whereas the twenty-four books are available to "the

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<sup>12</sup> The original version seems to have closed at 14.48. Nonetheless, except for the Latin, all the versions proceed to relate the events of Ezra's <sup>M</sup>assumption into heaven (14.48-51). This section appears to have been added at a relatively early stage by a redactor who, writing in the third person, wanted to complete the account of Ezra's life on a high note.

<sup>13</sup> The Latin, alone, reads "the first" books, rather than "the twenty-four books." In some christian circles, the Jewish scriptures were seen to number twenty-two rather than twenty-four; combined were Ruth and Judges, Lamentations and Jeremiah (cf. also Josephus, *Apion* 1.8 par 38; contra b. *BB* 14b-15b, wherein the number is twenty four). Perhaps this led to the omission of the number "twenty-four" in the Latin text.

worthy and the unworthy”, the seventy books are revealed only to “the wise among your people”. On occasion it has been argued that the author understood the seventy books as being “kept hidden away in a secret place *until the time appointed*” when they will finally be revealed to all the public.<sup>14</sup> But, although the disclosure of the divine revelations *to the public* is evident in other passages of the apocalyptic corpus,<sup>15</sup> it is not to be found in 4Ez 14, where it is poignantly demonstrated that those who know the divine wisdom are only the very few. That is, the author makes not a *temporal* distinction between the time of Ezra’s private revelation and the time of its public proclamation but rather a *social* distinction between those who are familiar with the books and those who are not.<sup>16</sup> The former are only the very few; just as in 12.37-38 and 14.26, Ezra is not permitted to reveal the secrets of God’s ways to the people collectively but only to the few who are wise. This is an important observation if the seventy books are to be properly identified.

When identifying the seventy books, G.F. Moore suggested that they refer to “the traditional law”, meaning the Jewish oral law contained in the Mishnah.<sup>17</sup> As such, the author is seen to be attributing divine origin and authority to the oral law (contra Sadducean and Samaritan conviction) as well as to the written law, both having been revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (14.5-6). As we have seen, however, the seventy books are described as secret books which are restricted to the circles of the privileged few, a description which does not accord well with the oral law which was “taught as openly as the written Law itself”.<sup>18</sup> Moore’s suggestion, therefore, has not received much support.<sup>19</sup>

A second solution enjoys almost unanimous assent and identifies the seventy books as Jewish apocalyptic literature – in particular, those books which, like 4 Ezra itself, relate the events of the end times. In this interpretation, Ezra is permitted to reveal in seventy books

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<sup>14</sup> Russell, 1964: 114, emphasis ours. Cf. Meade, 1986: 83; Gruenwald, 1973: 72; Collins, 1984b: 21-22.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jub 1.4-7; 1En 82.1; 2En 33.8-11, 35.2, 47.1-6.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 1QS 9.17: The master of the community “shall conceal the teaching of the Law from men of falsehood, but shall impart true knowledge and righteous judgement to those who have chosen the Way”. So also 1QS 11.5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Moore, 1927: 1.8, n. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Russell, 1964: 86.

<sup>19</sup> To our knowledge, Moore is followed only by McCullough, 1975: 206.

the eschatological happenings which Moses was commanded *not* to reveal (14.5-6). That which differentiates the seventy from the twenty-four books, then, is an interest in eschatology; whereas Ezra gave the Torah to the people, he also secretly propagated the mysteries of the end times which are the exclusive property of "the learned, not the general public".<sup>20</sup> In this way, the author is understood to be authenticating the elaborate eschatological speculation evident in the majority of Jewish apocalypses and in the visionary episodes of IV-VI.<sup>21</sup>

But we wonder whether a more precise identification of the seventy books is possible? It must be kept in mind that 4 Ezra was not written to be an exercise in eschatological prediction. The author's quest has been to comprehend the ways of God, and, in this regard, his commitment is ultimately to the understanding of God which Uriel defends. He is not interested in defending some guild of eschatological seers and their literature. Nor is he intent on propagating fanciful descriptions of future events for their own sake. These serve primarily to verify his new beliefs concerning God's ways, human existence and the requirements for salvation. It is the author's message which gives his works its *raison d'être*, and the eschatological trappings serve primarily to animate that message. As C. Rowland suggests:<sup>22</sup>

we should endeavour to investigate *what particular message* the visionary is wanting to communicate to his readers by means of the images which are included in his vision.

That is to say, apart from the author's message, the eschatological framework has little significance. This is the case, at least, for 4 Ezra wherein eschatological descriptions serve as supports for its more fundamental message. It is only when one has in view the central thread which runs throughout the each episode of 4 Ezra (*viz.*, the quest for the proper understanding of God's ways) that the seventy books can be properly identified.

Throughout I-VI, the author has been concerned with the quest for the proper under-

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<sup>20</sup> Knibb, 1979: 278.

<sup>21</sup> This interpretation is very prevalent. Usually the adjective "apocalyptic" is used to describe the character of the seventy books, but in the sense of "eschatological." A list of just a few scholars includes Box, 1912: 304-306; Brandenburger, 1981: 134-5; Mundle, 1929: 248-29; Myers, 1974: 324, 326, 329; Cohen, 1987: 180, 187; Russell, 1964: 87-88; *idem.*, 1987: 108-109; Knibb, 1979: 272, 274; Gunkel, 1900: 401; Oesterley, 1933: 164, 166; Morris, 1971: 69; Brockington, 1961: 25, n. 3.

<sup>22</sup> 1982: 60, emphasis ours.

standing of God's ways, first by entertaining two "competing" perceptions in I-III and then by granting the "victory" to Uriel's view in IV-VI. In this regard, the distinction between the two types of books (the twenty-four and the seventy) plays a part in the larger scheme of this quest. Ezra's complaints of I-III were rooted in his covenantal understanding and were nurtured by his reading of the twenty-four books of the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, every dialogue began with an appeal to God's mercy based on a covenantal rationale. And for the same reason, III includes a developed midrash of Ex<sup>od</sup> 34.6-7 which detailed the merciful and gracious character of God as revealed in the history of his dealings with Israel (7.132-40). Uriel, however, maintained a different understanding of God's ways, and assured Ezra that the events of the end would bring about God's justice. Whereas Ezra, looking back to Israel's past history, understood salvation to be wholly dependent upon the mercy of God, Uriel, looking towards the events of the end times, insisted that salvation is bestowed only upon those who merit salvation by means of works stored up with God. After his resignation to Uriel's position, Ezra was consoled by visions of the end times in IV-VI – visions which the author reworked in order to harmonize them with Uriel's case in I-III.<sup>24</sup> These (reworked) visions serve to assure Ezra that by relinquishing his covenantal understanding he had come to a better understanding of God's ways.<sup>25</sup>

It is this theological development which transpires in the narrative of 4 Ezra, rather than some concern to legitimate an "apocalyptic school", which provides the best context for identifying the 70 books. By means of these 70 books, the author is concerned only to legitimate the theological innovation which he has orchestrated throughout I-VI. Ezra's quest throughout 4 Ezra is best understood as representing the personal quest of the author as he attempted to reconcile the righteousness of God with the disastrous events of 70 C.E. Ezra's solution, then, is the solution of at least one pious Jew who, having come to a new understanding of God's ways, reaffirmed once again his confidence in God. Since the covenantal perception of God did little to solve his dilemma, the author, in the guise of Ezra, replaced it with another view of God's ways. Consequently, he was faced with a new problem, for his new understanding is not evident

<sup>23</sup> Cf. 3.12-19, 22-25, 5.21-30, 5.56-6.6, 6.55-59, 7.102-103, 132-140, 8.15-34.

<sup>24</sup> Rowland, 1982: 168.

<sup>25</sup> Collins, noting Ezra's transformation in IV, states: "Ezra's conversion is now consolidated by two dream visions" in V and VI (1984a: 165).

in the traditional Jewish scriptures. Accordingly, he had little basis in which to give authority to his newly-acquired solution. It is for this reason that the seventy books are introduced into the narrative. Having established his case in I-VI, the author apparently believed (and with good reason) that his new perception of the ways of God is not contained in the pages of the twenty-four books of scripture, although it is confirmed by the events of the end which were revealed in IV-VI. Accordingly, in order to justify his "non-canonical" perspective, he postulated the existence of the seventy other books which God intended only the wise to see; only in them, and not in the Jewish scriptures, can one find wisdom and understanding, for they contain the secrets of God's ways which the eschatological visions have revealed.<sup>26</sup>

By means of the seventy books, the author hoped to legitimate Ezra's conversion-perspective, which was, in fact, his own post-70 understanding of the ways of God. He was not concerned to legitimate apocalyptic literature in general. Instead, he was concerned only to authenticate the eschatological message of his apocalypse in particular.<sup>27</sup> The seventy books are not incorporated into the drama for purposes of literary structure or narrative closure. Their function is determined solely by the need of the author to guard his message against objection, a message which he legitimated through a "secrecy" motif. With the exception of 7.129-30, an "according to the scriptures" type of exegesis is absent from Uriel's words, which voice the author's new convictions. Instead, the author presented his case as being secretly revealed by God. Accordingly, the need for scriptural authentication is bypassed, and a prophecy-fulfillment schematization is not employed.<sup>28</sup>

For the author of 4 Ezra, as for most innovators who seek to maintain their place within

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Schmithals, 1975a: 207. See Lombard's comments on the apocalyptic innovation and scripture (1981: 22).

<sup>27</sup> We find it significant that in 1982 Rowland cited the seventy books as representing "apocalyptic works" (1982: 19), whereas in 1988 he cited them to be "his [Ezra's] revelations" (1988: 183). It is this kind of refinement which we are arguing for here, one which allows for much greater precision.

<sup>28</sup> As we saw earlier, Uriel's appeal to Moses and the prophets in 7.129-30 is unique, even exceptional, to his argument. His attempt at scriptural authentication was not convincing to Ezra, who immediately counters Uriel's appeal to scripture with an appeal of his own in 7.132-40, which expounds the characterization of God in Exod 34.6-7. Never again does the author attempt to legitimate Uriel's position from scripture, and, in fact, as 14.45-47 would suggest, he abandons the hope of scriptural support altogether.



a religious tradition, the problem to be solved is one of continuity. How is it that the God who is unveiled in 4 Ezra appears so differently from the way he has revealed himself in Israel's history and sacred books? This is all the more pressing since what the author considered to be the authoritative understanding of God's ways was not considered as such by his fellow Jews – the “worthy and the unworthy”, “all the people”. Most of them worshipped the one whom they knew from their sacred books and who worked for their benefit throughout the ages. It is this two-fold problem which the author addresses in 14.37-48. Although he had only recently discovered for himself the solution to his quest for understanding, the author contended that it was secretly revealed long ago to Moses and Ezra. This allowed his message the historical underpinning which it needed in order to gain a sense of continuity with Israel's past. And because this ancient revelation was made to Moses and Ezra *in secret*, so the vast majority of Israel were unaware of it. Although they did not share his perception, this caused the author no <sup>A</sup> angst; it was to be expected, in fact, since God intended all along for the seventy books to be revealed only to the few.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the author defended (1) the *antiquity* of his message despite its relatively recent appearance, and (2) the *validity* of his message despite its minority position.<sup>30</sup> Here, then, we see in bold relief how “the apocalyptic framework could offer the basis for radical steps in religion”.<sup>31</sup>

Now that the function of the seventy books has been recognized, we may inquire more specifically about the identity of the books themselves. Is the author making mention of actual books? What significance is there to the number “seventy”? How are we to understand the seventy books in the light of the author's motivation for mentioning them? We begin investigating these matters by considering the point of the number “seventy”. G.H. Box has suggested that

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<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, we have reservations about Nickelsburg's statement: “‘Ezra’ does not believe that possession of this revealed esoteric wisdom creates an exclusive community of the saved” (1985: 81). The author thinks that he possesses the saving knowledge which the rest of the people do not have, and is aware that this sets him (and his community?) apart from the others. Whether there is an “evangelistic” purpose to this text is itself a problematic issue.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Rowland: “the apocalyptic framework signifies a point of view which would otherwise be looked on with some suspicion by the majority... In addition, the emphasis on the revelatory dimension allows those novel aspects of the teaching of the apocalypse to receive that authority which other literary forms would not have given them” (1982: 122, 134).

<sup>31</sup> Rowland, 1988: 182. Rowland emphasizes, however, that the general tendency of apocalyptic writers is to confirm the authority of scriptural revelation while interpreting it according to a particular social setting.

the number “doubtless has a symbolic significance, denoting what is large and comprehensive”,<sup>32</sup> meaning that the author has a sizeable collection of Jewish apocalypses in mind. But as we have seen, such a concern was not held by the author. Better, we think, is Russell’s suggestion that a more subtle symbolism lies behind the number seventy. He notes that the numerical value of the letters of the Hebrew word for “secret” (  $\text{סֵדֶר}$  ) add up to seventy (  $\text{ס} = 60$ ,  $\text{ד} = 6$ ,  $\text{ר} = 4$  ).<sup>33</sup> This is a tantalizing suggestion, especially since, as scholars agree, 4 Ezra was originally composed in Hebrew, and since numerical symbolism played a significant role in apocalyptic literature. If Russell’s suggestion bears any weight, the number “seventy” is a numerical code describing the *character* of the books themselves (that is, they are secret books) or the *contents* of the books. Probably, in fact, both aspects should be included; the secret, esoteric books contain the secrets of the Most High.

Russell’s suggestion is wholly reasonable and highlights the symbolic value of the adjective “seventy”. That is, the extra-“canonical” books are identified not by quantity but by quality. There is little reason to think that the author actually knew of seventy books which he recognized as authoritative beyond those of Jewish scripture. Instead, he knew of *an understanding of God* which went beyond that of the twenty-four books of scripture, an understanding which he considered to be secret. We need not look any further than the recognition of the author’s needs of legitimation to explain the identity of the seventy books. Since the covenantal understanding of God’s ways is substantiated by the twenty-four books, the author needed to substantiate his own secret understanding of God by postulating the existence of other authoritative books. To arrive at a complementary number to twenty-four, the author simply translated the *quality* of his new understanding (*viz.*, it is secret) into a numerical value (= seventy). The seventy books, therefore, are nothing other than a symbol of his perspective in numerical form. That is to say, *the seventy books are a numeric metaphor*. They need not be identified with any particular books, but are hypothetical books, necessary only to substantiate the author’s particular message.

We have tried to argue, herein, that the seventy books represent the author’s attempt to legitimate his innovative understanding of God. His audience were to understand them to contain

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<sup>32</sup> 1912: 305.

<sup>33</sup> Russell, 1964: 114; *idem.*, 1987: 109-110.

the secret of God's ways which Ezra has learned throughout I-VI and which are worthy only of the wise. These extra-scriptural books allow his message a revelational base which it otherwise lacks, and they infuse his case with an authoritative character. Similar techniques are employed elsewhere in Jewish literature,<sup>34</sup> especially in the apocalypses, wherein there is frequent mention of special books which contain divine truths specially mediated to the apocalyptic seer.<sup>35</sup> Often this phenomenon allows an author to authenticate his own idiosyncratic views which he would otherwise have trouble legitimating. Thus, for example, the book of Jubilees (whether or not one considers it an apocalyptic work) professes to be the book written by Moses containing the things which God showed him on Mount Sinai concerning "what (was) in the beginning and what will occur (in the future)" God commanded him to "write it in a book" (1.4-7, 26). The book itself lies open to the reader in the pages of Jubilees. In it, several peculiarities of the author are readily apparent. For instance, the author (1) presents the case that one can maintain the covenant only by following a solar rather than a lunar calendar (6.32-38, 50.1-13; cf. 1.14, 4.17-18, 23.19), (2) denounces Jewish intermarriage with other nations (30.7-23), and (3) argues that the patriarchs themselves kept the practices which seem to have arisen only later in Jewish history (7.3-5, 15.1-2, 16.20-31, 22.1-5, 32.4-9, 34.12-20) even to the point that they followed the solar calendar (cf. 6.17-20). Other idiosyncrasies are evident in Jubilees, but these are some primary concerns of the author. They need not detain us except to note that the biblical Torah ("the book of the first law", 6.22) includes very little of these concerns. Evidently, our author thought that they should be included or emphasized and he sought to reconcile this by writing a second book of the law. In this regard, I. Gruenwald writes that the author of Jubilees

wants to convince his readers of the existence of two parallel versions of the biblical story... the one given exoterically to the whole of the People of Israel and the other given esoterically to the initiate alone.<sup>36</sup>

Calendrical concerns are also evident in the Book of Heavenly Luminaries (1En 72-82) which describes Enoch's vision of the movement of the heavenly bodies. After perusing all this,

<sup>34</sup> See esp. Nickelsburg, 1985.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Jub 1.4-7, 26, 4.17, 32.21-26, 45.15; Dan 8.26, 12.4, 9; 1En 82.1, 107.3; 2En 22.10-23.6, 33.8-11, 35.2, 47.1-6, 48.6-8, 54.1. See Hengel's comments, 1974: 1.243.

<sup>36</sup> Gruenwald, 1980: 23. The same technique noted by Gruenwald is evident in the long version (E and T) of Orphica, wherein the author speaks of the "double law". Lafargue considers this to refer to the "two levels of meaning (exoteric/esoteric) in Scripture" (1985: 800).

Enoch gives to his son Methuselah “the book concerning all these things” (82.1) which grants wisdom and righteousness (82.2-4), and which contains the secret that the “year is completed in three hundred and sixty-four days” (82.6). Here again is a secret book which reveals to the wise and righteous the secret that only the solar calendar is proper to regulate one’s practices – a fact which the author would no doubt have enjoyed finding in the Jewish scriptures themselves, but, since such was not the case, another book of divine revelation was necessary.<sup>37</sup>

These techniques evident in Jubilees and 1 Enoch barely differ from that in 4Ez 14, and the motivation is precisely the same – to authenticate firmly-held convictions which could not be substantiated from scripture by postulating the existence of “extra-canonical” books, themselves being divinely inspired and approved. Once again, then, the author does not intend to legitimate apocalyptic literature in general, or eschatological descriptions of the end times *per se*, but hopes to authenticate the peculiar message of his apocalyptic book in particular.

It is significant to compare briefly the characterization of the seventy books in 4Ez 14.47 with the characterization of the law in Deut 4.6. In commanding the people to observe the law of God, Moses says:

for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’

In 4Ez 14, however, God reveals to Ezra that the twenty-four books are available to the worthy and the unworthy, while the seventy are worthy only of the wise, for in them (and *not* in the twenty-four books<sup>38</sup>) is “the spirit of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge”.<sup>39</sup> Here again, the author shows his dissatisfaction with his former comprehension of God which was rooted in the public law. Despite Moses’ public declaration of Deut 4.6, the author is convinced that only the wisdom of the secret seventy books (which are representative

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Rowland, 1988: 181.

<sup>38</sup> Nickelsburg (1985: 81-82) and Silbermann (1974: 196) mistakenly identify the *twenty four* books as containing the spirit of understanding. Correct in this matter are Collins, 1984a: 168; Luck, 1976.

<sup>39</sup> One may compare, in this regard, the manner in which Revelation plays on the command of Deut 4.2, “You shall not add to the word which I shall command you, nor take from it.” John cites this in Rev 22.18-19 while making reference not to the Mosaic law but to his own apocalypse. In this way, he considers his apocalyptic revelations to equal, at least, if not exceed, the Mosaic revelation.

of Ezra's new understanding) makes sense of human experience in the light of the tragic events of 70 C.E.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, to label episode VII as "Ezra's account of his commission by God to restore *the Scriptures*"<sup>41</sup> is to miss the point and function of this episode completely.

One qualification remains to be made. In one sense, the author sets the public law and the private law in a hierarchical relationship, in which the latter supersedes the former in the discernment of the will of God. This is obvious from the preceding paragraphs. In another sense, however, the author cannot bring himself to do away with the public law. Although his mention of the twenty-four books being written first may simply be an indicator of the temporal distance between the revelation of the Mosaic law and the revelation of the eschatological mysteries, it may also indicate the author's desire to affirm the centrality of the Mosaic law. In that case, the relationship between the twenty-four and the seventy books would appear to be modeled on that of text and interpretation; the interpretation and application of the Mosaic law is accurate only when it is understood in the manner of the seventy books – that is, only when it is seen to demand a rigid individualism of work-righteousness. The public law may be a final law, but it is not complete in itself.<sup>42</sup> It needs the commentary of the private law – the interpretive seventy books, the symbol of its individualistic key.<sup>43</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that the distinction between the twenty-four books, which are for the worthy and unworthy, and the seventy books, which are exclusively for the wise, plays an essential part in the author's project in that it represents his attempt to legitimate Ezra's conversion-perspective, which he himself maintains. His claim is that the seventy books, which give wisdom and understanding of God's ways to the few, contain the individualistic key which unlocks the mysterious ways of the God who is represented (although inadequately) in the twenty-four books. When the seventy books are identified in this way, the theme which provides the

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<sup>40</sup> The distance from the author's position to a gnostic view of knowledge is not very great. Cf. Murdoch, 1967: 184; Lombard, 1981: 37. The primary difference is that the knowledge of divine mysteries is redemptive in itself in many types of gnosticism, whereas it is a precursor to proper practice in apocalypticism. See further Rowland, 1988: 182-83.

<sup>41</sup> Cook, 1988: 90, emphasis ours.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Rowland, 1988: 183; Russell, 1987: 102-103.

<sup>43</sup> Stone characterizes apocalypticists as considering themselves as providers of "the real, inner meaning of scriptural revelation" (1984: 431). Lebram talks of Ezra writing a "new Torah" which consists of ninety-four books, the seventy interpreting the twenty-four (1983: 204). Cf. Alexander's comments on Jubilees and its relation to scripture (1988: 100).

internal momentum and cohesion throughout I-VI (*viz.*, the quest for the understanding of God's ways) maintains its centrality even in VII.<sup>44</sup>

## 9.2. Summary of Episode VII

In our estimation, episode VII has been seriously neglected or misunderstood in 4 Ezra scholarship. The general tendency is to regard it as secondary to the central concerns of the book. One of the most recent studies of 4 Ezra concludes, for example, stating that episode VII "adds little to the argument and is considered an epilogue".<sup>45</sup> Similarly, A.L. Thompson barely mentions this episode in his analysis of the "Structure of IV Ezra as the Key to the Author's Argument", a section of ninety-nine pages, of which two are dedicated to episode VII.<sup>46</sup> In fact, according to the index of his book, nowhere in nearly four hundred pages does Thompson make reference to 4Ez 14.37-48! Certainly such a scenario demonstrates the weakness of the general approach to the text, which we have sought to redress in this project.

Without an awareness of the conversion theme which runs throughout I-VI, the point of VII can easily be missed. This episode contains the author's attempt to substantiate his new perception of God's ways. He seems conscious of the fact that it is not widely known or accepted by others of his day, but takes account of this by postulating that God forbade the true understanding of his ways to be revealed to the people. As such, the fact that he holds a minority view actually reaffirms the validity of that view. In conjunction with this, he then legitimates his perception with regard to the scriptures by distinguishing between the twenty-four books of Jewish scripture known by all the people and the seventy books which reveal the secret ways of God to the few who are wise. As such, VII does not function as "einen ästhetisch gefälligen Abschluss",<sup>47</sup> nor as a defense of apocalyptic literature, nor can it be considered an appendix which, having been added at a later date, dislodges the original author's argument altogether.<sup>48</sup> In fact, this episode is fundamental to the whole of the book in that it guards the

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<sup>44</sup> Or, as Brandenburger states: "Der Verfasser von visio 1-6 und 7 ist identisch" (1981: 136). Cf. Münchow, 1981: 77.

<sup>45</sup> Willet, 1989: 122.

<sup>46</sup> See his outline, 1977: xiv.

<sup>47</sup> Gunkel, 1900: 348.

<sup>48</sup> Torrey, 1945: 118-19. Cf. Sanders, 1977: 417-18.

author's case where it is most susceptible, certifying it with a divine seal of approval.

## Chapter 10

## Conclusions to 4 Ezra

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In the course of researching this project, we have often wondered whether we were reading the same text as other interpreters. This is true on three points. Consider first the following statement, quoted at length from J.H. le Roux.<sup>1</sup>

From IV Ezra, . . . it is clear that the final decision lies with God. It is the merciful and righteous God who has the last word. Although IV Ezra mentions the dealings of God with people like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob etc. their righteousness is never the sole reason for God's intervention in their lives. Not their piety and good works but the grace of God is the most important thing. More emphasis is laid on God's love and election than on man's conduct. It is God's great love which causes Him to make a covenant with Abraham in the midst of a wicked generation. Future salvation can only be expected from God and one must rely on His grace. Certainly there are righteous men who will inherit the future glory because of their good works, but they form the minority. God is the only One who can save all other men.

The problem with this statement is that it is prefaced by saying that this is a characterization of "IV Ezra", thereby indicating the *text* rather than the central *character* within the narrative, who is the "Ezra of IV Ezra". One suspects that what le Roux is referring to, however, is not the text but the character Ezra, for this quotation is most applicable to the words of Ezra in I-III, while failing to be a description of the point of the text of IV Ezra.

If this be the case, there follows a resulting complication. That is, it must always be clear *which* Ezra of IV Ezra is being discussed: the Ezra of I-III or of IV-VII? This is of primary importance since the narrative is nothing other than a conversion story.<sup>2</sup> In I-III, two perspectives jostle each other for supremacy – Ezra maintains that salvation can only be by the grace of God, whether on behalf of his people (I-III) or all humanity (III), while Uriel maintains that God has done enough in giving the law, and that the responsibility now lies with the individual to overcome the common fate of humanity. In the final episodes, Ezra, having accepted Uriel's case, receives confirmation of his new perspective through the eschatological visions, which themselves

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<sup>1</sup> 1981: 51.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Stone, 1981. Stone defines conversion as "the radical, sudden experience of change that causes the shift of perception" (1981: 204 n. 25). Cf. Collins, 1984a: 165, 168.



conform to Uriel's descriptions of God's ways. What Ezra has learned about God's ways in the present is not left dangling, without being tied down in a new vision of the future. To have a new awareness of the demands of God for the present requires a new awareness of the ways of God in the future. The point, of course, is that the Ezra of 4 Ezra is transformed as the narrative develops.

The second point at which we express our puzzlement at the conclusions of some picks up from this point. The text demonstrates how, as a result of his conversion, Ezra comes to a new understanding of God's relationship with Israel. Nonetheless, commentators continue to state, as does M.E. Stone for instance, that Ezra moves from despair in I-III to the comforting assurance in IV-VII that Israel will be vindicated at the end – this assurance being the outcome of “traditional explanations” of God's relationship with Israel.<sup>3</sup> So also, T.W. Willet argues that the final visions offer the assurance “that God's promises to Israel would be fulfilled”.<sup>4</sup> Similarly C. Münchow states that the author of 4 Ezra is concerned “die bezweifelte Liebe Gottes zu seinem Volk zu behaupten”.<sup>5</sup> Assertions such as these can be multiplied at length. But the question must be pressed: *Who is meant by Israel?* In II, Uriel affirms that God loves Israel (5.33) and that he has an eschatological blessing for his people (5.40). Following from Ezra's concern for the nation Israel, it might initially appear that Uriel too has this ethnic group in mind. As the dialogue progresses, however, eschatological salvation is described by Uriel as being for “those who remain” (6.25) – that is, for those who have deposited treasures of faithfulness with God (6.5). In III, Uriel clarifies what he means, stating that the next age belongs to the very few (Jews) who are eligible for salvation not by their ethnic membership or covenant status but by their treasures of works which demonstrate their perfect faithfulness to the law without sin. This, it must be noted, is a highly redefined sense of “Israel”; if the term is meaningful for

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<sup>3</sup> Stone, 1987: 215, cf. 219.

<sup>4</sup> Willet, 1989: 75.

<sup>5</sup> 1981: 95. Cf. Mundle, 1929: 235-49. According to Mundle, the author considered salvation to be meted out along nationalistic lines. The gentiles are shown to be “die Frevler und Feinde Gottes. . . Sie sind gemeint, wenn von den Sündern die Rede ist, die die Frommen zertreten, das Gesetz verschmäh, die Gottesfürchtigen ghasst haben, . . . die in den Augen Gottes nichts gelten. . . In Wahrheit bleibt die pharisäische Unterscheidung von Frommen und Gottlosen, die mit derjenigen von gesetzestreuen Juden und gesetzesverachtenden Heiden im ganzen zusammenfällt, auch für den Verfasser unserer Apokalypse zu Recht bestehen”.

Uriel, it is as an eschatological concept, a collective title of those few who are saved wholly apart from national status. Ethnic considerations have less to do with the definition of "Israel" than does the eschatological boundary. The vision of V confirms this (12.34). Of course, in VI the eschatological Israel is shown to be an innumerable multitude. The few appear together with an entity thus far unmentioned in 4 Ezra – the ten tribes who were led away early in the people's history. Together, these two groups form a new, twelve-tribe conglomerate. Nonetheless, this glorious depiction of a grand eschatological Israel is a somewhat artificial construct which offers little assurance to the ethnic people who are seeking God's mercy. The traditional expectation of God's vindication of Israel has been so radically transformed as to allow no comfort for a people convinced that *divine grace* works in *their* favour.<sup>6</sup> The author's presentation in VI represents less a return to traditional beliefs than theological positioning wherein unconventional convictions are clothed in acceptable garb. To claim, then, that the author is assured of "God's enduring purpose of covenantal election and his attendant mercy" upon ethnic Israel<sup>7</sup> is to miss the whole purpose of 4 Ezra.

A third point at which we must acknowledge dissatisfaction with much in 4 Ezra scholarship is the way in which the author's position is evaluated in terms of the character of Early Judaism and its view of the law. In contrast to the scholarly estimates concerning the certainty of God's eschatological salvation of the ethnic people Israel, other estimates are just as frequent concerning the legalistic posture of the author as the exemplar of the Judaism of his day. So, in 1929, G.R.S. Mead, recognizing Ezra's constant plea for divine mercy, commented:

Reading it [4 Ezra] to-day, our sympathies are, must be, with that large-hearted and gallant old Jew of eighteen centuries or more ago. We feel with him, think with him, cheer him on; and at the end profoundly regret that *he found himself compelled to bow down his brave spirit under the weight of tradition.*<sup>8</sup>

In the same year that E.P. Sanders published his study on Paul and Early Judaism, A.L. Thompson argued as Mead had done fifty years earlier:

through the mouth of Ezra, the author pleads for some means of saving the multitude of sinners. God's righteousness would really be established if he would show mercy to those with no store of good works (8:36). Though he ar-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Violet, 1924: xl.

<sup>7</sup> Knowles, 1989: 266.

<sup>8</sup> Mead, 1929: 9-10, emphasis ours. Cf. the estimate of Hughes, cited above, p. 4.

gues his case with great earnestness and pathos, the author apparently realizes that his hopes must be disappointed, and *the closing episodes represent his acceptance of the traditional basis of salvation, namely, the merit and obedience of the individual.*<sup>9</sup>

Similarly we hear from M. Knibb that the author

*in common with other Jews of his day* believed that by the strict observance of the law it was possible for an individual to acquire, as it were, a credit balance of good works and to earn thereby the reward in the world to come of life.<sup>10</sup>

Such characterizations of Early Judaism, however, go contrary to the characterization given within the text itself, wherein “all the people” are confused by the absence of divine mercy on their behalf and seek mercy once again to restore and save them (5.16-18, 12.40-45). Similarly, the reason why Ezra cannot accept Uriel’s position throughout I-III is that it goes against the grain of the traditional understanding of God which is rooted in the scriptural record of God’s merciful dealings with Israel in covenant relationship. If Ezra comes eventually to another understanding of God’s ways, it is not because he has “bowed down his brave spirit under the weight of tradition”, but because he found tradition itself to be inadequate.

The author, then, is not ultimately a frustrated conservative but a reluctant liberal (radical?) who is willing to forsake tradition where it fails to meet experience. The author of 4 Ezra has advanced a new understanding concerning the character of Jewish existence without the temple; salvation is not a national privilege but an individual responsibility worked out with great effort by works of merit. Divine grace is, for all purposes, absent in his scheme, except as an eschatological reflex to those who have saved themselves anyway by their works.<sup>11</sup> He still maintains such traditional concepts as “law” and “Israel” in his new pattern of religion, but redefines them in a way which gives them radicalized import. (See “Thesis Conclusions”, where the author’s handling of these concepts is compared with that of Paul in Rom 1-11.) In the eyes of the author, ethnocentric covenantalism could not make sense out of the destruction of Jerusalem. He found no way to maintain his “intellectual integrity” and to account for that definitive event within an ethnocentric perspective. Thus, he appropriated a new view which can

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<sup>9</sup> Thompson, 1977: 318, emphasis ours.

<sup>10</sup> Knibb, 1979: 182, emphasis ours.

<sup>11</sup> Collins: The author “allows little if any place for atonement or divine mercy” (1984a: 169).

make sense of that momentous event while retaining the trappings of the old view at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

What we see in I-III, therefore, are, first and foremost, the dialogues of the author with himself. This is not to say, however, that Ezra and Uriel represent two convictions sustained by the author simultaneously (*contra* Gunkel). Instead, they embody the author's case at two distinct stages in the process of his conceptual development; in the encounter between Uriel and Ezra, we overhear the author's own post-conversion self in dialogue with his pre-conversion self.<sup>13</sup> The author knows the point of view of ethnocentric covenantalism all too well, and gives it a voice of its own before abandoning it for another view. This is not to say, however, that ethnocentric covenantalism has no validity. The author seems all too aware that it does. This would explain why Ezra's conversion is nowhere portrayed; his change is due not to argumentative persuasion (I-III) but (evidently) to the force of the eschatological perspective. For this reason, his conversion takes place outside the context of the dialogue and in reflective solitude, off-stage. The author seems to have no argument to disqualify Ezra's initial position; he is conscious "of the strength of the arguments which he places in Ezra's mouth".<sup>14</sup> But because the author found that he could not square the arguments mouthed by Ezra with his own experience, he abandoned them altogether and appropriated another understanding, one in which he found the consolation for which he longed (or so IV-VI would have us believe). This new understanding is discovered only by the privileged few, as God intended it. The author never defended God's decision to work in this way but simply affirmed that God is just.

With this portrait in mind, the obvious question is: Why did the author choose Ezra, one of the great figures of Israel's covenantal history, as his pseudonym? The answer can be best illustrated by the encounter scenes wherein Ezra meets with the people of Israel. G.B. Sayler correctly notes that the "encounters between Ezra and his people are mentioned only rarely in

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<sup>12</sup> It is not too far off, then, to say that traditional characterization of the degeneration of Judaism from a covenantal to a legalistic religion is played out within the single text of 4 Ezra; if that traditional scheme misses the mark as a description of the religious history of the Jews, it comes close to the mark as a description of the religious history of at least one Jew of the first century CE.

<sup>13</sup> Collins: "It is probable that the story of Ezra represents the author's own spiritual journey" (1984a: 168). Cf. esp. Münchow, 1981: 77.

<sup>14</sup> Hayman, 1975: 53.

analyses of 4 Ezra".<sup>15</sup> She comments that "none of the three encounters is an essential component in the development of the book; if they were omitted, their absence would hardly be noticed".<sup>16</sup> In our view, however, this second estimation misses the point of what is a most telling rhetorical feature in 4 Ezra. The encounters are not extraneous and superficial to the main body. The author places Ezra in that encounter situation at various points in his work in order to highlight Ezra's progression in the process of his conversion – from the ambassador of the national interest to the individualistic legalist – and to authenticate his case with regard to historical anomalies.

The first encounter appears at the end of I. It serves to inform the reader that Ezra has undertaken his task in the interests of the people who feel betrayed by their God and who seek his covenant mercy. The people's hope for restoration lay with Ezra's appeals and, as dialogue II especially depicts, he is well suited for this role. His characterization here is not far from that of the biblical texts.

The second encounter takes place after V, wherein the author sets up a curious situation for Ezra. No longer is Ezra the people's spokesperson; this Ezra is not the figure known from the pages of scripture, for he has learned the truth which disqualifies the people's concerns altogether. And yet, how does Ezra appear to the people when they, "all the people", approach him at the end of V? Since God has instructed him not to reveal his new understanding to the people but only to the wise, so he does as he was commissioned to do and fails to reveal the truth of God's ways to them. His only recourse is to assure the people that God has not forsaken them. This is what *the people* hear, and it is in full accord with the scriptural presentation of Ezra. *The reader*, however, knows the inside story and discerns the irony of the situation; after having learned the truth, Ezra does not disrupt the people's perspective, for this is not his task. Instead, he is to give *to the wise* the knowledge of what is required for salvation, a knowledge which is kept from the majority of the people. Consequently, his words to the people prove to be superficial. By means of this "encounter motif", therefore, the author illustrates that appearances are deceiving without the proper vantage point, which the people do not have and which is not contained even in the scriptural records. (This promotes ~~the~~ his peculiar estimate of scripture in 14.37-48.)

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<sup>15</sup> 1984: 133 n. 28.

<sup>16</sup> 1984: 133.

The third and final encounter occurs in VII. Ezra is told by God to write in books what is revealed to him, but is instructed to reveal only some things to the people, while the wise are eligible to receive the full account. Immediately after this command, Ezra gathers the people to him, thereby paralleling the situation at the end of V. Saylor states that Ezra's speech to the people in VII "bears little, if any, relationship to the revelations he has received throughout the book".<sup>17</sup> It is probably better to say, however, that the speech is (intentionally) ambiguous in its meaning. What Ezra proclaims can be understood in various ways, depending on one's prior perceptions. He credits Israel's desperate situation to the people's disobedience of the law, and urges them to discipline themselves in the ways of the law in order to be kept alive and obtain mercy after death. This, of course, bears striking resemblance to the prophetic voice and to traditional exhortations of Judaism. It also, of course, is the core of Ezra's new perspective. Thus, in its ambiguity, it feeds both the people's ethnocentrism and Ezra's individualistic legalism. While he points to the answer he has discovered (*viz.*, adherence to the law), he never sinks that answer into the system of thought which he has learned from Uriel. Instead, he allows the people to remain in their ignorance and does not supplant their covenantal self-perception. Can he be blamed for this? No, for he is under orders from God himself, whose ways are just.

This "encounter motif", then, is an early exercise in hermeneutics and epistemology, motivated by a concern to legitimate innovation in the face of historical appearances. Whereas the official Jewish history books portray Ezra – the second Moses, the founder of the Great Assembly of scribes and interpreters – in one light, the author presents a different picture of Ezra, but one which incorporates the scriptural account while *reinterpreting* the historical significance of one of Israel's great heroes.<sup>18</sup> (A "Christian" revaluing of Ezra is evidenced in QuesEzra A.32-33.) The author does not attempt to deny the covenantal *appearances* of Israel's history. His case is more subtle. In the figure of Ezra, the author has isolated a post-destruction figure of great significance in the history of Israel and of the law, but he demonstrates that behind the depiction of Ezra in the official history books of scripture lies a motivation not explained in scripture:

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<sup>17</sup> 1984: 133. Cf. Hayman, 1975: 47; Brandenburger, 1981: 65, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Herford wonders whether the author wanted "to connect the apparent breakdown of the religion of the Torah with the man who was mainly responsible for that form of religion" (1933: 180, note).

Ezra's actions were propelled not by a vibrant covenantalism but by a stringent legalism. If the people fail to see this, such is to be expected.

A similar authenticating technique is employed by the author of Mark's gospel in Mk 4.10-12. There Jesus is said to have spoken parables to all, but to have explained them to only a few who have "been given the secret of the kingdom of God"; the rest hear but do not understand "lest they might turn and be forgiven".<sup>19</sup> Whether or not this is a historical account, as a literary-redactional technique it reinforces an understanding of an historical person which is not shared by "those outside". It authenticates what was not apparent to others by virtue of the fact that those others were not privy to vital information. This distinction between public proclamation and private explanation feeds the gospel's "messianic secret" motif.<sup>20</sup> A similar motivation and technique is evident in the "encounter motif" of 4 Ezra, promoting a "soteriological secret" motif. If the reader identified with Phaltiel and the people in I, by V and VII he is to distinguish himself from them, identifying instead with Ezra and the few who understand the true ways of God, which are not evident to the majority.

From the text of 4 Ezra, then, we can recognize the author to be a pious and sensitive Jew so disturbed by the events of 70 CE that his confidence in God's righteousness was fundamentally shaken. Instead of abandoning his loyalty to God, however, he arrived at a new understanding which enabled him to reaffirm once again his confidence in God. In the process, however, his beliefs took on a radical character, following on from his denial of divine grace in the present. In a very real way, then, while refusing to abandon the God of the law and of Israel, the author has had to abandon his belief in the primary quality which distinguished that God in his relationship with Israel, as presented in scripture: the efficacy of God's grace. Consequently, he focused his expectations concerning eschatological salvation upon the works performed by the individual in this age.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Isa 6.9-10. For the influence of Isa 6 in Early Jewish and Christian self-definition, see Evans, 1989, where, however, the phenomenon in 4 Ezra goes unmentioned.

<sup>20</sup> See, in this regard, F. Watson, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Much work remains to be done in analysis of this text. Three avenues especially will be mentioned here. First, the ground is fallow for a literary-critical approach to 4 Ezra; the results of such a project would, we think, prove to be fascinating. Second, a sociological description of the author, his community and the purpose of this book in relation to the community's self-definition is necessary. This would prove to be a difficult task, by reason of the fact that social indicators

Throughout Part II, we have seen how the author of 4 Ezra reacted to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE – a “crisis event” which jolted his traditional understanding of God’s ways and caused him to transform his perspective in its wake. In Part III, which follows, our interests turn to the other Jew of the first century CE who, according to Sanders, falls “outside” the common covenantal pattern of Early Judaism and whose perspective was also radically transformed as a result of a “crisis event” (*viz.*, the revelation of Jesus Christ): Paul.

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within the text are not readily evident. Despite recent attempts (cf. Stone, 1987: 216; Gray, 1976; Kolenkow, 1982; Mueller, 1981), this area still remains unclear. Third, a comparison of the author’s position with some gnostic tendencies and ideologies would help to demonstrate, we think, the overlap of Jewish apocalypticism and gnosticism already in the late first century CE, while highlighting at the same time some of their fundamental differences.



PART III: ROMANS 1-11

## Chapter 11:

### Introduction to Romans 1-11

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#### 11.1. Introduction to Romans 1-11

In his classic work of 1980, J.C. Beker demonstrated decisively the “contingent” nature of Paul’s letters. Beker argued that a coherent “apocalyptic” perspective gives substance to what are shown to be situation-bound arguments within Paul’s letters. This dynamic between “coherence” and “contingency” is fundamental to many issues concerning Paul and his letters, and in one regard this is especially true: as Beker has shown, the contingent expressions of Paul’s gospel do not always dovetail into one nicely-wrapped package for the benefit of scholars and believers two millennia removed; instead, they are composed with specific situations in mind, and their content is determined by Paul’s view of those situations as he attempted to address them.<sup>1</sup>

All this is pertinent for our project in that, since only one Pauline text is to be examined below (and that only in part), whatever transpires from that examination must be recognized not as a comprehensive treatment of Paul’s view on any matter, such as “Paul and the Law”; such is not our intention. We are interested only in analysing one of Paul’s contingent arguments in order to compare it with the case of the author of 4 Ezra. We have no doubt that were another Pauline text chosen for evaluation, the results of the comparison would be somewhat different, owing to the different situation in which Paul found himself and his audience at the time of writing.

The text chosen for this analysis in Part III is Romans 1.18-11.36, which provides many points for comparison. Much ink has been spent on determining how one or another situation may have determined the content and argument of this letter. Is it Paul’s own situation<sup>2</sup> – *viz.*, the events which confronted him in Corinth and Galatia, or his approaching visit to the

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<sup>1</sup> 1980: 23-131.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., Bornkamm, 1977; Jervell, 1977.

Jerusalem church – or the situation of the Roman christian communities<sup>3</sup> which motivates Paul's presentation? Or is this a false juxtaposition altogether, with the primary motivation for the letter arising instead out of the interface between the two?<sup>4</sup> A few words should be said in this regard before beginning a study of the text.

First, a fairly consistent picture emerges from other of his letters concerning Paul's situation: Paul was a Jew who boasted of his Jewish heritage (Phil 3.5), who had persecuted some early believers (Phil 3.6), who encountered the risen Messiah (Gal 1.15-16), who involved himself in proclaiming the message of the crucified and exalted Messiah, and who undertook at some point in his career a controversial mission to the gentiles by preaching that salvation was available to them on the sole basis of their faith in Christ (cf. Galatians). For whatever reason, his mission was suspect by many believers and proved often to be a point of contention within the early christian movement, making for some tension between various groups (cf. Gal 1-2), presumably between Jewish and gentile believers especially (although such distinctions cannot be drawn too rigidly). Moreover, Paul hoped to collect offerings from the communities which he had established in order to present them to the christian communities in Jerusalem (1Cor 16.1-4; Gal 2.10?). His interest in this collection seems motivated not solely by a desire to make a display of solidarity among the christian communities which were separated by distance, practice and belief; other interests may well have contributed to his interest in this regard, for if the Jerusalem congregations would accept the collection as a symbol of gentile-christian charity and of christian unity, such a scenario would no doubt help to legitimate Paul's position and mission within the movement itself. It is with this controversial reputation, this concern for the spread of his gospel, this desire for christian unity, and this need for acceptance and legitimation that Paul writes to the christian communities in Rome, which he had never visited previously.

Secondly, we must inquire as to the situation of the Roman communities. It is telling that scholars usually concentrate their investigations of this matter in the early verses of Romans 1 or (especially) in the latter chapters of Romans (Rom 12-16); if any passages within Paul's letter give us a glimpse of what is happening in the Roman congregations, they would seem

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<sup>3</sup> Cf., e.g., Minear, 1971; Wiefel, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Wedderburn, 1988.

primarily to be those passages which surround Rom 1.18-11.36.<sup>5</sup> What Paul says in Rom 1.18-11.36 (a section marked by a certain degree of "Selbständigkeit"<sup>6</sup>) appears to be less concerned with the situation of the Roman communities than with establishing a theological rationale for Paul's provocative mission; both the nature of the chapters themselves (*viz.*, the virtual absence of situational indicators) and Paul's introduction to the "thesis" of 1.16-17 ("I am not ashamed of the [read: "my"] gospel") suggest that Paul's agenda herein is primarily to explicate his gospel in order to authenticate it in preparation for his visit to the Roman communities.<sup>7</sup> These chapters arise primarily out of Paul's reflections on his own situation within the purposes of God; his concern is seemingly to legitimate his perception of God's ways by spelling out the theological grounds for his controversial mission. Paul evidently expected some believers in Rome to be wary of his mission, just as many others seem to have been elsewhere. The latter chapters of Romans demonstrate why Paul took precautions to allay the suspicions of the *Roman* communities in particular by sending them his theological legitimation; he wanted to seek their support and acceptance in order to establish a geographical springboard towards his envisaged Spanish ministry (Rom 15.17-24, 28-29, 32). He also hoped, no doubt, that his gospel would be of help in alleviating some dangerous developments within the Roman communities as well (esp. Rom 14-15.13) and sought their support in return (at least through prayer) for his impending visit to Jerusalem, which he knew would involve some danger of its own (Rom 15.30-31). Nonetheless, all of these interests are dependent upon the persuasiveness of Paul's case in Rom 1.18-11.36, wherein he seeks to authenticate for this Roman audience in particular his controversial ministry; once done, he can then proceed with some authority to contribute towards the betterment of their situation, and they to his. We approach Rom 1.18-11.36, then, intent on discovering how Paul presented himself to believers in Rome, most of whom he had never met and many of whom, it seems, were cautious, suspicious or even antagonistic towards him. For them, he lays out his credentials in 1.18-11.36 especially, before proceeding into exhortations and admonitions in Rom 12-16.

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<sup>5</sup> We remain sceptical of attempts to recreate the situation of the Romans christian communities from this material; cf., e.g., W.S. Campbell's attempt to do so from Rom 9-11 (1981b).

<sup>6</sup> Schmithals, 1975b: 9.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rowland, 1985: 205; du Toit, 1989: 200-201; Shaw, 1983: 138.

Of special concern for this project is Paul's handling of the significance of the law and the people of Israel as he seeks to authenticate his perceptions and ministry. Before beginning our own investigation into these matters, it will be helpful to call to mind something of the present scholarly debate, allowing it to serve as the backdrop for our investigation. In what follows, then, a very brief and selective survey will be set out which seeks to highlight the issues pertaining to the examination of Paul's text.

### **11.2. A Selective Survey of Recent Pauline Scholarship**

Perhaps the thorniest of issues in Pauline scholarship concerns the role of the law in Paul's thought. The issue has proven to be so fundamentally problematic that several scholars have recently attributed the dilemma to Paul himself, finding his own reflections on the law to have been disjointed. This course has been steered, for instance, by H. Räisänen (1983), who argues that inconsistency permeates Paul's reflections on the law.<sup>8</sup> Theories which seek to explain inconsistencies as arising out of development within Paul's thought<sup>9</sup> do not get to the heart of the problem, says Räisänen, since each particular letter shows within itself inconsistencies and contradictions. The problem is explained, instead, by emotive factors within Paul: Paul is "torn in two directions, incapable of resolving the tension theologically".<sup>10</sup> Those two directions are due to (1) Paul's conviction that the law has been abolished, and (2) Paul's conviction that the law, having been given by God, is incapable of being abrogated.<sup>11</sup> His experience forced Paul to abandon his loyalty to the law, although he also paid lip service to it for the sake of appearances.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, the meaning of "law" oscillates to fit the needs of Paul's arguments in relation to his two conflicting convictions. Although he instigated a break with the law, Paul left this implicit in his scheme, concealing it from others and, most probably, even from himself; what was implicit became explicit only in gnostic circles where the abandonment of the law became complete.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Räisänen finds Paul's case to be fundamentally ill-conceived, involving a

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Boers: "what gives coherence to Paul's thought is contradiction at its most fundamental level" (1988: 63, emphasis removed).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hübner, 1984a; Drane, 1975; Wilckens, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> 1983: 264.

<sup>11</sup> 1983: 264-65; cf. 1987b: 410.

<sup>12</sup> 1983: 266.

<sup>13</sup> 1983: 201.

“misinterpretation” of the role of the law in Early Judaism; Paul can denounce the law as he does only because he ascribes to the law a status “which it never had in genuine Jewish thought” and a function “detached from God’s covenantal grace”.<sup>14</sup> Paul “gives a totally distorted picture of the Jewish religion”<sup>15</sup> since, as Paul presents it, Judaism was legalism.

Although Räisänen has been accused of carrying out an “atomistic treatment” of Paul,<sup>16</sup> his work nevertheless demonstrates well that, in the course of defending his gospel, Paul was not so concerned with logical consistency but used various lines of argument even within a single letter to score points in support of his case. Paul’s statements on the law, then, are performance oriented, or as F. Watson says, Paul “makes use of various types of theoretical legitimation, which are not always compatible with one another as pure theory but which all contribute to the same practical goal”.<sup>17</sup>

In this regard, E.P. Sanders has argued that Paul’s estimates concerning the law are secondary to his exclusivistic soteriology; they are explained by his conviction that salvation is exclusively through Christ and do not explain that conviction. Sanders, like Räisänen, sees Paul’s various estimates of the law as unable to be harmonized (*viz.*, they are “unsystematic”). Nonetheless, he emphasizes that Paul’s critiques of the law are coherent in that they all arise from a common factor: the conviction that salvation is through Christ alone and, therefore, cannot be by any other means.<sup>18</sup> The exclusivism of Paul’s soteriology gives coherence to his diverse critiques of the law. Sanders also notes, however, that whereas the negative estimates of the law arise when Paul discusses the conditions for membership within the christian community, positive estimates are given when he discusses the behavioural norms of that community; in the latter context, Paul insists that the law should be fulfilled,<sup>19</sup> albeit by means of the Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Taking his cues from Paul’s comments in Phil 3 and 2 Cor 3, Sanders thinks that, despite his many arguments against the law, Paul found nothing fundamentally wrong with the law except

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<sup>14</sup> 1986b: 39.

<sup>15</sup> 1986b: 38.

<sup>16</sup> Dunn, 1988a: lxvii.

<sup>17</sup> 1986: 22.

<sup>18</sup> 1977: 519.

<sup>19</sup> 1983a: 84, 114.

<sup>20</sup> 1983a: 105.

that it was not Christ. The dispensation of the law was glorious, but its glory was surpassed for Paul, and became “loss” in comparison with the dispensation of faith in Christ; “the only thing wrong with the old dispensation is that it is not the new one”.<sup>21</sup> Paul knows the function of the law in Jewish covenantalism, but he no longer accepts it to be regulative, and consequently constructs various arguments against it as a means to salvation.

Other approaches have been taken to resolve the issue of the law in Paul’s presentations. Rather than “law” being a slippery, oscillating concept, as some argue, S. Westerholm thinks that a distinction runs consistently between Paul’s various estimates of the law, a distinction between (1) the Pentateuch or Jewish scriptures, which for Paul pointed to faith in Christ, and (2) the Sinaitic legislation, which prescribes “doing” and “works” rather than faith. While Paul puts his presentation in line with the former and, accordingly, claims to uphold the law (Rom 3.31). Paul considered the Sinaitic legislation to have been abrogated by God’s action in Christ, thereby ruling out “works” and “doing” from the sphere of proper response to God. Westerholm essentially argues a traditional line, finding, as does E. Käsemann, that for Paul “law” and “gospel” are “mutually exclusive antitheses”.<sup>22</sup> So Westerholm proposes that “students who want to understand Paul but feel they have nothing to learn from a Martin Luther should consider a career in metallurgy”.<sup>23</sup> He agrees with Sanders, however, that Early Judaism is best represented by “covenantal nomism”, and thinks, consequently, that Paul’s juxtaposition of grace and works was not shared by his Jewish contemporaries;<sup>24</sup> “the Jewish position could hardly be reconstructed on the basis of Paul’s writings”.<sup>25</sup> Westerholm does not accuse Paul of distorting the issue, however; Paul’s case does not involve a caricature of Judaism but is a recasting of traditional categories in which he “moves the whole discussion onto a different level”.<sup>26</sup>

Others argue that Paul’s criticisms are not against the law *per se* but against a misapprehension of the law and its significance; what Paul refuted was the improper view of the law as a “law of works”, for the law is properly the “law of faith”. This approach counters the prevalent

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<sup>21</sup> 1983a: 140.

<sup>22</sup> Käsemann, 1980: 282.

<sup>23</sup> 1988: 173.

<sup>24</sup> 1988: 148-50.

<sup>25</sup> 1988: 150.

<sup>26</sup> 1988: 150.

juxtaposition between “gospel” and “law” with its “cavalier dismissal of the law”,<sup>27</sup> positing instead a distinction between the proper and improper usage of the law. So N.T. Wright states: “Whatever solution is to be found to the question of ‘Paul and the law’...it will not come by treating Paul simply as a Lutheran – still less a Marcionite – born out of due time”.<sup>28</sup> This approach has taken two forms. First, C.E.B. Cranfield (1975a) and H. Hübner (1984a) argue that, for Paul, the law is misused when allowed to promote Jewish legalism; only when it promotes faith is the law properly fulfilled.<sup>29</sup> Like Räisänen and Westerholm, Cranfield and Hübner think that Paul charges his Jewish contemporaries with legalistic motives, in which salvation is earned apart from grace; unlike Räisänen and Westerholm, however, Cranfield and Hübner use this charge to reconstruct Early Judaism as a sterile religion of legalism. So Hübner states that, in Early Judaism, the law had been “degraded and depraved into a means of having to assert oneself before God”,<sup>30</sup> Cranfield and Hübner find Paul’s critique to be right on target; Paul found Jewish legalism to be an inappropriate understanding of God’s ways in view of God’s grace mediated through faith.

This general approach, which distinguishes between proper and improper usages of the law, is advocated also by J.D.G. Dunn (1988a) and N.T. Wright (1980), who argue, however, that it was not “legalism”, in the traditional sense, but Jewish ethnocentrism which Paul regarded as an illegitimate perception of the law’s significance. Paul considered that “most of Israel has misunderstood the law, by taking it as a badge of national and covenant identity”.<sup>31</sup> Dunn and Wright consider Paul to be interacting with, rather than misunderstanding or distorting, the covenantal character of the Judaism of his day. Instead of a sterile legalism, they think Paul to have rejected the ethnocentric attitude which prevailed in Early Judaism as a result of a covenantal self-identity.

Intertwined with Paul’s statements concerning the law is, of course, Paul’s estimate of Israel. One dilemma which he encountered seems to be that, although the people of Israel

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<sup>27</sup> Wright, 1988: 424.

<sup>28</sup> 1988: 424.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Cranfield, 1975a: 220; Hübner, 1984a: 138. For Hübner, Paul argues this line only in Romans.

<sup>30</sup> 1984a: 138.

<sup>31</sup> Dunn, 1988a: 192.



claimed to be the covenant people of God who possess in scripture the revelation of God's ways, the majority of them failed to believe in the Messiah of God, of whom Paul considered the scriptures to speak. This dilemma, coupled with his need to authenticate his gentile mission, forced Paul to reflect upon the relationship of the christian movement (as he perceived it) to traditional expressions of Judaism and God's dealings with Israel. In this regard, W.D. Davies has championed the case that, for Paul, the gospel of faith was not antithetical to but was "the full flowering of Judaism, the outcome of the latter and its fulfillment".<sup>32</sup> Somewhat differently, F. Watson characterizes Paul as one "who devotes his energies to the creation and maintaining of sectarian groups hostile to all non-members, and especially to the Jewish community from which in fact they derived".<sup>33</sup> Different in all respects is L. Gaston's case (1987) that, for Paul, unbelieving Jews experience God's grace even apart from faith in Christ, since they are God's covenant people irrevocably; instead, Paul considered God's work in Christ to be for the benefit of *the gentiles*, for whom salvation is now available apart from converting to Judaism. One passage which Gaston cites especially in support of his case is Rom 11.26-29, wherein Paul is convinced of Israel's salvation on the basis of their irrevocable call and election by God in love. This passage is often cited by others who do not assent to Gaston's views as springing not from the logic of Paul's gospel for salvation by faith but from his affection for his own people; he is certain that God will not abandon Israel, although his arguments throughout the rest of Romans work in the opposite direction and give no basis for this rather surprising claim (a "mystery", as Paul calls it). At this point, it is often said that Paul wants to have his cake and eat it, or, as Sanders says, Paul "desperately sought a formula which would keep God's promise to Israel intact, while insisting on faith in Jesus Christ".<sup>34</sup> In this regard, says Sanders, Paul has "more than a little difficulty reconciling his native convictions with those which he had received by revelation".<sup>35</sup>

It is with this very brief and selective survey in view that we will examine in the chapters to follow Paul's view of the law and Israel in Romans 1.18-11.36. Our examination will follow not a sequential outline, as in Part II, but a thematic outline. Chapter 12 will concern itself with

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<sup>32</sup> 1980: 323.

<sup>33</sup> 1986: 180-81.

<sup>34</sup> 1983a: 199.

<sup>35</sup> 1983a: 199.

Paul's description of the anthropological condition and the implications which he draws from it in Rom 1.18-3.20; Chapter 13 investigates the solution to that problem as it is laid out in Rom 3.21-31, 9.30-10.13 and 7.7-8.4; Chapter 14 takes note of the "ethnic" aspect of Paul's view of salvation history as it is found in Rom 9-11 and seeks to explain it in view of his larger project of salvation through faith. These passages have been chosen for their direct relevance to the concerns of this project. (Unlike Part II, a summary chapter will not appear in Part III. In order to avoid unnecessary redundancy, the "conclusions" to this analysis of Rom 1-11 appear in the final "Thesis Conclusions", where they appear in comparison with appropriate conclusions from the analysis of 4 Ezra.)

## **Chapter 12:**

### **The Anthropological Condition**

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After introducing himself briefly in Rom 1.1-15, Paul sets out in 1.16-17 what is frequently cited as the “thesis” of Paul’s presentation in Romans. He states that he is not ashamed of his gospel (although many might have thought it to be shameful) since it is “the power of God unto salvation for all who believe” (1.16), demonstrating that God’s righteousness is revealed “from faith unto faith” (1.17). The next eleven chapters lay the theological groundwork for his claim. Structurally, he works his case in its early stages from problem to solution; initially, Paul exposes the dilemma which he will later seek to address with his christological perspective. This chapter will deal in seven sections (12.1. through 12.7.) with Paul’s setting up of the problem to be solved as it appears in Rom 1.18-3.20. This passage establishes the context for Paul’s interaction with the Judaism of his day in legitimation of his gentile mission.

#### **12.1. Paul’s Description of the Anthropological Condition: 1.18-32.**

Paul, in commencing his case that God’s righteousness has been revealed “from faith unto faith” (1.17), sets out the first facet of his argument in 1.18: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men”. In 1.26-31, Paul gives a list of moral vices to illustrate the extent of human depravity which provokes God’s wrath. He does not characterize these moral failings as the disease to be corrected, but as the symptoms of a more fundamental condition described in 1.19-25. His prognosis of that condition is evident especially in 1.21: “although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him”, the point being that they failed to give rightful honour to the creator in proper response as his creation. Instead they became idolatrous (1.23, 25). Consequently, God “gave them over” to the desires of their heart, resulting in crimes against the natural order and against others, as described in 1.24 and 1.26-31. These evil deeds are the outward expressions of an inward condition which is deserving only of death (1.32). Although “what may be known about God”

is evident in the natural order and is clearly perceived by all (1.19-20), "they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God" (1.28), and so "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (1.25), suppressing "the truth by their wickedness" (1.18). Accordingly, they themselves are held accountable "without excuse" (1.20).

It is sometimes held that Paul's description in 1.18-32 is intended as an indictment of the gentiles, whose sinful condition is expressed in idolatrous and sexually perverse lifestyles. So L. Gaston claims that this section deals "*exclusively* with the situation of the Gentile world".<sup>1</sup> Certainly, Paul's description in 1.18-32 includes a condemnation of the gentile nations; charges of idolatry and sexual immorality (esp. homosexuality) were common artillery in Jewish denunciation of the gentile nations. Nonetheless, to state, as Gaston does, that Paul's sights are focused exclusively on *gentile* deficiencies is to narrow down the dynamics of Paul's case in 1.18-3.9. It is not the gentile condition alone that Paul is describing here but a more fundamental *anthropological* condition ("man-in-Adam")<sup>2</sup> which includes in itself no ethnic differentiation.<sup>3</sup> That is, if what Paul is describing pertains exclusively to the gentiles, that is true only by way of the fact that, for most Jews, gentiles alone were thought to remain in the anthropological condition of sin, whereas Israel has been rescued from that condition by the covenant grace of God; Jews too are susceptible to that anthropological condition except for God's election of them. It follows then that Paul is painting herein a picture of humanity *in toto* before God, although such a condition was thought to have been offset for Israel by God's mercy upon them.

It should be noted that, in this initial section, overtones can be heard of the biblical account in Gen 2-3 of the fall of Adam into sin.<sup>4</sup> Despite his knowledge of God and God's decree, Adam exchanged the glory of God in which he had been created (cf. *ApocMos* 21.16) by believing the lie of the serpent ("you will be like him"), thereby perverting his natural creatureliness. By hoping to clothe himself in the garments of the creator, Adam entered into the perversity of

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston, 1987: 140, emphasis ours. Cf. Ziesler, 1989: 78.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, 1980: 95.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wedderburn, 1980: 120. Suhl thinks that Paul restricts his condemnation of the gentiles to 1.20-27 and begins his accusation of the Jew in 1.28 (1971), but there is little in the text of 1.27-1.28 to signal such a shift in perspective.

<sup>4</sup> See Hooker, 1959; Jervell, 1960: 312-31; Wedderburn, 1980; Dunn, 1980: 101-102. But see Scroggs, 1966: 75-76 n. 3.

sin, as is clearly evidenced by his offspring. Not surprisingly, Paul evidently chose to frame his portrayal of the *human* condition in semi-narrative form which is indebted to the Genesis account of the fall of Adam.

It also should be pointed out that Paul's words in 1.23 are tantalizingly reminiscent of those in Ps 106.20 which speak of Israel's own fall into idolatry, as recorded in Exod 32; their worship of the golden calf is described as their exchange (*ἠλλάξαντο*) of the glory (*δόξαν*) of God for the likeness (*ὁμοιώματι*) of an ox. If this echo is deliberate, as many think,<sup>5</sup> it is telling that the nation of Israel itself makes for one obvious example of the story of the fall of Adam. As he proceeds, Paul will exploit this connection between the sinful condition of Adam and the people of Israel. Here he leaves it undeveloped.

### 12.2. Paul's Initial Attack on Jewish Ethical Superiority: 2.1-11.

Scholars have for long recognized, especially in the early chapters of Romans, Paul's use of the diatribe format to present his case.<sup>6</sup> By means of this rhetorical device, Paul allows his readers to overhear him in conversation with an imagined dialogue partner as he advances his case. Whereas in the dialogue format of 4 Ezra both participants of the debate voiced their own views, in the diatribe format the position of each participant can be gleaned from the author's own presentation as he poses problems which he then proceeds to solve. Much like the Socratic method of instruction, diatribe was employed to engage a student (often imagined) in an exchange which, as it unravelled, led the student from an immature to a proper understanding of the issue at hand. As such, it is primarily a pedagogical (and sometimes protreptic) tool used within a school context,<sup>7</sup> and "is motivated by concern rather than contempt" for one's dialogue partner.<sup>8</sup>

This provides the rhetorical context for Paul's use of diatribe in Rom 2. As his argument unfolds, it becomes clear who his discussion partner is – he is "the typical Jew"<sup>9</sup> who thinks the description of 1.18-32 to apply to others but not to him by reason of the covenant privileges which he enjoys as a Jew (see esp. 2.17-20). As such, the diatribe is cast as an intramural exchange

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dunn, 1988a: 61, 72-73; Ziesler, 1989: 78; Garlington, 1990: 144-45.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., e.g., Bultmann, 1910; Black, 1973: 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> Stowers, 1981; *idem.*, 1984: 710-14, 722; *idem.*, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Stowers, 1988: 81-82.

<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, 1975a: 138 (see his defense, 137-39).

between two Jews.<sup>10</sup> But if the dialogue partner, whom we will refer to hereafter as “the Jew”<sup>11</sup> (cf. 2.17), expects Paul’s description of the anthropological condition in 1.18-32 to be offset by a recital of God’s grace to Israel in the covenant, he will be surprised by the argument that Paul constructs throughout 2.1-3.20.

The tone of 2.1-11 is set in 2.1, where Paul writes:

Accordingly, you have no excuse, o man, each one of you passes judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things.

The word *διό*, “accordingly”, indicates that Paul is now ready to draw out implications or conclusions from his portrayal of the anthropological condition in 1.18-32. Rather than going on to distinguish between the sinners who remain in the anthropological condition and the righteous who are saved by God’s mercy, Paul stops to draw up his conclusions already in the light of the anthropological condition described earlier without recourse to the covenant mercy of God.<sup>12</sup>

Paul first portrays “the Jew” as *ὁ κρίνων*, “the one who judges”. The attitude which Paul wants to capture by means of this appellation is demonstrated well by Ezra in the first episode of 4 Ezra, who judges the nations to be morally inferior to Israel (3.28-36). For instance, Ezra calls the gentiles “godless tribes” (4.23); moreover, he considers creation to belong exclusively to Israel (6.38-59) since God himself described the gentiles as “nothing”, “like spittle”, and as significant as “a drop from a bucket” (6.56). Paul is aware of the same attitude of Jewish superiority. The difference between Paul and Ezra is that, whereas Ezra considers the judgement against the gentiles and in favour of Israel to have come from God (cf. 6.56), Paul describes this judgement

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Dunn, 1987c: 2849; W.S. Campbell, 1988: 5.

<sup>11</sup> This appellation can be misleading if it is thought to imply that Paul is critiquing Judaism from the outside. Similarly, the appellation “the Jew” is not intended to be an all-embracing characterization of all Jews of Paul’s day. It is employed here quite simply with a particular reference to the imagined interlocutor of Paul’s case in Rom 2-3 especially.

<sup>12</sup> Some have argued that the gentile is still under fire, since the *διό* draws conclusions from 1.18-32, which was concerned with the gentiles. Most, however, are agreed that Paul’s comments in 2.1-11 are directed against “the Jew”. Cf. Lübking: “Der ganze Abschnitt [Rom 2.1-29] richtet sich von Anfang an gegen jüdische *καύχησις*, nämlich gegen einen beanspruchten heilsgeschichtlichen Vorrang des Juden im Gericht” (1986: 26). Moreover, few would now agree with Bultmann’s suggestion (1967: 283-4) that 2.1 is a marginal gloss.

as derived from "the Jew"; as Paul goes on to say, God's judgement is different (2.2). Moreover, in Paul's view, "the judge" is not a righteous judge. Paul describes him with the same adjective which he used of the sinner who is trapped in the anthropological condition - ἀναπολόγητος, "without excuse" (2.1; cf. 1.20). The irony is that, when "the Jew" judges (κρίνω) the other, he condemns (κατακρίνω) himself, for, as Paul explains, the judge has himself done the same things (τὰ αὐτά) as the one he condemns.

The charge that "the Jew" does the same things seemingly refers to the list of vices of 1.24-31. But how can he make this claim? Did not the Jews gain the respect of many gentiles precisely because of their moral integrity? Were not idolatry and homosexuality shunned by pious Jews? Paul cannot be talking here only of a select group of Jews (*viz.*, their leaders),<sup>13</sup> since Rom 2 should not be divorced from Rom 3, where the Jewish people appear collectively (3.9, 19). Is Paul talking, then, about only some less heinous crimes, such as gossip? Or is he thinking of the manner in which the commandments may be broken without a literal transgression of them, such as adultery (cf. Mt 5.27-28)?<sup>14</sup> Or is he referring to hypocrisy, wherein one sees the sin of others without noticing his own?<sup>15</sup> Such explanations could well be correct, and yet we suspect something different to have occasioned Paul's charge, as we demonstrate below from other texts of Early Judaism.

It is worth noting first, however, that Ezra's initial speech in 4 Ezra parallels to a certain extent Paul's case here and includes the same charge as that of Rom 2.1. After reviewing the state of human sinfulness (4Ez 3.3-13), Ezra recalls the election of Abraham and his descendants (3.13-17) and the giving of the law to Israel (3.18-19). And yet, Ezra claims that Israel stands rooted firmly in the position of human sinfulness, as is evidenced by the fact that *they do in everything the things which Adam and his wicked descendants had done* (3.26). The point is that the covenant has been no avail to them. The charge of doing the wicked things of Adam's race is not indebted to a notion of hypocrisy or to a redefined understanding of what it means to break the commandments. It simply functions as a technique to demonstrate that the covenant

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<sup>13</sup> As F. Watson thinks to be the case throughout Rom 2 (1986: 113-15).

<sup>14</sup> Cranfield, 1975a: 142.

<sup>15</sup> Dunn, 1988a: 89-90.

relationship established by God seems non-existent, as is evidenced by the sinful behaviour of Israel who do as the gentiles do. That this is simply a rhetorical technique without empirical correspondance is demonstrated by the fact that Ezra proceeds in 3.28-36 to argue that Israel is morally superior to the gentiles. Rather than harmonizing these two arguments, the point of them both is that they lay the blame squarely on God for Israel's position; God is to blame if the people do as the other nations do, and God is to blame because the people have no benefit from him despite the fact that they do not do the things that characterize the other nations. The charge of doing the same as the outsiders of the covenant in 4Ez 3.26 functions, then, to breakdown the covenant relationship in order to lay blame (in this case, on God).

Paul's charge is hardly different, except in that he does not blame God but "the Jew". His charge follows not from *empirical* observation but from the "grammar" of ethical denunciation. As we will show below, it was often the case that, once the boundaries of the community of grace were drawn up, those who were considered outside its boundaries could all be classed together. There is no middle ground. There are no greys; everything is white and black. In the process of denunciation, the one to be denounced becomes the object of ethical criticism and slander, being accused of behaviour which is unworthy of the righteous and which equals the worst sin of all outsiders. Whether such charges are deserved or not matters little; the "grammar" of ethical denunciation allows for denunciation of this kind.

One example of this kind of rhetorical technique is evident in PsSol 4, which provides also a close parallel to the description of "the judge" of Rom 2.1. The author describes the condition of a Jewish "profaner" whose heart is impure and who breaks the law of God while moving in the circles of the assembly of the righteous (4.1). With great ceremony and appearances, this profane Jew condemns (*κατακρίνω*) sinners in judgement (*ἐν κρίσει*) (4.2). But, like "the Jew" of Rom 2, although he is quick to judge the sinner, he himself is guilty of all manner of sin (4.3), which is described in great detail in 4.4-5 and 4.9-13. He is accused of sexual perversity to the extent that it motivates his every action. Such charges, however, may have borne little relationship to reality at all, as R.R. Hann comments:<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 1988: 178. He continues: "Once matters of morality have been conceived in such rigorous terms, the ethics of the sect must be defined in opposition to the behaviour of those of



Although it is most unlikely that the backsliding sectaries [the profaners] were in fact guilty of the immorality of which they were accused (they would surely have been expelled if the charges had been literally true), it is significant that they are described in the same moral terms as are the sect's opponents. Once their less rigid observance has been identified, they have lost status within the cult and are classified as the equivalent of outsiders... It is not necessary that the less strict sectaries actually committed the deeds of which they are accused.

Elsewhere in Psalms of Solomon the behaviour of Jewish apostates is described as *equal to* (17.14-15) or *worse than that of the gentiles* (1.8, 8.8-13), doing wicked things which had never been done before (2.9) and which even the gentiles despised (2.12). Although these charges are quite trumped up, the rhetoric of ethical denunciation allows for such exaggeration; just as the covenant boundaries are drawn up rigidly, so too is a sharp distinction between the morality of the righteous and that of the sinners. As soon as a Jew is thought to have "fallen from grace" (at least in the eyes of another Jew), so the worst of the worst can be said of him in order to reinforce that fact, whether or not those accusations correspond to reality. The author heaps up the descriptions of the sinners' perversity in order to portray their ethical standing in the bleakest of terms, thereby disqualifying their covenant membership.

Ethical denunciation of this sort not only allows for exaggeration but frequently does so in extended strains. So Mic 3.3 denounces Jewish apostates, identifying them as those who "eat the flesh of my people, strip their skin from off them, brake their bones in pieces, chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a pot". No doubt there is little correlation between this description of apostates and the actual misdemeanors which they may have committed, but the motivation for such polemic has little concern for accuracy.

The same phenomenon is evidenced in PsPhilo 25, wherein groups of Jewish sinners confess their sinful deeds which resulted from their disregard of the covenant. Their behaviour matches their position as apostates; they are credited with having committed idolatry, adultery, imitating the practices of the gentiles, and desiring to eat the flesh of their own children (25.9-13). The principle is clear; those Jews who are thought to be outside the boundaries of the covenant are attributed with practices indistinguishable from those of the gentiles.<sup>17</sup>

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the outside".

<sup>17</sup> The author's assurance in the mercy of God allows him to entertain the possibility

A most significant variation of this principle is to be found in the Prayer of Manasseh, a poignant prayer of repentance to a merciful God. The speaker recounts the extent of his sinfulness: his sins “multiplied in number more than the sand of the sea” (PrMan 9a), and he finds himself with no strength to lift up his eyes to heaven “because of the multitude of the iniquity of my wicked deeds, because I did evil things before you” (10). Especially important is the way in which the confessional section of the prayer culminates in the admission of idolatrous practices: “I set up idols and multiplied defilement” (10).<sup>18</sup> If the attribution of this prayer to Manasseh is original to the prayer, the mention of idolatry seems to be a reference to the biblical portrayal of Judah’s King Manasseh in 2Chr 33.7, wherein he is said to have placed an idol in the Jerusalem temple. But the point to be noted is that the author who crafted this prayer and any others who incorporated it into their worship identified themselves as idolaters each time they recited it. To incriminate oneself in such a fashion is certainly significant. The author, citing the multitude of his iniquity, goes so far as to cap his confession with the most heinous sin imaginable – idolatry, the sin which characterizes the gentile world *par excellence*.

We may suppose, however, that the charge is overblown. There is little reason to think that such self-denunciation had a factual basis, and we are well advised against seeing the author as “a miserable wretch, or a Jew who has committed disgusting sins”.<sup>19</sup> Instead, as J.H. Charlesworth describes him, he was simply “a devout Jew”<sup>20</sup> whose composition serves as “a palpable reminder of the living force of Jewish piety during the turn of the era”.<sup>21</sup> If he is not some heinous sinner but a typical Jew of the first century, in what way can he identify himself as an idolatrous pagan? The answer comes in the recognition that the pious Jew, in confession before God, recognized his sinful standing alongside the rest of humanity. And where there is no distinction, the sins of one may be applied to another. Once again, the principle is affirmed: In ethical denunciation, the sin of the Jewish sinner tends to be augmented in order to highlight the

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that, after the death of these sinners, God may have mercy upon them. This does not negate the principle cited here, but demonstrates the author’s confidence in God’s mercy.

<sup>18</sup> Charlesworth notes that the reference to “defilement” can denote the practice of idol worship (1985a: 637, n. q2).

<sup>19</sup> Charlesworth, 1988: 48.

<sup>20</sup> 1988: 48. Cf. *idem.*, 1985b; 314.

<sup>21</sup> 1985a: 631.

fact that he no longer is worthy to have a part in the covenant people. When standing outside the parameters of the covenant, he can be accused of crimes characteristic of those outside the covenant, even if such accusations are not literally true. What is so shocking is that this principle can result in *self*-denunciation when standing before God in confessional prayer. In Prayer of Manasseh, the speaker is not denouncing himself as one who has rejected the covenant; indeed, he appeals to the mercy of the covenant God in order that he might be cleansed. Instead, he stands before God mindful of the fact that, before God, no one living is righteous. For him, since it is illegitimate to postulate a social distinction between the righteous Jew and the sinful gentile while standing before God in confession, so he humbly identifies himself with the gentile and confesses the sin which is characteristic of the sinners, thereby emphasizing all the more his need for the grace of God to restore him. He would, no doubt, have denied the charge of idolatry if anyone applied it to him, but, in the context of humble petition for divine mercy, he accentuates his dependence upon God's grace by accentuating the state of his sinfulness. (Cf. G.W.E. Nickelsburg's distinction, when analysing 1QH, between one's "public and private sides".<sup>22</sup>) The speaker of this prayer claims for himself no right to salvation, unless it be by the grace of the covenant God of Israel. Without that, he is no different from the idolatrous gentiles.

This digression into several texts of Early Judaism is necessary to establish the proper rhetorical context of Paul's charge in 2.1, and elsewhere in his letter (2.21-24, 7.7-25). The principle is simple; where the covenant is to no avail, whether that be due to God's negligence (4Ez 3.20-27), apostasy (Psalms of Solomon, Pseudo-Philo, Micah), or confession before God (Prayer of Manasseh), the most heinous sins are said to characterize one's behaviour. Paul's charge follows the same principle. It is important to point out, moreover, that ethical denunciation of this kind follows from prior convictions concerning the boundaries of the covenant of grace. That is, Paul's charge against "the Jew" is arrived at in view of theological commitments already held, rather than *vice versa*; the charge is explained by, rather than explains, Paul's christological case. It functions at the level of polemic without necessary correspondence in fact, and it demonstrates from the outset that Paul's use of diatribe is system-dependent, being determined by his conviction that ethnocentrism is improper. Because Paul already knows that Jews outside

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<sup>22</sup> 1981: 139.

the parameters of the christian community fall outside the community of grace, so he can charge "the Jew" (*viz.*, the spokesman for ethnocentric Jews) with the same ethical deficiencies as those from whom "the Jew" thought himself distinct. In this way, Paul simply follows the pattern of ethical denunciation; those outside can all be grouped as one without distinction. What one scholar has said of the charges against the Jewish "sinners" in Psalms of Solomon can be said of Paul's charge in 2.1: The charge "should not be read as an impartial and objective testimony. This is factional propaganda and polemic, with a fair degree of exaggeration".<sup>23</sup>

In the light of this, it might be helpful once again to reflect briefly upon Ezra's initial case in 4 Ezra where he argues two points in indictment of God. First, he argues that Israel's covenant status has failed to be of any benefit; God has not weeded out from them the evil heart of sin which is common to all humanity, so they do the same things as the gentiles (4Ez 3.20-27). Second, because Israel is better than the gentiles, God's covenant faithfulness is in doubt (4Ez 3.28-36). Obviously, these two cases are difficult to maintain simultaneously (*viz.*, is Israel as bad as, or better than, the gentiles?), but both cohere in laying the blame for Israel's position squarely on God. The point to be noticed, however, is that, whereas Ezra initially maintains both (1) the universal sinfulness of humanity and (2) the covenant status of Israel resulting in their ethical superiority, the latter is eventually disallowed in the light of the former<sup>24</sup> due to the conviction that the two are incompatible. This is a significant parallel to Paul's case; Paul (like the author of 4 Ezra) sees in these two points nothing but contradiction and, as his case proceeds, hopes to displace ethnocentric distinctions by means of his argument concerning the all-embracing condition of sin.

In 2.2, Paul juxtaposes "the Jew's" judgement of ethical superiority with another judgement – that of God, whose judgement is based on truth (*κατὰ ἀλήθειαν*). Since God's judgement includes the condemnation of anyone who does the things described in 1.24-31, and since "the Jew" is no different from the gentile on that score, so Paul can point out that God's judgement falls without ethnic consideration. In the light of the pervasiveness of sin, God's true and

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<sup>23</sup> Dunn, 1988b: 288, n. 65.

<sup>24</sup> He must then allow for a few necessary exceptions to universal sinfulness.

impartial judgement on the matter disqualifies ethnocentrism altogether.<sup>25</sup>

The same point is made in 2.3, where Paul emphasizes that the one who judges others, and yet does the same as they do, cannot escape God's judgement upon sin. This verse illustrates again the manner in which Paul's case is carried out in the face of ethnocentric covenantalism. In this regard, it is significant that one can recognize in 2.3 a parallel with PsSol 15.8:

PsSol: οὐκ ἐκφεύξονται οἱ ποιοῦντες ἀνομίαν τὸ κρίμα κυρίου

Rom: ποιῶν αὐτά, ὅτι σὺ ἐκφεύξῃ τὸ κρίμα τοῦ θεοῦ

It is not necessary to determine the relationship between these two texts (i.e., Is Paul quoting? Do both authors draw upon common parlance?). Instead, it is enough simply to note how the two authors utilize the same idea in completely different ways.

In PsSol 15, the sinners "who do lawlessness" are distinct from the righteous who live by God's mercy (15.13). These two groups, the sinners and the righteous, equal those outside and inside the covenant respectively – that is, the gentiles (along with the Judean sinners), and Israel. As such, the pronouncement of PsSol 15.8 is an expression of ethnocentric covenantalism, charging that gentile (and Judean) sinners will not escape God's judgement against them. God's justice is distributed in line with his covenant with Israel.

When the same pronouncement is employed by Paul, however, it appears in a completely different system of thought; those who cannot escape God's judgement are all those who sin (ὁ ποιῶν αὐτά), apart from any consideration of the covenant and its people. On this score, then, this pronouncement works out in a completely different way in Paul's case than in Psalms of Solomon. In the latter, divine judgement is contained within the context of ethnocentric covenantalism, whereas in the former it is not, and, in fact, critiques ethnocentrism altogether. The charge that sinners do not escape God's judgement is common to both authors, but it has a different effect in their respective works since it is employed in a different system of thought.

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<sup>25</sup> Here, then, it becomes obvious why in 1.23 Paul seems to have relied on the terminology of Ps 106 (which describes the fall of Israel into idolotry) to illustrate the extent of human error; for him, Israel's history itself proves that the anthropological condition of sin applies just as well to the Jew as to the gentile, a point which he works to disqualify ethnocentrism. Cf. Bassler: "already in chap. 1 Paul's argument was deliberately double-edged" (1984: 45, n. 8).

In 2.4, Paul continues his attack upon ethnocentric covenantalism, saying, “Do you presume upon the riches of his kindness (*χρηστότης*), tolerance and patience (*μακροθυμίας*)?” Paul here is polemicizing against the kind of presumption evident throughout much of the literature of Early Judaism. One example of this is WisdSol 15.1-2:

But you, our God, are kind (*χρηστός*) and true, patient (*μακροθύμος*) and in mercy governing all things. For even if we sin, we are yours.

Paul considers this type of Jewish confidence in the mercy of God, despite their own sin, to be a false presumption. He says to “the Jew”: “Do you not realize that God’s kindness (*χρηστόν*) leads you to repentance” (the “you” probably bearing the emphasis of the sentence). Paul’s statement itself is not untypical of Jewish piety, but, again, it is used by him in an untypical fashion. For “the Jew”, the very fact that God is merciful no doubt leads him to repent of his sin in order to maintain his covenant membership. In this way, “the Jew” would have agreed with Paul that God’s kindness leads him to repentance, but by “kindness” he would have meant God’s covenant mercy upon Israel, as in WisdSol 15.1. In Rom 2.4, “kindness” has no such significance; by relying upon his ethnic status, “the Jew” presumes upon God’s kindness. Once again, the system into which Paul drops the points of his argument is different to that of “the Jew”, although the points of argument are common to them both. Because Paul *knows* already that the system of ethnocentrism is wrong, so he sinks the principle of divine “kindness” into another system of thought, thereby *proving* that ethnocentrism is wrong.

Paul’s rejection of ethnocentric covenantalism is reinforced in 2.6 and 2.11, wherein he twice states the principle of divine impartiality, while 2.7-10 unpacks the significance of that principle. In 2.6, Paul cites Ps 62.12 (LXX 61.13) and Prov 24.12: God will repay each according to his works (*κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ*). Similar pronouncements appear elsewhere in the literature of Early Judaism. The idea of divine retribution according to works is evident in Psalms of Solomon, for instance. Therein, one reads statements such as that in 2.34, which describes the purpose of God’s impartial judgement to be to separate

between the righteous and the sinner, to repay sinners forever according to their actions (*κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν*; cf. 2.16, 17.8-9 [twice]).

But in Psalms of Solomon, the principle of judgment by works operates once again within a context other than that used by Paul. There, one's works are thought to indicate one's position as an outsider (= the sinner) or insider to the covenant. The latter intends to preserve his membership in the covenant by relying on God's covenant mercy (notice, God's "kindness", ἡ χρηστότης σου, PsSol 9.7) to forgive the sin of which he (= the righteous) repents.<sup>26</sup> The author is convinced that there is no discrimination in God's judgements, but for him God's impartial judgement works within the context of his elective mercy upon Israel.<sup>27</sup> In Psalms of Solomon, then, God's standard of impartial judgement is contained within his faithfulness to his people; he will show no partiality to those who have rejected the covenant, and he will be merciful to those whose works indicate their desire to maintain the covenant relationship.

Paul's case, of course, is quite different. He finds it presumptuous to contain the principle of divine impartiality within an ethnocentric context. Such a presumption arises, says Paul from a stubborn and hardened heart and is deserving of God's wrath (2.5). Although the principle of judgement according to works is common to both Paul and the author of Psalms of Solomon, the system in which that principle operates is wholly different in their two works. In his diatribe, Paul affirms the principle of judgement by works which was indispensable to ethnocentric covenantalism, but, having abstracted the principle from its traditional context, he uses it to bolster his own notion of divine impartiality, thereby negating ethnocentric covenantalism.

After extracting the principle of judgement by works from its native covenantal context, Paul is left with a system which operates solely on the basis of actions. Thus, in 2.7-10 he describes the two ways to eternal life and wrath – the one is by doing "good work(s)", the other is by

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. the distinction in 9.4-7 between those who do what is right (ποιῆσαι δικαιοσύνην) and those who do what is wrong (ποιῆσαι ἀδικίαν).

Bassler cites divine judgement according to works in Psalms of Solomon as evidence of the theme of divine impartiality in Early Judaism (1984: 49, n. 19). But, in fact, Psalms of Solomon demonstrates how the principle of judgement "according to works" is undergirded by a covenant distinction between the righteous and the sinners; the Judean sinners who have abandoned the covenant will be judged by their actions which have placed them outside the bounds of the righteous. Cf. Sanders: "God's grace establishes the framework within which works are required, and performing the works commanded (or atoning for transgression of them) is the condition of remaining in the elect" (1982: 401, emphasis ours).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. PsPhilo 49.7, where God says to Israel: "If I were to pay you back according to your evil deeds, it would be necessary to pay no attention at all to your race".

doing what is unrighteous. This is not the end of Paul's case, of course, but it is the natural result of his technique throughout this section of his diatribe, in which he extracts aspects from the ethnocentric system of covenantal perception and reworks them into a system without an ethnocentric character. The result is a case hardly different from that evident in 4 Ezra; Paul ends up arguing that, because there is no favouritism with God (2.11), so one remains in the condition of sin unless he can free himself from it by means of his good works. This is not Uriel speaking in 4 Ezra; this is Paul in Romans. Both, however, engineer the collapse of ethnocentric covenantalism, and maintain that the escape from the anthropological condition is by means of one's works.<sup>28</sup> Although Paul later hopes to ground this principle within the christian community (8.4, 13.8-10), both Paul's and Uriel's cases are patterned along the same lines at this point.

### 12.3. What then of the law?: 2.12-16.

Having argued that there is no favouritism with God, Paul narrows his discussion to focus upon that which provided the basis of Jewish ethnocentrism – their possession of the law. The typical Jewish distinction between the righteous of Israel and the sinners of the heathen nations is rooted in the fact that Israel has been given the law.<sup>29</sup> Paul works his case in the same way, making a distinction between those who are “without the law” (*ἀνόμως*) and those who are “in the law” (*ἐν νόμῳ*). As he begins in 2.12a, Paul states that for those “without the law” (*viz.*, the gentiles) sin is rewarded with destruction. No doubt “the Jew” would have heartily agreed. In 2.12b, however, Paul again turns the tables on “the Jew” by applying the same connection between sin and condemnation to those “in the law”. Moreover, he states that to the one *ἐν νόμῳ* condemnation is, in fact, distributed *διὰ νόμου*. The point seems to be that, rather than being a sign of ethnic superiority (2.17-20), the law acts as the standard of judgement which actually condemns those “in the law” who sin. Paul here is not referring to Jewish apostates but to every Jew who considered his being “in the law” as a privilege which offset his place in the condition of universal sinfulness. Paul's point is that, although Israel has possession of the law,

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<sup>28</sup> Many scholars exhibit particular difficulty in exegeting Rom 2.6-11, in the light of Paul's heavy emphasis there on salvation by ethical works. Cf. Käsemann's handling (1980: 57-58). These difficulties fall away, we think, when Paul's rhetorical technique (demonstrated above) is recognized.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ps 147.19-20; 4Ez 3.18-19; Sir 24; Bar 3.36-4.4.



the law does not offset their sinfulness but condemns them because of their sin.

The first time that Paul makes use of the concept of righteousness since beginning his case in 1.18 is in 2.13, wherein the *δικ-* root appears twice. It is used in relation to another distinction which Paul makes, this time between the “hearers of the law” and the “doers of the law”; whereas the doers will be justified (*δικαιωθήσονται*), those who only hear the law are not righteous (*δίκαιος*) before God. This in itself is not a controversial distinction. Paul’s own use of it, however, is unusual, for it carries the implication (following from 2.12) that the one “in the law” who sins is not a doer of the law; his sin disqualifies him from doing the law. For “the Jew”, doing the law does not necessitate the absence of sin altogether but necessitates acting on the measures which the law provides for correcting that sin; for him, making atonement for sin *is* doing the law, so that sin itself does not negate one’s ability to do the law. In the context of Rom 2, however, Paul has constructed a case in which sin disqualifies one from being a doer of the law (cf. Uriel’s case in 4Ez). Both discussion partners maintain the relationship between doing the law and righteousness, but Paul removes these two components from the context which “the Jew” would have considered their natural environment and works them against “the Jew’s” perceptions.

Paul’s case in 2.14-15 has proven somewhat difficult to sort out. There, Paul makes mention of *gentiles who do the law*. He writes:

Indeed, when gentiles, who do not have the law (*τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα*), do by nature (*φύσει*) the things of the law (*τὰ τοῦ νόμου*), they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. (2.14)

This is an awkward component of Paul’s argument if we keep in mind that he is working his case from his depiction of the anthropological state of sin to the conclusion of 3.9 that “all are under sin”; the mention of gentiles who “do the things of the law” would seem to go against the thrust of Paul’s case.<sup>30</sup> Various arguments have been presented to iron out the problem, and need mentioning at this point.

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<sup>30</sup> To say that Paul considers “doing the law” in 2.14-15 to be sin (cf. Gaston, 1987: 31) seems to miss Paul’s point altogether. Like most, we consider “doing the law” to be a positive phenomenon in the context of 2.1-29.

A good many scholars suggest that those who Paul has in mind here are *christian* gentiles.<sup>31</sup> Support for this estimation comes from Paul's case in 8.4, wherein the believer is said to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law (cf. 13.8-10). However, several criticisms can be applied to this interpretation. Particularly convincing is the fact that Paul is unlikely to have referred to believing gentiles as doing the things of the law *by nature* (*φύσει*). For Paul, believers can be said to fulfill the law only by means of the indwelling of the Spirit (8.4; cf. Gal 5.14 with 5.22-23).<sup>32</sup> What Paul has in mind must not be *christian* gentiles,<sup>33</sup> but simply gentiles.

Other scholars, taking this into account, attempt to solve the problem by pointing out that Paul is not claiming that gentiles do *all* the law; he does not envisage the complete fulfillment of the law but only the *occasional* fulfillment of *some* of the law.<sup>34</sup> In this interpretation, there is no incongruity with Paul's conclusions of 3.9, for the fulfillment of some (but not all) points of the law does not undermine Paul's basic thesis that all are under sin. There is, in this reading, a quantitative qualification of the phrase τὰ τοῦ νόμου. The problem, however, is that, as H. Räisänen points out, this understanding cannot be maintained well in 2.27 where Paul utilizes the same idea once again.<sup>35</sup> There, Paul states that the gentiles who fulfill (τελέω) the law condemn the Jews who transgress the law. Since in both 2.14 and 2.27 the law is portrayed in ethical terms, it is hard to understand how the condemnation of the Jew (who must have fulfilled at least *some* ethical conditions of the law, despite being a transgressor of the law in general) is accomplished by the gentile who, according to this interpretation, also fulfills only *some* of the law's ethical demands. The argument in 2.27 juxtaposes the gentile and the Jew, portraying them respectively as fulfilling (τελέω) the law and transgressing the law. They are not equal in their ethical performance. τελέω here must have a quantitative sense signifying the

<sup>31</sup> Cf., e.g., Schreiner, 1989: 62.

<sup>32</sup> Cranfield argues that Paul meant φύσει to modify τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα, reading 2.14 as "those who do not have the law by nature" (1975a: 1.156-57). But this does not explain Paul's description of these gentiles as "a law for themselves"; contra 1Cor 9.21, where Paul talks of being ἔννομος Χριστοῦ. Moreover, if Paul had intended what Cranfield thinks he intended, it would have been far more natural for φύσει to appear within the ἔχοντα clause; cf. Dunn, 1988a: 98.

<sup>33</sup> Snodgrass: The 'christian gentile' interpretation "requires a considerable stretch of the imagination" (1986: 74).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Nygren, 1949: 123-24; Bornkamm, 1971: p. 123; Dunn, 1988a: 98.

<sup>35</sup> 1983: 103.

full performance of the ethical stipulations of the law. The same sense is evident in the phrase τὰ τοῦ νόμου of 2.14.<sup>36</sup> If other phrases with the same construction are any indication,<sup>37</sup> the application of a quantitative qualification to the expression τὰ τοῦ νόμου (*viz.*, they do *some* things of the law) would seem most unusual.<sup>38</sup>

After reviewing the various interpretations of 2.14-15, Räisänen argues that the only possible conclusion is that Paul actually believed that some gentiles do fulfill the law outside of the christian community, citing this to be an obvious contradiction to his more fundamental concerns.<sup>39</sup> But Räisänen does not exhaust all the options, as we see it at least. We think it possible to explain Paul's argument in 2.14-15 along the lines suggested in the following paragraphs.

Throughout 2.1-13, Paul has been seen to polemicize against ethnocentric covenantalism by extracting fundamental principles of that perspective from their native context and reapplying them in a new manner. It is this same technique, we suspect, which explains what Paul is doing in 2.14-15. Many Jews of Paul's day would have recognized that some gentiles do the things of the law. This group of gentiles would surely have included proselytes who accepted the ethnic marks and practices of the Jews. It might also have included the "righteous gentile" who kept the Noachian commandments (although we cannot be certain that this notion was well rooted prior to rabbinic times).<sup>40</sup> Already in his argument Paul (1) has highlighted the fact that sin is not foreign to "the Jew", and (2) has claimed that sin and doing the law are incompatible, intimating that "the Jew" *ipso facto* has no claim to being a doer of the law. Now Paul dislodges "the Jew's" own admission that some gentiles do the law and inserts it into his case with a polemic spin against "the Jew". The point is, if "the Jew" is not a doer of the law (as Paul has

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<sup>36</sup> We would argue that it is quite permissible to read 2.14-15 in the light of 2.27 since, as Snodgrass states, "2.25-29 is parallel to 2.13-16" (1986: 80).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. τὰ τῆς σαρκός, Rom 8.5; τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, Rom 8.5; τὰ τῆς εἰρήνης, Rom 14.19; τὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, 1Cor 2.11; τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ, 1Cor 2.14; τὰ τοῦ κυρίου, 1Cor 7.32-34, τὰ τοῦ κόσμου, 1Cor 7.32-24.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Räisänen, 1983: 103.

<sup>39</sup> 1983: 105.

<sup>40</sup> On the seven Noachian laws in rabbinic literature, see *Mek* on Exod 20.2; *t. AZ* 8.4. Elsewhere they are listed as thirty (*GenR* 98.9; *y. AZ* 2.1.40c) or referred to generally (*b. Sanh* 56ab; cf. *Jub* 7.20-21). Gaston doubts whether in Paul's day the "righteous gentile" could have been identified as such *without having undergone circumcision first* (1987: 23-25, emphasis mine). For the view that the Noachian law was thought to be the means of salvation for gentiles already in Early Judaism, see Segal, 1986a: 171.

argued), and if some gentiles are (as "the Jew" himself maintains), then how can "the Jew's" sense of ethnic superiority be maintained?

In the apodosis of 2.14b, Paul draws a conclusion which would have been strange to "the Jew": those who do not have the law but do it anyway are "a law for themselves." The point seems to be this; although the gentile who keeps the law is "without the law", he is nevertheless "defined" in some sense by law even apart from ethnic constraints.<sup>41</sup> 2.15 continues this point, stating that the gentiles illustrate that the work of the law is written in their hearts. Here the privilege of possessing the written law is extended beyond the ranks of the Jews to include, in a different way, even the gentiles; they too have a law, written not on tablets but on their hearts.<sup>42</sup> That they do the law is testified to not by their undertaking of ethnic rituals (*contra* ethnocentric covenantalism) but by their moral conscience and their thoughts which guide them in their ethical living (2.15).<sup>43</sup> These are the badges which prove that, although they do not have the law as the Jews do, the gentiles too have knowledge of the things of the law.<sup>44</sup> Paul here has already set the scene for what he will do in 2.17-28, wherein he denounces ethnic badges as secondary to the fundamental ethical issue. Although the gentiles do not share the ethnic badges of the Jews, some gentiles are known to have done the moral requirements of the law. The badge which testifies to the fact that they too know the things of the law is not circumcision or any other ritualistic practice, but is their conscience.

If this interpretation is on the right track, the question of whether Paul really envisaged gentiles doing the law apart from Christ misses the point. Paul is wrapped up in polemic against ethnocentric covenantalism, and his technique throughout 2.1-13 has been to sink points of "the Jew's" ethnocentric logic into a context foreign to their original environment. In the process, Paul hopes to show how that logic is seriously misguided. The same practice occurs in 2.14-15

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Moo: "Paul speaks of the Gentiles' confrontation with νόμος as a means of placing them in an analogous situation to Israel" (1986: 123). Cf. Ziesler, 1989: 87.

<sup>42</sup> Käsemann, 1980: 64; F. Watson, 1986: 116. We are persuaded by the argument that, although his language in 2.15 may be indebted to that of Jer 31 (LXX 38).33, Paul is not drawing upon the new covenant theme of that passage. In 2Cor 3.6-18, the new covenant motif is grounded in the possession of the spirit. Nothing of the sort appears in 2.14-15, wherein the gentiles are said to do the things of the law "by nature".

<sup>43</sup> Moo: "Paul, when he speaks of Gentiles being a 'law for themselves', means that their consciences (v 15) become the source of moral guidance" (1983: 79).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Bassler, 1984: 53-54.

where Paul borrows a point from his interlocutor but manipulates it in such a way as to force a concession from him contrary to his ethnocentric posture.

It is important to point out that in the process of his polemic, Paul's technique has taken him to a position which does not coincide with his conclusion of 1.18-3.20 (*viz.*, that all are under sin)<sup>45</sup> but which coincides with his concern to undermine Jewish ethnocentrism. As S. Westerholm states: "it is in the course of this argument against Jewish privilege, not his assessment of the Gentile plight, that Paul compares righteous Gentiles to sinful Jews".<sup>46</sup> Two points are important to recognize. First, Paul's method of turning the tables on "the Jew" has caused him here to compromise his case that all are under sin and in need of redemption, the very point towards which he is working (3.9); second, despite this fact, Paul is nonetheless able to use the logic of 2.14-15 to make the charge that "the Jew's" confidence in his favoured status before God is misplaced. In other words, although the logic of Paul's polemic in 2.14-15 may undermine one aspect of Paul's final conclusion, it does not undermine the essential point which that conclusion is intended to arrive at – that ethnocentric covenantalism is an incorrect understanding of the ways of God.<sup>47</sup> The claim will not be made herein that Paul's case is the paradigm of logic (perhaps it fares better as a model of polemic). Nonetheless, his argument, which takes various turns here and there, is motivated by one constant – the overthrow of ethnocentric covenantalism. Thus, we must be careful to distinguish at this point between Paul's statements and his strategy. As W.S. Campbell well states,

one can observe Paul making use of various types of theoretical legitimation which are not always compatible with one another as pure theory but which can all contribute to the same practical goal.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to notice that Paul has succeeded in portraying the law in wholly *ethical* terms. At this point in his argument, "doing the law" cannot refer to the performance of cultic

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<sup>45</sup> Westerholm: "In suggesting that some Gentiles will be approved by God on the basis of their works, Paul appears to allow in Romans 2 what chapters 1 and 3 categorically deny" (1988: 160).

<sup>46</sup> 1988: 159. Cf. N.M. Watson, 1983: 215.

<sup>47</sup> Sanders: "Even at the point at which Paul may most obviously be charged with true incoherence, the statements in Romans 2 that the sole basis of salvation is fulfillment of the law, we can see that he has been led to make use of material which is contrary to one of his central convictions (salvation by faith in Jesus Christ) by the desire to assert another one (the equality of Jew and Gentiles)" (1983a: 147).

<sup>48</sup> 1988: 4.

rituals or ethnic practices. Throughout 2.12-15 doing the law means acting in accordance with God's "moral law".<sup>49</sup> This is the result of Paul's argument already in 2.1-11, wherein he portrayed God's judgement as dependent upon one's ethical behaviour.<sup>50</sup>

2.16 has proven to be problematic for most interpreters. Paul writes there:

on the day when God will judge the secrets of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ.

Various theories have been suggested to interpret what Paul's meaning is. The fact that this verse is still being written off as a gloss,<sup>51</sup> despite the lack of any textual evidence for such an extreme measure, indicates the difficulty which this verse presents for a smooth reading of Paul. Probably, what Paul is emphasizing is that the principle of divine equality in judgement coincides with the message of the gospel that he preaches. But the function of 2.16 will become clearer in the light of Paul's comments in 2.29. We will return to this verse below.

#### **12.4. Paul's Second Attack on Jewish Ethical Superiority: 2.17-24.**

Only in 2.17 does Paul explicitly recognize the interlocutor as one who calls himself a Jew. Throughout 2.1-16, we have seen him to be a "typical" Jew whose self-identity is rooted in his covenant status, who prides himself on being "in the law", thinking himself to belong to the privileged people who are set apart from the heathen nations. Paul has attacked this confidence in various ways throughout 2.1-16, principally by deflating the Jewish claim of ethical superiority (2.1-11) and by recognizing that moral uprightness can be attributed even to gentiles (2.12-16). In 2.17-24, Paul's line of argument focuses again on undermining the Jewish sense of ethical superiority ("cutting the Jews down to the Gentiles' size"<sup>52</sup>), thereby paralleling his argument in 2.1-11. In 2.25-29 he will reargue his point that gentiles can be said to do the law, thereby paralleling his argument in 2.12-16.

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Räisänen, 1983: 26-28; Ziesler, 1989: 87.

<sup>50</sup> Sanders makes the point that, although a Jewish author knew the law to be broad in its significance, nonetheless he may well tend to limit its significance to one or two points for homiletical purposes (1983a: 135 n. 45). Other summaries of the law include loving one's neighbor and being charitable; see Bornkamm, 1963: 107-111.

<sup>51</sup> F. Watson, 1986: 116-17; Bultmann, 1967: 282-84.

<sup>52</sup> Ziesler, 1989: 92.

2.17-24 is fairly straight forward. Paul begins in 2.17-20 by characterizing “the Jew’s” confidence in the covenant in ways which “the Jew” himself might have done; he is one who boasts not in his own merits but in his privileged position, who has the law, knows God’s will and is, therefore, a guide to the blind and a light to those in darkness. But if “the Jew” considers himself to be unrivaled in his position before God because of his possession of the law and its benefits, Paul again questions whether that attitude is borne out by the ethical behaviour of “the Jew”. In 2.21-22, he sets up an incongruous relationship between the claim and the behaviour of “the Jew”; he preaches what he does not practice. The same case is made here as in 2.1 and 2.3; there it was in terms of judgement of others, here it is in terms of instruction of others. The ethical crimes cited against “the Jew” are robbery, adultery and sacrilege. Thus, Paul accuses “the Jew” of disobeying the very law which he possesses and takes pride in, and denounces him as a moral degenerate – one outside the boundaries of the covenant. “The Jew” himself boasts in God (2.17) and in the law (2.18), considering God to be the God of the Jews and the law to be the symbol of Israel’s election by God.<sup>53</sup> But although he considers himself to be one of the “righteous”, Paul portrays him as morally perverse; rather than pleasing God, he dishonours God (2.23). Once again, Paul has gone on the offensive against “the Jew’s” understanding of the covenant by deflating “the Jew’s” sense of ethical superiority.

Moreover, Paul goes on in 2.24 to apply this charge against not just the single exceptional Jew but against the whole of the covenant people. There he cites Isa 52.5 (LXX) to make his point: “The name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you (ὁ μὲν ἄς)”, the “you” having a plural referent. Whereas the LXX reading of this verse accuses the whole of Israel of unfaithfulness, Paul accuses the whole Jewish community of ethical laxity in order to undermine Jewish ethnocentrism. Here, then, is the first evidence of what we have expected all along – “the Jew” is Paul’s representative of the Jewish community at large.

But how can Paul make this charge against the *whole* of unbelieving Israel? Many take a view similar to that of E. Trocmé on this matter. Says Trocmé:<sup>54</sup>

Paul picks out *some* fields in which *some* Jews had a *few* crimes on their conscience and claims that it is enough to disqualify *the whole Jewish people*

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Wright, 1978: 82.

<sup>54</sup> 1985: 153, emphasis ours. Cf. Stendahl, 1976: 81.

as a Law-obedient group. A strange reasoning indeed, but colored by Paul's conviction that... a people is a unit which has one and the same fate.

This is a possible explanation, but its premise is not altogether clear from other Jewish sources of Early Judaism. That is, it is not evident from the extant Jewish texts that "a people is a unit which has one and the same fate". A good number of texts rely on precisely the opposite conviction: that a people consists of both the remnant and the unfaithful, each having their own "fate". We think, instead, that Paul's collective denunciation of the Jews follows on from the "grammar" of polemic and ethical denunciation, whereby the sins of the worst sinner can be applied to all those who stand outside the boundaries of the covenant of grace. Paul is simply following through on this premise, applying it to all those Jews who stand outside of the boundaries of the christian community. As we stated above, denunciation of this kind is possible only in view of a prior understanding of the boundaries of God's covenant grace.

At this point, Paul introduces his first explicit quotation of scripture since 1.17. In that it accuses the people of Israel of moral bankruptcy, this proof-text conforms perfectly with Paul's strategy of undermining ethnocentric covenantalism by disqualifying the ethical claim of "the Jew" who represents them. The implication is consistent with Paul's earlier point that, rather than protecting "the Jew" within the covenant, the law condemns those "within the law" who transgress its moral code (2.12). Once again, Paul characterizes the law not as a symbol of Israel's superior position before God but as a universal code of ethics.<sup>55</sup>

#### **12.5. What then of Circumcision?: 2.25-29.**

Whereas Paul's case in 2.17-24 paralleled that of 2.1-11 in criticizing Jewish ethical behaviour, his case in 2.25-29 parallels that of 2.12-16;<sup>56</sup> that is, having charged the Jewish community with ethical laxity, he once again juxtaposes that situation with the ethical awareness demonstrated by some gentiles. And once again, this is accomplished by removing covenantal value from the

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Dunn, 1988a: 108.

<sup>56</sup> Bassler considers 2.12-19 a unit in itself, following on from 1.18-2.11 (1984: 45-53). It seems best, despite Bassler, to take 1.18-32 as a description of the anthropological condition of sin, and 2.1-16 and 2.17-29 as two similarly constructed arguments against ethnocentric covenantalism; cf. Hübking: "In 2,1-16 und 2,17-29 liegen zwei parallele Gedankengänge vor" (1986: 27).



law which, thereby, comes to have solely ethical significance apart from ethnic boundaries. Thus, in 2.25 Paul immediately divorces circumcision from the arena of what doing the law entails: “For circumcision is of benefit if you practice the law” (2.25a). This would be a peculiar statement for “the Jew”; for him, circumcision is fundamental to the performance of the law. The law which God gave Israel prescribes that every Jew must carry on his flesh the mark of circumcision as a symbol of the covenant (esp. Gen 17.9-14). Paul, however, differentiates between “doing the law” and “circumcision”. Thus he writes in 2.25b: “but if you are a transgressor of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision”, again forcing the issue of “doing the law” beyond ethnocentric ritualism and into an ethical sphere (cf. 14.1-6).<sup>57</sup>

In 2.26, the law continues to transcend ethnic boundaries, still maintaining its solely ethical character: “If then the uncircumcised keeps the just requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be reckoned as circumcision?”. Paul once again takes from his dialogue partner the point that gentiles can do the law and turns it on its head by placing it within the confines of his own discussion wherein “doing the law” is a wholly ethical phenomenon. This technique was evident already in 2.14-15 where the same argument was given with the same end in view – to undermine the Jewish sense of ethical superiority.

The point is then driven further in 2.27, where Paul again introduces the theme of judgement: “and the naturally uncircumcised who fulfills the law will judge you who, in spite of the letter and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law”. Paul has already rebuked “the Jew’s” judgement of the gentile (2.1, 3) on the basis that, in ethical terms, “the Jew” is a *peer* to the gentile; Paul has also demonstrated that God’s own judgment (2.2, 5, 12-13) is not according to race but according to one’s works; finally the “judgement” theme goes full-circle as Paul draws the conclusion that it is, in fact, the moral gentile who judges the Jewish transgressor (probably in the sense that the gentile’s justice brings to the fore Jewish transgression more poignantly). The irony of this situation, Paul says, is that “the Jew” is condemned while he remains within the realm of “the letter” and of “circumcision” (*διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς*).<sup>58</sup> The point

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<sup>57</sup> Cf., e.g., Schreiner, 1989: 60-62.

<sup>58</sup> Paul uses the pejorative word *γράμμα* here, as in 7.6 where he contrasts living in the realm of the letter and living in the realm of the Spirit. Ethnocentric Jews have only “the external form” of the law (“the letter”) but lack what the law really requires. Cf. Westerholm, 1988: 211.

is made once again, therefore, that doing the law is wholly independent of ethnic consideration. Paul can make this claim because he portrays the law as an ethical guide. Furthermore, it should be noted that, as in 2.14-15, Paul's argument in 2.26-27 concerning the righteous gentile goes "against the grain" of his broader case.<sup>59</sup>

Paul rounds off his argument in 2.28-29 supplying his own definition of what it means to be a Jew; being a Jew has to do with an inner condition of the heart. The point is directed against the rite of circumcision, which was considered by most Jews of Paul's day as the indispensable marker of what being a Jew meant (cf. Gen 17.11: circumcision is the "sign of the covenant").<sup>60</sup> But Paul distinguishes between outward, physical circumcision and inward circumcision of the heart.<sup>61</sup> He is not simply arguing that ethnic symbols should be grounded in an inner piety if they are to have covenantal significance. His point is far more radical, arguing that ethnic symbols are salvifically irrelevant, for the inner condition of the heart is all that matters.<sup>62</sup> We know from Philo that there were Jews in Egypt who argued a similar line, finding circumcision and other ethnic symbols to be full of symbolic meaning without literal necessity (cf. *MigrAbr* 89-94). Most Jews of Paul's day would have denounced their position,<sup>63</sup> as did Philo, who argued that the command to circumcise was to be taken literally, no matter what symbolic significance the rite of circumcision might also contain. These same Jews would no doubt have denounced Paul's conclusion as well.

One point especially distinguishes Paul from the Egyptian Jews mentioned by Philo: Paul makes mention of the fact that circumcision of the heart is *by the Spirit*.<sup>64</sup> The significance of this can hardly be overemphasized; in 2.28-29 Paul has not only rooted the ethical doing of the law in an inner condition of the heart but has illustrated that that inner condition is itself facilitated only by the presence of the Spirit.<sup>65</sup> In that he later argues that the Spirit is with

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<sup>59</sup> Shaw: "It is difficult to avoid the impression that this is a purely tactical concession to the Gentiles, which is inconsistent with his earlier position [*viz.*, Rom 1.18-32]" (1983: 147).

<sup>60</sup> On the social significance of circumcision, see, e.g., Dunn, 1988a: 119-20.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Deut 10.16; Jer 4.4; 1QpHab 11.13; 1QS 5.4-5.

<sup>62</sup> See Moxnes, 1988: 70.

<sup>63</sup> Borgen argues that *MigrAbr* 86-93 demonstrates that those Jews who disparaged circumcision were subsequently persecuted by other Jews (1983: 38).

<sup>64</sup> Dunn: "it is now usually agreed by comparison with 7:6 and 2 Cor 3:6 that in Paul's intention  $\piνεῦμα$  = Holy Spirit, not the human spirit" (1988a: 124).

<sup>65</sup> This process of redefining the Jewish symbol of circumcision is evident in various early

those who have faith in Christ, Paul is fo<sup>e</sup>rshadowing his solution to the anthropological condition: faith in Christ, despite ethnic standing.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, his case here now throws the whole of 2.1-29 into a different light, for at this point it becomes evident that Paul understands the doing of the law to be a solely "christian" phenomenon. This does not sit well with the point which Paul has made along the way concerning non-believing gentiles who do the law. Evidently, after employing arguments which at various places go against the grain of his own beliefs in order to score points against his diatribe interlocutor (2.14-15, 26-27), Paul is forced in the end to "christianize" the case which those arguments allowed him to make (2.28-29). Evidently Paul's polemical arguments do not always match his personal conviction.

The same is true of 2.14-16. As we have seen, in 2.14-15 Paul borrows the conviction of "the Jew" that gentiles can do the law in order to turn it back upon "the Jew". The conviction that gentiles are able to do the law supports Paul's sociological argument (Jewish ethnocentricity has no case) but endangers his christological argument (faith is the only means to righteousness). Paul has evidently postulated a situation which he cannot envisage (the *non-christian* gentile doing the law) in order to undermine Jewish ethnocentrism. Once that sociological point is made, Paul's reflex is to sanitize his case by injecting it in 2.16 with a theological confession of confidence in God's sovereignty through Christ, thereby rescuing his christological case from being side-tracked and derailed.

We have seen, then, two cases in which Paul's personal conviction is subtly subordinated to his polemic (2.14-15, 26-27). In polemical argument, Paul manipulates the logic of "the Jew" in order to undermine "the Jew's" position. But in the process of his polemic, Paul endangers his christological corrective. So after first allowing "the Jew's" (manipulated) logic to have its desired effect, Paul must then alter the thrust of that logic by "christianizing" it. This can be contrasted with the situation in 3.5-6, where Paul again entertains a logic which is not his own, only to reject it altogether ("I am speaking *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον*"). But since he cannot retract his arguments in 2.14-15 and 2.26-27, he must infuse them finally with a christocentric focus in 2.16

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christian texts; see Ferguson, 1988.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Wilckens, 1978: 1.157; Räisänen, 1986g: 187.

and 2.28-29.<sup>67</sup> In this way, Paul allows his sociological polemic (*viz.*, some gentiles do the law) to do its damage, only to harness it finally in conformity with his own christological convictions.

### 12.6. God's Faithfulness and Impartiality: 3.1-8.

Many scholars, finding Rom 3.1-8 to be "one of the most puzzling passages in the epistle,"<sup>68</sup> have appreciated (to some degree) C.H. Dodd's estimation that the argument of this section is "weak and feeble" and that "the argument of the epistle would go much better if this whole section were omitted."<sup>69</sup> But such an estimation misses Paul's intention in these verses. In them, Paul defends his case of 2.1-29 by discrediting several charges which might be laid against it.<sup>70</sup>

In Rom 2, Paul's case for the impartiality of God allowed him to discredit Jewish confidence in their ethnic standing. The question which naturally arises then is that of 3.1: "What then is the advantage of the Jew, or what is the advantage of circumcision?" No doubt, "the Jew" would have sympathized with this question, and Paul's audience may well have expected his answer to have been "None whatsoever" (just as Dodd expected<sup>71</sup>). But, instead, Paul answers "Much in every way", since the Jews were entrusted with the oracles (*τὰ λόγια*) of God (3.2); that is, their advantage is their possession of the scriptures.<sup>72</sup> Because Paul considers the scriptures to contain the promise that God's righteousness will be revealed through faith (cf. 1.2, 3.21), the advantage of "the Jew" is that he stands first in line to enter into right relationship with God when that promise is fulfilled. Paul's reply in 3.2, therefore, is not as incredible as it might first have appeared; the advantage of "the Jew" does nothing to remedy his position in the state of sin, but allows him to recognize the remedy (*viz.*, christian faith) more readily. Paul does not allow Jewish advantage to impinge upon his case for divine impartiality since, for him, possession of the divine oracles does not translate into a salvific privilege apart from faith. As we

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<sup>67</sup> Ziesler, accepting Sanders' (unnecessary) suggestion that Paul is borrowing a Jewish synagogal sermon, finds 2.16 and 2.29 to be "where Paul goes beyond the Jewish material he has been using" (1989: 94). The point is the same as ours, although Ziesler mistakes Paul's polemical technique for evidence of a synagogal sermon.

<sup>68</sup> Hall, 1983: 183.

<sup>69</sup> Dodd, 1932: 71.

<sup>70</sup> In his sights specifically is the objection that he has applied the maxim of divine impartiality in a manner contrary to its proper usage. Cf. Bassler, 1982: 153.

<sup>71</sup> 1932: 168.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Doeve, 1953.

will see in 3.20, the law actually indicates the Jewish need for salvation along with the gentiles.

It is significant that the Jewish scriptures (here, τὰ λόγια) are *not* portrayed here as a tome of ethical prescriptions, as in 2.1-29. Instead, their revelatory character comes to the fore in this discussion of Jewish advantage; the Jewish scriptures reveal the ways of God for those who possess them. The irony for Paul is that the possessors of the scriptures have missed the point of God's ways, which of course culminate in Christ.<sup>73</sup>

The difficulties of this section begin at 3.3. From that point, it is difficult to know whether or not the diatribe continues throughout 3.1-8,<sup>74</sup> and if it does, where Paul speaks for himself and where for another (whether that be "the Jew" or a curious gentile).<sup>75</sup> The best solution, we think, is to consider that in 3.3, 3.5, and 3.7 Paul entertains three further queries which he expected "the Jew" to have in mind and which, if allowed to stand, would negate his conclusion. Paul answers these possible queries in 3.4, 3.6 and 3.8.

The query of 3.3 asks concerning the faithfulness of God: "if some have been unfaithful, has their unfaithfulness abolished God's faithfulness?" The "some" (τινες) who Paul has in mind here are those many Jews who have failed to put their faith in Christ (cf. τινες in 11.17), thereby being unfaithful to the scriptural record which they held in their possession and which prophesied that God's righteousness will be revealed in Christ.

It is of great importance to note that, in 3.2-3, Paul *does* recognize a covenant of some sort between God and Israel. He does not elaborate on this point until Rom 9-11;<sup>76</sup> until then, his allowance for some sort of a relationship between God and Israel never again resurfaces. But, as Paul's case in 3.2 shows, even within Paul's understanding of the covenant there is a clause which includes some advantage for ethnic Israel. And because of that clause, the unbelief of some (many) Jews<sup>77</sup> allows God's righteousness to be called into question in the manner of 3.3. The

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<sup>73</sup> Dunn notes that τὰ λόγια would mean even more for a gentile readership, evoking "the thought of inspired utterances preserved from the past, often mysterious and puzzling in character, awaiting some key to unlock their meaning" (1988a: 138).

<sup>74</sup> Hall argues throughout his article that it does not (1983).

<sup>75</sup> For discussion, see Stowers, 1984: 708-710; W.S. Campbell, 1981a: 31-32.

<sup>76</sup> For the relationship between Rom 3.1-8 and Rom 9-11, see Räisänen, 1986g; Wedderburn, 1988: 112-13.

<sup>77</sup> Because their unfaithfulness is their unbelief, ἀπιστία may here be legitimately trans-

point of 3.3 is that, if there is an ethnic clause in Israel's favour in Paul's understanding of the covenant, and if some Jews do not enjoy any benefits from that clause, is not God's righteousness in doubt? If the covenant allows some advantage to the Jew in the process of salvation history, and if that advantage has been rendered ineffective, is God not in some way responsible? And if this is the necessary result of Paul's argument, the very fact that it is unacceptable conclusion disproves Paul's case.

For Paul too, the idea of God being unfaithful is abhorrent, and he gives an emphatic denial to this idea in 3.4: "May it not be. Let God be true (faithful) and every man a liar (unfaithful<sup>78</sup>)". What he means by this becomes clearer in 3.4b where he quotes from the LXX of Ps 51.4 (LXX = 50.6): "so that you might be justified in your words and will be vindicated when you are judged" (*ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαί σε*). The scene is of a courtroom trial with God himself under the accusation of being unrighteous, as in 3.3. The plaintiff has already been identified as one who is unfaithful. So too in the original context of Ps 51, the author repeatedly acknowledged his lawlessness and sin (in the first five verses, *ἀνομημά* [once], *ἁμαρτάνω* [once], *ἀνομία* [thrice], *ἁμαρτία* [thrice]). But the sinner of Ps 51 (David) did not hold God accountable for his own sin but declared him to be righteous. Such is the biblical precedent, says Paul: The guilty party does not hold God accountable but affirms, in his own condemnation, the righteousness of God.

By proving in 3.4 that his argument does not imply that God is unfaithful, Paul has kept his argument from being derailed. Of course, for Paul, God's faithfulness to Israel does not entail the redemption of Israel at the expense of the gentiles. That position (ethnocentric covenantalism) he has already negated. For him, God's faithfulness is revealed in Jesus Christ and in him all have access to God by faith alone (christocentric covenantalism). But it is not until later that Paul explains how God can be said to be faithful to Israel. At present, he is content only to preserve the momentum of his case by insulating it from attack.

Having defended his argument against a first objection, Paul is now faced with a second

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lated by either "unfaithfulness" or "unbelief". Cf. Hall, 1983: 186; Räisänen, 1986g: 188-91. The sense of "covenant unfaithfulness" captures especially the point of the verse, since Paul juxtaposes it with God's own "covenant faithfulness".

<sup>78</sup> Black: *ψεύστης* here has the sense not just of "liar" but of an "unreliable, perfidious, faithless person" (1973: 63).

objection which springs from his insistence in 3.4 that God is faithful: "But if our unrighteousness illustrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust to inflict his wrath (upon us)?" (3.5).<sup>79</sup> The point is this: If Paul is right that God's faithfulness is clearly demonstrated by the guilt of the unfaithful Jew (3.4), and if Paul is right that God's impartial wrath falls upon the unfaithful Jew (Rom 2), then God's wrath falls upon the very one who proves him to be righteous; but that would seem to render him unrighteous, which cannot be the case; therefore, Paul must be wrong and the case for divine impartiality presented in Rom 2 is false. But Paul does not allow such a conclusion to be drawn from his argument (*μη γένοιτο*, 3.5c), and states in 3.6: "How else will (does) God judge the world?" C.K. Barrett notes three possible interpretations of this verse: "(I) If God is unrighteous how is he to judge? (II) If God is not to use his wrath how is he to judge? (III) If God does not punish Jews (as well as Gentiles) how is he to judge *the world*?"<sup>80</sup> The third option is probably the best, since it reaffirms what was called into question in 3.5 – *viz.*, that God's judgement is impartial. Paul's reply seems here simply to restate the point of 2.6-11: if God were not impartial, he could not be a just judge.<sup>81</sup> In effect, whereas the objection of 3.5 implies that Paul's argument concerning divine impartiality is in error, Paul's reply in 3.6 implies that divine impartiality proves his argument to be valid. There would appear to be something of an impasse between Paul and his objector, at least at this point of Paul's case.

Paul, thinking his point of 3.6 to be self-evident, then entertains in 3.7 another objection: "But if<sup>82</sup> the truth (*viz.*, faithfulness) of God has overflowed to his glory<sup>83</sup> because of my lie (*viz.*, unfaithfulness), how is it that I too (*καὶ γώ*) am judged to be a sinner?" This objection, like the first two, is concerned with the relationship between God's faithfulness and Jewish unfaithfulness. In the first, God's faithfulness was questioned since some are known to be unfaithful; in the second, God's righteousness was again questioned since he cannot impartially judge those who prove him

<sup>79</sup> Räisänen: "Das 'Wir' von V.5 ist zweifellos der ungläubige Jude" (1986g: 196).

<sup>80</sup> 1957: 64, emphasis his.

<sup>81</sup> So Hall, 1983: 191-2; F. Watson, 1986: 126. Bassler seems to miss this crucial point (1982: 153).

<sup>82</sup> The text should probably be read *εἰ δέ* rather than *εἰ γάρ*, as Hall reads it (1983: 192).

<sup>83</sup> So Dunn, 1988a: 136.

to be righteous. Since Paul does not allow such indictments against God's righteousness to be drawn from his case, the third objection goes in another direction by questioning whether "the Jew" can be rightly identified as a "sinner". The  $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\gamma\omega$  points to the objector's amazement that *even he* can be considered a sinner, along with the gentiles.<sup>84</sup> Once again, the objection is raised against Paul's case for the impartiality of God which flattens out ethnic distinctiveness; "how can I be judged in the same way as the gentile if God is faithful to his covenant responsibilities and, therefore, to me as a privileged Jew?" The problem for the objector is that Paul wants to maintain both God's impartiality *and* God's faithfulness to the privileged people simultaneously. "The Jew" is no doubt puzzled, and understandably so, since in Rom 2 Paul chided "the Jew" for thinking that divine impartiality and ethnic advantage could be maintained simultaneously. Throughout 3.1-5, however, "the Jew" has heard Paul doing precisely that. Paul appears to have gotten himself into a muddle, which the objections of 3.1-7 highlight; after having set the terms of the discussion in 2.1-11 (*viz.*, divine impartiality rules out ethnic advantage), he seems to contradict those rules in 3.2ff. While Paul goes on to explain in Rom 9-11 how divine impartiality and ethnic advantage can be held in complementarity, the objector is at a disadvantage by not yet knowing Paul's understanding of how these two are related.<sup>85</sup> Paul presents a fascinating argument in 11.11-33 in explanation of this.

In the meantime, however, Paul hopes to turn this objection to his own advantage in 3.8 where his words are to this effect: "Although Jewish unfaithfulness does not impinge upon God's faithfulness, if you think that God's continued faithfulness allows you to sin without consequence, then you are guilty of boldly saying, 'Let us do evil that good (*viz.*, the demonstration of God's faithfulness) may result'. Although my opponents have accused me taking this position, it is not my position but theirs, and their condemnation is well deserved." This verse gives us a view to the kind of disputes in which Paul and the opponents of his gospel were engaged.<sup>86</sup> As he will

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<sup>84</sup> Theissen: Rom 3.7 "is no doubt said from the perspective of the affected Jew, who has previously been threatened with judgement just like the sinful Gentile (Rom. 2:1ff.)" (1987: 193). Cf. Ziesler, 1989: 98.

<sup>85</sup> This tension between Paul's universalism and his recognition of Jewish privilege was already evident *in nuce* in 1.16: The gospel "is the power of God unto all who believe, for the Jew first and for the gentile".

<sup>86</sup> Wedderburn argues that issues raised by Paul's critics appear not only in 3.7-8 but also in 3.1-6 (1988: 115). Cf. Stowers, 1981: 177.



later pronounce, his gospel is of God's righteousness revealed through Christ *apart from the law* (*χωρὶς νόμου*). In the eyes of his opponents, this is a declaration of antinomianism since the law contains God's prescriptions for proper living. They accuse Paul, therefore, of promoting sin in order to prove God's righteousness, since God will remain faithful despite one's sin. Paul's perspective is the exact opposite; the one who promotes sin is "the Jew" who thinks that, despite his sin, God will be faithful to him.<sup>87</sup> Paul's charge throughout 2.1-29 is here restated in the most pronounced terms; by presuming upon the faithfulness of God, ethnocentric covenantalism leads to moral laxity, and is rightly condemned as an inadequate understanding of God and his redemptive workings in history.<sup>88</sup>

### 12.7. The Anthropological Condition Encompasses All: 3.9-20.

The conclusion that Paul wants his readers to accept before he introduces his christological corrective in 3.21ff appears in 3.9b: "all are under sin", the "all" including both Jews and gentiles. He argued in 1.18-2.29 that Jews have no claim to be ethically superior to the gentiles, and because he has framed this point in terms of the anthropological condition of sin in 1.18-32, he draws the conclusion of 3.9 in the light of that anthropological condition. For this reason, Paul thinks he can claim to have already proven (*προηγουμένως*) that all are under sin. Although in manoeuvring his case polemically Paul has entertained one idea (*viz.*, that gentiles can do the law) which is compatible with neither his conclusion (3.9)<sup>89</sup> nor with his depiction of the anthropological condition of sin (1.18-32), Paul now leaves that idea far behind. His case becomes quite simple; not only does "the Jew" have no claim to superiority over the gentiles, but, moreover, both Jew and gentile share the same position in the anthropological condition under sin (described in 1.18-32) and stand in need of redemption (described explicitly in 3.21ff).

After drawing his conclusion, Paul proceeds to support it with a catena of scriptural proof-texts. The first, a quotation from Eccl 7.20 (or Ps 13.1), makes his point most obviously:

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<sup>87</sup> It is evident here how necessary ethical integrity is in substantiating one's case; if the charge of antinomianism can be made to stick against one's behaviour, that charge rules out the appropriateness of one's claim to covenant membership.

<sup>88</sup> Thus, this section cannot be considered to contain merely "side issues", as Bassler estimates (1982: 153). Cf. also Dodd's estimation, at n. 69 above.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Bassler, 1984: 53-54; Räisänen, 1983: 106-107; *idem.*, 1986g: 191.

“There is none righteous, not even one.” This is one example of the Jewish sense of universal sinfulness before God. But whereas Paul’s contemporaries considered universal sin to be offset by God’s covenant which marked Israel off as superior to the other nations, nothing of the sort is possible in the context of Paul’s case. He has targeted his case against Jewish ethnocentrism, and he targets his reading of scripture in the same way. Throughout 3.10-12 runs the phrase “there is none” – none who are righteous or understand, none who seek God or do good; instead, all have turned away and have become worthless. Because this includes the Jew alongside the gentile in the anthropological condition, it also excludes Jewish confidence in their ethnic standing. So Paul, in his “postponed conclusion” of 3.22b-23,<sup>90</sup> states: “there is no distinction, for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

After the catena of verses ends, Paul drives the point home again in 3.19-20, first by stating that what the law says, it says to those “in the law”. And what it says (to the Jews!) is that, before God, *every* mouth is to be silent and *all* the world is held accountable (3.19). Again it should be noted that the same point could well have been made by “the Jew”; what distinguishes Paul’s case, however, is that it does not proceed to outline the salvific benefits of the covenant for Israel. For Paul, the anthropological condition of sin is the whole story, encompassing the whole of humanity and leaving no room for ethnic considerations. All mouths are silenced, and thereby have no recourse to ethnic defense.

Paul makes his point one final time in 3.20, this time framing it in terms of “works of law”. He inserts this expression into his reading of Ps 143 (LXX 142).2, where it was not originally: “because *by works of the law* (ἔργων νόμου) no flesh will be justified before him”. It is of great importance to recognize what Paul has in mind by this expression, which is used here for the first time in Romans. We join the ranks of many who currently argue that what Paul envisages by “works of law” are not legalistic merit points which one deposits before God in order to earn the right of salvation. Instead, the phrase signifies collectively those Jewish ritual practices which reinforced their self-identity as a unique and superior people – the covenant people of God.<sup>91</sup> Paul is referring to those Jewish “identity markers” (such as circumcision,

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<sup>90</sup> Bassler, 1982: 156; cf. Dahl, 1977: 79.

<sup>91</sup> See especially Dunn, 1988a: 153-55; *idem.*, 1983: 107-111; *idem.*, 1985: 527-32; Tyson,

referred to in 2.25-29) which serve to differentiate the Jews from the other nations – “the practice of the law within the Jewish community”.<sup>92</sup> The way Paul makes use of this phrase in Gal 2.16 reinforces this reading especially well in the context of Paul’s argument and in light of the dynamics surrounding the Antioch incident described there.<sup>93</sup> Thus, Paul’s point is made once again, this time by his reading of scripture itself: National status has no salvific value in and of itself, for God’s favour does not depend upon ethnic considerations.

It has become fashionable to speak of contradictions in Paul, and Paul’s comments in 3.20 have helped to facilitate this estimation. That is, all too often Paul’s words in 3.20 (“by works of the law no flesh will be justified before him”) have been juxtaposed with his words of 2.13 (“the doers of the law will be justified”).<sup>94</sup> In point of fact, however, Paul has two completely different arguments going in the two cases. Whereas “works of the law” in 3.20 makes reference to *ritualistic identity markers*, “doing the law” in 2.13 is rooted in Paul ethical denunciation of “the Jew” and, as such, refers to *moral uprightness*. Paul argues that (1) Jews have no claim to righteousness on the basis of their nationalistic “works of law”, and (2) those who do the moral requirements of the law demonstrate themselves to be the righteous ones. There is no

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1973: 424-25; Sanders, 1983a: 46; F. Watson, 1986: 129-30; Snodgrass, 1988: 102; W.S. Campbell, 1988: 7; Barth, 1974: 1.244-48.

<sup>92</sup> F. Watson, 1986: 36.

<sup>93</sup> See esp. Dunn, 1983. This understanding is, of course, not shared by all. Most recently, for instance, Westerholm has challenged this reading on several fronts (1988: 117-19). One of Westerholm’s criticisms is directly related to Rom 3.20. He notes that in Rom 2.21-22 Paul has attacked “the Jew” on moral grounds; the Jew has not met the basic moral requirements of the law contained in the Decalogue. These (ethical) practices, claims Westerholm, are what Paul has in mind by the phrase “works of the law”; no one can be justified by moral performance (“works of law”) because no one does what the law requires for ethical behaviour; the problem with “works of the law” is, in Westerholm’s opinion, that “Jews do not do them” (p. 121).

While it is true that Paul’s critique of “the Jew” does, of course, depend upon charges of moral inadequacy, this does not necessitate identifying “works of law” in any other way than as Jewish “identity markers”. Paul’s point in Rom 3.20 is that, because of “the Jew’s” moral inadequacy, he has no claim to covenant membership, no matter what ethnic symbols (“works of the law”) he might wear. His charge here is no different from that of 2.25: “if you break the law [*viz.*, the moral requirements of the law], your circumcision has become uncircumcision”. That is, because even “the Jew” does not keep the moral requirements of the law (demonstrated in 3.10-18; cf. 2.1-24), so Jewish “works of the law” (3.20; cf. circumcision in 2.25-29) which “the Jew” *does* practice (contra Westerholm) are rendered salvifically null and void. Thus, Paul’s charge against the salvific efficacy of nomistic practices in 3.20 depends upon his charge of ethical inadequacy in Rom 2, and his scriptural charge in 3.10-18.

<sup>94</sup> Recently, Boers has argued that the two demonstrate a blatant contradiction (1988: 61). Conversely, see Snodgrass, 1986: 84-85.

contradiction here.

With 3.20b, Paul goes further in redefining the function of the law; the law brings the knowledge of sin. That is, instead of reinforcing the Jewish sense of national superiority, the law is intended to make those "within the law" aware that they too stand with the gentiles under sin, thereby discrediting Jewish confidence in their ethnic identity. In Paul's eyes, Jewish possession of the law should not bolster ethnic pride but should flatten it; by the law comes the knowledge of sin, and by that knowledge one is reminded that there is no distinction, for no one is righteous before God.

Underlying the whole of Paul's case in 1.18-3.20 are two key points: (1) the principle of divine impartiality, and (2) the conviction that all are under sin.<sup>95</sup> Each of these two points are commonplace within Early Judaism but Paul employs them in a completely different fashion, due to his peculiar understanding of the covenant, which he lays out in its first explicit form in 3.21ff, one of the passages with which the next chapter deals.

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Bassler, 1982: 154.

## CHAPTER 13

### The Christological Corrective and the Community of Grace

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In this chapter, three passages will be examined: Rom 3.21-31, 9.30-10.13 and 7.7-8.4. From these passages a fairly consistent picture emerges concerning Paul's reflections on the law and the people of God as he legitimates his mission in terms of christian self-definition. After analysing Rom 3.21-31 (sect. 13.1.), an analysis of Rom 9.30-10.13 follows (sect. 13.2.). These two passages demonstrate the lines of Paul's thought concerning the matters at hand, and similar themes are evident in each. Finally, Rom 7.7-8.4, one of the thorniest passages in the Pauline corpus, will be approached (sect. 13.3.) and an interpretation suggested in the light of the findings from chapter 12 (above) and from 13.1. and 13.2.

#### 13.1. The Community of Grace and the Law (1): 3.21-31.

One of the central themes upon which Paul built his case in 1.18-3.20 is the impartiality of God. As such, he made the claim that Jewish ethnocentrism is a misunderstanding of the ways of the covenant God. In Rom 3.21-31 – “the theological centre and basis of Paul's argument in Rom. i-xi”,<sup>1</sup> the “heart of Paul's gospel”<sup>2</sup> – the same theme appears. Once again Paul employs it to negate the idea that righteousness is ethnically determined. Moreover, this theme underlies the solution to the anthropological condition of sin, which Paul posits here in its first explicit form: the corrective is faith, which is available to all in relation to the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

The first occurrence of the theme of divine impartiality is in 3.22, where Paul restates his point of 3.9: “for there is no difference” between Jew and gentile. Having stated this, Paul again introduces into his discussion the problem which inflicts itself upon all humanity without distinction: “for all sinned and fall short of God's glory” (3.23). In 3.29-30, Paul embellishes this

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<sup>1</sup> W.S. Campbell, 1981a: 26.

<sup>2</sup> Scroggs, 1976: 276, n. 16.

<sup>3</sup> We are intentionally ambiguous here in light of the controversy surrounding the phrase πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, a controversy stirred up afresh by Hooker 1989; Keck, 1989: 452-57; Williams, 1987; *idem.*, 1975; Hays, 1983.

to mean that, since all are equal in the problem, so the corrective must be the same for all. Once again, divine impartiality is the principle upon which his case rests: “Is God of the Jews only? Is he not God of the gentiles also? Indeed of the gentiles as well, since God is one” (εἷς ὁ θεός).

Paul, no doubt, intends here to marshal in support of his case the basic affirmation of Jewish ethnocentric covenantalism – the affirmation that God is one. This affirmation stands as the front<sup>ⲓ</sup>piece of the Shema (“Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one...”), the prayer which was offered daily by the pious Jew based on Dt<sup>ⲉⲩ</sup> 6.4-9, 11.13-21, and Num 15.37-41. In Deut 6.4, the God who is one is identified more specifically as Israel’s God: “The Lord our God (MT: ·|] ʾיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ; LXX: ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν), the Lord is one”. Immediately following this in Deuteronomy there appears the command to love God and to obey the commandments which he has given Israel in order that they might live pleasingly before him, in distinction from the other nations (Deut 6.5ff). Paul, however, extracts the affirmation from this ethnocentric context and works it in support of his own case *against* ethnocentrism;<sup>4</sup> if God is one, he is the God not only of Israel (cf. Deut 6.4: ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν) but of both Jews and gentiles. Accordingly, Paul writes: “he will justify both the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith” (3.30). Any distinction which might be made between “the circumcision” and “the uncircumcision” is, says Paul, salvifically irrelevant, for the basis of salvation for all is faith. In this way, Paul makes a case which disqualifies Jewish ethnocentrism by means of the central affirmation of Early Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Once again, Paul’s strategy evident throughout 2.1-29 reappears; he picks up one strand of the logic of ethnocentric covenantalism and reapplies it in a new manner for his own purposes.

Just as the principle of divine impartiality is not employed by Paul in some sterile, philosophical fashion, the same is true of Paul’s use of the phrase “the righteousness of God”, a key component of his case in 3.21-26. It refers not to an abstract metaphysical attribute of divinity, but is a relational term which denotes the saving activity of God in history “on behalf of those to whom he has committed himself”.<sup>6</sup> Paul’s argument is that those to whom God has

<sup>4</sup> Dahl: “To the rabbis, the confession of the One, who alone is God, implied willingness to observe his commandments. Paul, on the contrary, gives a polemic twist to the monotheistic confession, turning it against the Jew who relies on the Law and boasts of his special relation to God” (1977: 190). Cf. Meeks, 1983: 167-68.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wright, 1978: 66; *idem.*, 1980: 47, 73. Dunn, 1988a: 193.

<sup>6</sup> Dunn, 1988a: 166. Cf. Dahl, 1977: 99-100. See also Kertelge’s definition of this phrase,

committed himself – those who participate in a covenant relationship with him<sup>7</sup> – are not the Jews *per se*, as had generally been held in Early Judaism, but all those who have faith (3.22).<sup>8</sup> This, of course, is not just any kind of faith; even Jews outside the christian community could claim to have faith in God. Paul retains saving faith as the exclusive possession of the *christian* community by coupling divine grace with being “in Christ”: “having been justified freely by his grace (τῆ ἀυτοῦ χάριτι) through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (3.24). Although the syntax of the participle is awkward,<sup>9</sup> δικαιούμενοι has direct reference to those of 3.22 who have faith (τοὺς πιστεύοντες). Their faith is met by God’s grace, an interaction which takes place only ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

The grace which the christian community enjoys is eschatological in character; it is grace imparted only within the boundaries of the new age which has dawned. Within 3.21-26 Paul sets his gospel of faith within this temporal context, drawing up a contrast between the former situation of sin (which permeated humanity and provoked God’s wrath) and the present situation, the eschatological “now” (3.21: νυνί; 3.26: ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ).<sup>10</sup> The remedy for sin (*viz.*, God’s righteousness through faith) is itself temporally determined, being intrinsically tied to the Christ-event, described in sacrificial terms in 3.25. The problem of the power of sin could not have been solved at just any point along the way, for the corrective has become “available” only with the change of the ages.

With the temporal shift to the “now”, it has become obvious to Paul how God’s righteousness operates; his saving grace can no longer be restricted to an ethnic people, for it is manifest in the present time within the eschatological community of believers, and only there. To think otherwise is to misunderstand God’s ways and to incorrectly estimate the nature of his covenant.<sup>11</sup>

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1967: 75.

<sup>7</sup> See the way the term “righteousness of God” is employed in Deutero-Isaiah and the Psalms, as noted by Williams, 1980: 260-63. Cf. Dahl: “Especially in the Psalms and in Second Isaiah, God’s ‘righteousness’ means his saving righteousness, his vindication of himself and of his covenant people” (1977: 96).

<sup>8</sup> Moxnes: Paul is “marking off new identities and borders” (1988: 64).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Cranfield, 1975a: 205.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bornkamm, 1969a: 62-64.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Trocmé, 1985: 151.

This is what stands behind Paul's case in 3.21a where he says that the righteousness of God is now manifest "apart from law" (*χωρὶς νόμου*). It must be clear what Paul has in mind here. His point is not, as some have suggested, God's righteousness is apart from law because keeping the law is impossible.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the expression *χωρὶς νόμου* in 3.21a should be understood along the lines of Paul's comment regarding "works of law" in 3.20: "no one will be justified before him by works of law" (*ἐξ ἔργων νόμου*). As we saw earlier (ch. 12), by "works of law" Paul has in mind the *ethnic* practices of the law which marked out the Jewish people from the other nations – the "badges of national privilege".<sup>13</sup> The same phrase, "works of law", appears again in 3.28 where Paul writes: "a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (*χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου*). Paul means to divorce the righteousness of God from the arena of Jewish ethnocentrism and its identity markers.<sup>14</sup> Such a contentious move turns ethnocentric covenantalism on its head, but it follows in Paul's mind from his case which culminated in 3.20. And he has nothing else in mind by the phrase *χωρὶς νόμου* in 3.21a. Paul is claiming that God's righteousness is conferred without being restricted to the Jewish way of life, a way of life which he characterizes here as a life of "law".<sup>15</sup> Paul's statement in 3.21a, that "God's righteousness has been manifest apart from the law", is simply a restatement of 3.20 wherein Paul claimed that righteousness cannot be attained to by means of ethnically restrictive practices, as he argues also in 3.28.<sup>16</sup>

It is just as important to note that, while Paul denounces "works of the law" (*viz.*, the markers of ethnic membership) as salvifically irrelevant, he does not denounce the law itself. In fact, after stating that God's righteousness is *χωρὶς νόμου*, Paul immediately adds the phrase, "testified to by the law (*ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου*) and the prophets" (3.21). No doubt he is referring here to the Jewish scriptures, *νόμος* equaling Torah. Although God's righteousness has been made

<sup>12</sup> Schreiner has argued this case in his 1984 and 1985 articles. Cf. Westerholm, 1988: 166-67, and elsewhere.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, 1978: 82.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sanders, 1983a: 46; Wright, 1980: 72-73; Dunn, 1985: 529; *idem.*, 1988a: 186. Contra Moo: "Paul appears to criticize 'works of the law; not because they are *νόμου* ('of the law') but because they are *ἔργα* ('works')" (1983: 97).

<sup>15</sup> Cf., e.g., Williams, 1980: 271; Ziesler, 1989: 109; F. Watson, 1986: 132-34.

<sup>16</sup> Cranfield: "*χωρὶς νόμου* here is equivalent in significance to *χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου* in v.28" (1975a: 201). Cranfield misunderstands the significance of both phrases, however, thinking them to point to Jewish legalism.



manifest only “now”, it was foretold in the scriptures. (This point underlies Paul’s comment in 3.2 that the advantage of “the Jew” lies in the fact that the “oracles of God” were already in his possession.) In this way, what might appear to others as a Pauline innovation – viz., the claim that God’s righteousness is apart from ethnic considerations – is rooted in the revelation of God which the Jews (that is, those who are “in the law”) have possessed all along (2.12, 17-20). Accordingly, Paul clothes his gospel with the garb of continuity with God’s workings throughout Jewish history. Although God’s righteousness is mediated in the “now” by faith, this is not out of line with his previous revelations of himself. In fact, it is the fulfillment of those previous revelations.

The first two points – God’s righteousness apart from ethnic consideration but testified to by the Jewish scriptures – stands behind Paul’s question in 3.31: “Therefore do we invalidate the law through faith? May it not be, but we establish the law.” Paul does, of course, intend to invalidate *the ethnic identity markers* (ἔργα νόμου in 3.20, 28) or a nomistic manner of life (νόμος in 3.21a) as salvifically effective, but he evidently did not envisage invalidating *the law* – the self-revelation of God. For Paul, stripping away “works of the law” from the concept of righteousness did not invalidate the law; in fact, faith as the sole means of appropriating God’s righteousness is itself the establishment of the law, for the law and the prophets had foretold of this situation all along (3.21, as he goes on to show in Rom 4).<sup>17</sup> As S. Westerholm states, Rom 3.31 is a demonstration that “according to Paul, the *true* nature and purpose of the Law come to light when it is viewed from the perspective of justification by faith”.<sup>18</sup>

With these aspects of Paul’s case in 3.21-31 in mind, we now turn our attention specifically to Rom 3.27, a verse of utmost importance if Paul’s argument is to be properly grasped. There Paul writes:

Where then is boasting? It has been excluded. By what kind of νόμου? Of works? No, but through the νόμου of faith.

Controversial in this verse is Paul’s double mention of νόμος; does he mean to refer to the

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<sup>17</sup> Cf., e.g., Cranfield, 1975a: 205; Dunn, 1988a: 191.

<sup>18</sup> 1988: 122, n. 47.

Torah/scripture or to a general principle/rule?<sup>19</sup> Many think the latter to be the case. So H. Räisänen states<sup>20</sup>

dass jeder νόμος in V.27 eine 'Ordnung' meint. νόμος πίστεως ist die Heil-sordnung, die auf Glauben fundiert ist; νόμος τῶν ἔργων die Ordnung, die auf Werke des Gesetzes aufgebaut wurde.

This is certainly both possible and sensible within the contours of Paul's case. Nonetheless, the equation of νόμος in 3.27 with the Torah (or scripture) fits well with what Paul has argued at four points throughout 3.19-31 wherein the same equation appears (3.19, 20, 21b, 31). Of course, Paul could be playing with the term in 3.27, giving it a different meaning for effect; he seems to do so in 7.21 where νόμος is best understood to mean "principle", and in 3.21a where νόμος referred not to the biblical text but to a nomistic manner of life. In our opinion, however, Räisänen's estimation (quoted above) does not hit the mark. This is due not only to the four references throughout 3.19-31 where νόμος does refer to the biblical text but, more significantly, to the context of Paul's thought in view of what has preceded 3.27. The issue of this verse is "boasting", which Paul has made reference to in 2.17 and 2.23 when speaking of Jewish pride in their covenant relationship with God. The basis of this ethnocentric boast is *Jewish possession of the νόμος* = Torah/scripture. Says Paul, "the Jew" "relies on the law" (ἐπιαναπαύη νόμῳ) and so boasts in God (2.17); being instructed by the law (κατηχούμενος ἐκ τοῦ νόμου; 2.18), he considers himself the better of others because he has the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law (τῆς γνώσεως καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐν τῷ νόμῳ; 2.20); accordingly, he *boasts* in the law (ὄς ἐν νόμῳ καυχᾶσθαι; 2.23).

Already, then, Paul has established an intricate connection between Jewish boasting and their possession of the biblical texts – ὁ νόμος. (The Jews are, after all, ἐν νόμῳ.) When the two terms appear again in 3.27, the reference of each is presumably the same as in 2.17-23 unless otherwise clarified. But Paul does not indicate that the references have changed. Moreover, had he wished to avoid the identification of νόμος as the Torah or scripture, he could easily have left the word out altogether without damaging his case in the least. That is, he could well have

<sup>19</sup> Wilckens has argued that such a translation ("principle") is impossible (1978: 2.122) but Räisänen has demonstrated otherwise (1986d, 1986e).

<sup>20</sup> 1986d: 112. Cf. *idem.*, 1983: 50-52; Barrett, 1957: 83; Sanders, 1983a: 33; F. Watson, 1986: 132; Ziesler, 1989: 118.

written Πού οὐν ἡ καύχησις; ἐξεκλείσθη. διὰ τῶν ἔργων; οὐχί, ἀλλὰ διὰ πίστεως. As soon as he introduces νόμος into this context concerned with boasting, precedent suggests that he is referring to the biblical text, rather than simply juxtaposing two “principles”. Paul here has introduced a distinction with reference to the law through the genitives which modify it: works and faith. So C.F.D. Moule makes note of “Paul’s notoriously flexible and poignant uses of the genitive”.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, K. Snodgrass finds that nouns in the genitive case “are not incidental ‘add-ons’ for Paul, but often carry as much or more force than the noun they qualify”.<sup>22</sup> Such would seem to be the case here where a distinction in Paul’s concept of the law (= Torah) appears through his use of the genitives ἔργων and πίστεως.

In 3.27, then, Paul demonstrates his concern to undermine Jewish ethnocentric pride,<sup>23</sup> and he does so by attacking its very basis: the possession of the law. Instead of *promoting* ethnocentric boasting (as Paul demonstrates in 2.17-23), the law *excludes* such nationalistic confidence. Paul makes this claim by (re)defining the concept of Torah (νόμος) according to his own gospel of faith; the law is not one of (ethnocentric) works but of faith.<sup>24</sup> Because faith is the prerequisite of righteousness for both Jew and gentile (3.28-30), Paul says in 3.31 that faith *establishes* the law. Paul contends that in the “now”, the law promotes not nomistic practice but faith; for this reason, he speaks of the Torah in 3.27 as the “law of faith”.<sup>25</sup> When the law is used improperly as a badge of ethnic superiority and national security (cf. 2.17-23), the law brings condemnation (cf. 3.20, 5.20); as such, Paul speaks of it as the “law of works” (3.27). The law in both cases is the Torah of divine revelation as it is rightly and wrongly used or perceived.

In our estimation, this interpretation of 3.27 makes the best sense of the verse within

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<sup>21</sup> 1974: 181.

<sup>22</sup> 1988: 101.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sanders, 1983a: 33; Räisänen, 1983: 170-71; *idem.*, 1986b: 34-35; Howard, 1970: 232-33; Wilckens, 1978: 1.248; F. Watson, 1986: 133-35; Moxnes, 1988: 71; Snodgrass, 1988: 101; Dunn, 1988a: 185; Ziesler, 1989: 43, 117. Unless 3.27 refers to the Jewish boast of “national righteousness”, the question of 3.29 does not follow; cf. Wright, 1980: 97.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Friedrich, 1954; Lohse, 1973; Hübner, 1984a: 115-16, 138, 144; Cranfield, 1975a: 220; Wilckens, 1978: 1.245; Wright, 1980: 117; Dunn, 1988a: 185-87; Rhyne, 1981: 68-70; Snodgrass, 1988: 101-103; Stuhlmacher, 1985: 97; *idem.*, 1989: 62-63; von der Osten-Sacken, 1975: 226-32, 245-46; *idem.*, 1989: 13-19, 23-33; and, modified, Gaston, 1987: 31, 75, 131, 172.

<sup>25</sup> Dunn: νόμος πίστεως is the “law addressed to faith and fulfilled through faith” (1988a: 187).

the context of Paul's argument in Romans, despite the denials of many.<sup>26</sup> Sanders, for instance, finds this reading "clearly impossible" for the reason that it makes "nonsense of Paul's view of the death of Christ".<sup>27</sup> But this is a strange criticism coming from the man who popularized anew the estimate that Paul's thought proceeded from solution to plight, that Paul's "soteriology" explains his view of the law, rather than *vice versa*, and that Paul's various portrayals of the law are contingent upon his various points of argument and cannot be systematized. The fact is that Paul is not, of course, explaining the death of Christ, but is defining in 3.27 the constituency of the eschatological covenant people. In Early Judaism, "covenant" and "law" went hand in hand, and the same is true for Paul's innovative definition of the covenant. Having already restricted God's covenant grace to the "in Christ" community of faith in 3.21-26, Paul immediately makes claim to the law on behalf of that faith community. To do so, Paul makes an unusual but useful distinction with regard to the law which supports his definition (*viz.*, it is a "law of faith") and which includes a denunciation of other definitions of the covenant; for them, the law has nothing to do with faith (a provocative claim!) but is inferior, operating as a "law of works" (perhaps a legalistic note is evident here; see below). In his battle for the definition of the community of grace, Paul has to battle also for the definition of the law. This is evident in stark terms in 3.27. Accordingly, the dangers of speaking (as some do) of "Paul's Christ-Torah antithesis"<sup>28</sup> are readily apparent.

Already in this brief passage (3.21-31) we have seen something of the variety of ways in which Paul makes use of the word νόμος. First, it referred in 3.21a to the distinctively Jewish "way of life", a life that is thoroughly "nomistic" in orientation. So Paul says that God's righteousness is now shown to be "apart from law" (*χωρὶς νόμου*). Second, νόμος was employed in 3.21b in reference to the Torah, God's revelation of himself which the Jews have possessed (3.2; cf. 2.12: they are "in the law"). In this regard, Paul says that God's righteousness "apart from law" is testified to by the Jewish scriptures – *viz.*, the law (= Torah) and the prophets. Third, Paul recognizes νόμος (=Torah) to be subject to two "perspectives", one which is improper

<sup>26</sup> Esp. Räisänen, 1983: 42-52.

<sup>27</sup> 1983a: 15, n. 26. Sanders recognizes that the "boasting" mentioned in 3.27 must refer back to the two references of "boasting" in 2.17-23, but he fails to apply the same method to the νόμος of 3.27, which occurs four times throughout 2.17-23.

<sup>28</sup> Donaldson, 1989.

with regard to its intentions and the other which fulfills its intentions. On the one hand, the Torah can be regarded as the “law of works” (3.27) – that is, the law understood as prescribing ethnocentric practices as the symbols of covenant membership, “the law as a charter of national privilege”.<sup>29</sup> When understood in this way, the law does not exclude boasting (3.27) but promotes Jewish boasting in their covenant membership at the expense of the gentiles (2.17,23). On the other hand, the law can be regarded as the “law of faith” (3.27) – that is, the law understood as prescribing faith as the symbol of membership in the community of God’s grace (cf. 1.2, 3.21b). When understood in this way, the law does not promote Jewish boasting but excludes it (3.27), for God, who is one, justifies Jew and gentile alike by faith (3.28-29). Accordingly, faith establishes the law (3.31).

S. Westerholm has recently challenged the reading of Rom 3.21-31 which has been advocated herein. Westerholm charges that Rom 4.1-5 is “positively fatal” for any reading which considers Paul’s critique in 3.21-31 to operate on the level of an attack on Jewish ethnocentrism. Extending his case of 3.21-31 in 4.1-25, Paul refutes there not simply ethnocentrism but, according to Westerholm, the general notion of works altogether. This is evident by his denial that Abraham could have boasted before God of any “works” which might have been to his credit. Says Westerholm: “the ‘works’ by which Abraham could conceivably have been justified, and of which he might have boasted (4:2), were certainly not observances of the peculiarly Jewish parts of the Mosaic law”.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, Westerholm considers this to be proof that what Paul is attacking is the notion of the salvific sufficiency of “works in general”, rather than ethnocentric practices in specific.

Westerholm’s criticism suffers, we think, in that it does not grapple with the manner in which the figure of Abraham functioned in Early Judaism; in Jewish self-definition, and in Jewish attempts to preserve their distinctive way of life, Abraham played an essential role. For instance, in times of national or religious persecution, the example of Abraham’s faithfulness to God in times of testing (Gen 22) helped to bolster Jewish concerns to preserve their ethnic

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, 1980: 97.

<sup>30</sup> 1988: 119. Cf. Moo, 1983: 94-96.

distinctiveness in faithfulness to God.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Abraham was considered to be the ideal Jew, and, in this regard, he was said to have observed the Mosaic law *in toto* even before it was revealed to Moses<sup>32</sup> – a fact which itself calls into question Westerholm's claim (cited above). In fact, a central theme throughout Jubilees is the insistence that the patriarchs observed all the Mosaic prescriptions for ethnic distinctiveness. So, for instance, Abraham's obedience to the Mosaic law is evidenced by his participation in the feast of weeks (6.19, 14.20, 15.1-2, 22.1-9) and the feast of booths (16.20-31). Accordingly, as F. Watson states,<sup>33</sup> in Early Judaism Abraham is depicted

as a model of obedience to God. His function is to reflect and legitimate the self-understanding of the pious and loyal Jew of the present. He too, like Abraham, must separate himself from the ways of the Gentiles and devote himself wholly to the law of God, whatever the suffering this entails. The figure of Abraham symbolizes this sense of a unique status, privilege and responsibility.

In many ways, then, the Jews of Early Judaism looked to Abraham as the model Jew and forefather of Jewish society, claiming for him what they considered to be essential to their own self-identity.

In the light of this, it seems unlikely that Paul's reference to Abraham has little to do with Jewish ethnocentrism. Instead, it more likely has everything to do with it. As N.T. Wright notes, "Paul's critique of 'works'...functions *within* his critique of 'national righteousness'".<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, it has yet to be determined *how* this critique of "works" functions within a critique of Jewish particularism. And here there are two possibilities. That is, two senses can be applied to "works" in 4.1-5 without disregarding Paul's intention to upset nationalistic definitions of the covenant, and the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Each will be noted presently.

First, it is arguable that by "works" Paul is thinking in 4.1-5 specifically of ethnic practices which distinguish Jews from gentiles. This would fit well with what we know of Abraham's significance in Early Judaism. Moreover, it would be consistent with the manner in which Paul

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<sup>31</sup> E.g., Jub 17.15-18, 21.21-22; Jud 8.25-27; 1Macc 2.52; 4Macc 14.20, 16.19-20; PsPhilo 40.2-5.

<sup>32</sup> Gen 26.5; Jub 16.28; Sir 44.20; 2Bar 57.2.

<sup>33</sup> 1986: 137. See his fuller analysis on pp. 136-38. Cf. Dunn, 1988a: 200-201; R.N. Longenecker, 1977: 204-205.

<sup>34</sup> 1980: 97.

employs the term “works” (in conjunction with “boasting”) in 3.27 and with the manner in which the “faith–works” dichotomy is replaced in 4.9-12 by a “faith–circumcision” dichotomy, still in reference to Abraham. Furthermore, this interpretation makes good sense of Paul’s concern in 4.1-25 to identify Abraham as the father of those who believe rather than of those whose self-identity is determined by their place within the realm of the law (4.14: οἱ ἐκ νόμου; cf. 4.16) and for whom the outward mark of circumcision is all-important. It is this sense of ἔργα (= ethnic identity markers, or nomistic practice) which we suspect was uppermost in Paul’s mind throughout 4.1-5. His sights are set on toppling the salvific necessity of these practices (“works”).<sup>35</sup>

But if the “semantic field” of Paul’s argument suggests that by ἔργα Paul has distinctively Jewish practices in mind, it is also arguable, even in conjunction with what has just been shown in the previous paragraph, that within 4.1-5 Paul *expands* his critique of Jewish ethnocentrism *to include* a charge of legalism. Paul incorporates in 4.4-5 an analogy of a worker who tries to earn a wage by his own efforts, expecting to be rewarded according to his labours. It is not hard to hear a charge of legalism behind this analogy.<sup>36</sup>

It needs to be seen, however, that *if* Paul is charging Jews with the attempt to *earn* their salvation by works in a legalistic sense, even this plays a part within Paul’s case against Jewish ethnocentrism. It is necessary here to distinguish between *what* Paul is fighting against (*viz.*, Jewish ethnocentrism rather than legalism) and *how* he fights against it.<sup>37</sup> A charge of legalism may well have aided Paul’s larger attempt to discredit Jewish particularism. Quite simply, once Paul has argued that God’s covenant grace is restricted to the christian community, any Jews outside of that community who expect God to look favourably upon their ethnic practices could well be accused of attempting to earn salvation apart from God’s grace. They think they are *reacting* to God’s grace by their ethnic practices, but, as Paul insists, the proper response is faith.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ziesler, 1989: 123-25; Dunn, 1988a: 200-205, 226-28; Räisänen, 1983: 171; *idem.*, 1986c: 82; Sanders, 1983a: 34-35; F. Watson, 1986: 138-41.

<sup>36</sup> Although Räisänen accepts the first “ethnocentric” explanation of “works” in 4.1-5, he nonetheless thinks Paul’s comments in 4.4-5 to “lend themselves to a Bultmannian interpretation” (1983: 171). So, most recently, Hübner has followed a Bultmannian interpretation (1984a: 118-24).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Räisänen, 1986c: 82.

By rejecting this requirement of covenant relationship (faith), ethnocentric Jews are seen to be *acting* by their own efforts (*viz.*, their ethnic “works of law”) in order to gain God’s grace. In that sense, ethnocentric Jews are comparable to a worker who expects a wage for his toil (4.4-5). As we have seen, 4 Ezra demonstrates that, when God’s grace is removed from ethnocentric definitions of the covenant, ethnocentrism is replaced by legalism. The same would be true of Paul’s charge in Rom 4.1-5, following on from 3.21-31 where he demonstrated that God’s grace is upon the christocentric community, not upon the ethnic group of the Jews *per se*. Outside of the christian community of faith, any “pursuers” (9.31) of righteousness are simply spinning their wheels, acting on their own accord, but to no avail. They are guilty, in this way, of the charge of legalism, a characteristic which most Jews (and certainly all *ethnocentric* Jews) would have shunned, but one which (Paul may be intimating) applies to them since they are outside the boundaries of God’s covenant grace.<sup>38</sup> In this way Paul’s case against Jewish ethnocentrism may well have included a charge of legalism;<sup>39</sup> outside the christian community the Jew who thinks himself to respond to God’s grace by his nomistic practice is, in Paul’s eyes, attempting to earn salvation through works, thereby cutting himself off from God’s promise to establish for/through Abraham a worldwide family by means of righteous–reckoning faith.

In either of these interpretations, “Paul’s critique of ‘works’... functions *within* his critique of ‘national righteousness’”. Paul’s sights have not moved off the target of rejecting Jewish ethnocentrism. In 3.21-31, that target is attacked directly with the designations “works of the law” and “works” which denote practices characteristic of the Jews alone and which Paul rules out as having covenantal significance. In 4.1-5 the designation “works” may well include a connotation of legalism (4.4-5), but even if this is so, the target has not changed. And the same target remains throughout 4.1-25 wherein Abraham’s significance is broadened past ethnic boundaries to include all those who believe, whether Jew or gentile. God has promised that Abraham would be the father of a great multitude, and that promise is being fulfilled in the “now” by the faith of both Jews and gentiles, in accordance with the promises of Gen 17, thereby demonstrating God’s faithfulness to his word. The newness of the present age has unfolded in complete accord with

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<sup>38</sup> The same would apply to Paul’s mention of works in 9.11-12, 9.32 and perhaps 11.6.

<sup>39</sup> Perhaps, in retrospect, this charge may also be connoted in 3.27.



God's previous revelations; God's present activity complies fully with his promises to Abraham, whereby salvation history was initiated. Those who consider their ethnic identity markers (*viz.*, "works of the law") to have salvific significance are deluded, their efforts are in vain, and their attempts to *respond* to God's grace are, in fact, nothing other than works of a laborer who hopes to earn a wage. This charge of legalism is the product of Paul's case that God's grace is found only within the boundaries of the christian community of faith; it is not necessarily an accurate portrayal of any sector of Early Judaism.

Throughout 3.21-31, Paul has discussed the manner of attaining to righteousness with reference to the law. Two alternatives were juxtaposed – righteousness by faith and righteousness by national right – and Paul has insisted that ethnocentric covenantalism is a misunderstanding of the ways of the covenant God who gave the law. Although much later in Paul's epistle, Rom 9.30-10.13 restates the basic concerns of 3.21-31 in a similar fashion. It is to this passage that we turn now.

### 13.2. The Community of Grace and the Law (2): 9.30-10.13.

Paul begins this section by juxtaposing the position of gentiles (*ἔθνη* – that is, *some* gentiles,<sup>40</sup> specifically those gentiles who believe) with that of unbelieving Israel. Paul characterizes the gentiles as those "who do not pursue righteousness" (9.30a), (which is to say that they are those who traditionally have not sought after covenant relationship with God), whereas Israel is characterized as "pursuers"; they pursue "the law of righteousness" (9.31a).

It is not altogether clear whether Paul intended in 9.30-31 to conjure up images of pursuit,<sup>41</sup> or, more specifically, of a foot-race between two contestants – "the pursuers" and "the non-pursuers".<sup>42</sup> If this foot-race imagery is uppermost in Paul's mind, he has set up an ironic situation in which those who win the contest did not even participate in it. The winners are "the non-pursuers",<sup>43</sup> the gentiles who attain to righteousness by faith (9.30b). Conversely, Israel

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ἐξ ἔθνων* in 9.24.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ps 119.32: "I run in the paths of your command"; Isa 51.1: "Hear me, pursuers of righteousness and seekers of the Lord". See Noack, 1970; Refoulé, 1985: 174-75.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Barrett, 1977: 106; Gaston, 1987: 126.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Rom 10.20.

fails to finish; they have not reached the law which they pursued (9.31b). Paul refers to the law here as the “law of righteousness” (*νόμον δικαιοσύνης*), a NT *hapax legomena*. He is seemingly referring to the Torah; as F. Refoulé states, “Le contexte invite à l’identifier à la Loi mosaïque. Quelle autre loi pourrait chercher Israël?”<sup>44</sup> By this phrase, Paul is characterizing the Torah as that through which righteousness is conferred when it is properly “reached”. Thus, the irony of Paul’s imagery is all the more striking; although gentiles are not pursuers and Jews are, gentiles have attained to righteousness while Jews have not reached their goal of the law by which they would have attained to righteousness.

The attribution of righteousness to gentile believers is significant since the term itself is a relational one “which here seems to mean something like ‘life as God’s people’”.<sup>45</sup> Paul contends that, by their faith, gentiles have fulfilled the covenant responsibilities. The problem with Israel is not the fact that they *pursue* the law of righteousness, as if the *activity of pursuit* itself is condemned by Paul; Paul in fact commends Israel’s zeal only four verses later (10.2). Nor is the *object of pursuit* (the law) the reason for their fault. Paul describes the law here as the “law of righteousness”. Instead, in Paul’s eyes, Israel’s problem is the *manner of their pursuit*.<sup>46</sup> If Israel has failed to “reach” the law, it is because their attempt was off-target and failed to meet the requirement of covenantal responsibilities of which the law speaks.<sup>47</sup>

Paul explains this in 9.32; Israel’s pursuit has been misguided because they attempt to fulfill the law “not by faith but as (if it were) by works”.<sup>48</sup> Just as in 3.27, the law is here modified by two genitives: *πίστεως* and *ἔργων*. Fulfillment of the law is the issue in 9.31, and in 9.32 Paul proposes that faith is the means to that end. This conclusion can be avoided if the

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<sup>44</sup> Refoulé, 1985: 179-80. This phrase (*νόμος δικαιοσύνης*) should not be read as “righteousness of the law”; contra Luz, 1968: 157; Westerholm, 1988: 145; and the RSV. See Cranfield’s amusing criticisms, 1975b: 36.

<sup>45</sup> Ziesler, 1989: 250, cf. 252. Dunn: “Here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, Paul shows that he understands ‘righteousness’ as a covenant word: . . . it is always something which depends ultimately on God . . . and of which Gentiles remained largely ignorant until the gospel made known the offer of God’s righteousness to everyone” (1988a: 592).

<sup>46</sup> Cf., e.g., Cranfield, 1975b: 39-41; Wright, 1980: 98, 122, 124; Rhyne, 1985: 489-90; Dunn, 1988a: 582.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Cranfield, 1975b: 38.

<sup>48</sup> The issue of punctuation in 9.32 is best resolved by the position taken by Cranfield, 1975b: 38-39.

object of pursuit in 9.32 is not the law but righteousness, as Ziesler contends.<sup>49</sup> But such a view is hard to maintain, for the object of pursuit in 9.31 is explicitly stated as the law, and Paul does not indicate a change of object between 9.31 and 9.32. For Paul, then, the problem with Israel is that they have not pursued the law by faith, as is proper. Although it is hard to understand what Paul means by "pursuing the law", it is easy to see his dilemma; he is struggling to support his definition of the covenant of grace by refuting the significance of the law for others and by positing the law squarely in his camp. The principle is simple: Those who neglect the requirement of the covenant (faith) cannot make a proper claim to the law; or conversely, those who fail to demonstrate the identity marker required by the law cannot make a claim to membership in the community of God's grace. Paul does not disparage the law; he needs the law on his side if he is to have a convincing definition of the community of grace. Accordingly, he postulates that the law rightly stands together with righteousness only when christian faith is presupposed.

When he talks of Jewish "works", what Paul seeks to discredit is not self-achievement *per se*; that is not in his view. What Paul seems to have in mind by "works" are (as in 3.27) those Jewish practices which are ethnically normative and restrictive,<sup>50</sup> and which were thought by most Jews and many Jewish believers to be necessary badges of covenant membership (cf. "works of the law"<sup>51</sup>). In Paul's mind, such a restriction is a misunderstanding of the law, and causes the unbelievers of Israel to be excluded from covenant membership altogether. As in 4.4-5, Paul's case here may well include an accusation of legalism against non-believing Jews: Because they are outside the boundaries of the covenant, any attempt on their part to participate in the covenant can be characterized as "works"; instead of *reacting* to God's grace, they are simply *acting*, spinning their wheels. If such connotations are present, however, they function wholly within Paul's attack on Jewish *ethnocentrism*.<sup>52</sup>

Paul grounds his argument of 9.31-32 with his reading of Isa 28.16. Therein, Isaiah

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<sup>49</sup> Ziesler, 1989: 49, 254.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Wright, 1980: 98; F. Watson, 1986: 165; Dunn, 1988a: 582; W.S. Campbell, 1981b: 34-35.

<sup>51</sup> Several Greek manuscripts of Romans contain here the phrase *ἔργα νόμου*. While this reading is not original, it does capture precisely what Paul is meaning.

<sup>52</sup> Contra (with others) Gundry: "it is not pride of privilege so much as self-reliance Paul is objecting to" (1985: 18).

prophecied that Israel would stumble over the stumbling stone, but he also gave the assurance that those who believed in the stone would not be put to shame. Paul intends this prophetic announcement to bolster his case (underway since 9.6) that God's word has not failed; his word has, in fact, been proven, for he foretold through Isaiah the stumbling of most of Israel. Citing Isaiah, Paul makes the charge that, by misunderstanding the covenant to be an ethnocentric covenant, the majority of Israel has, just as Isaiah pronounced, failed to fulfill the requirement of faith and has stumbled over the "stone" (= Christ).<sup>53</sup>

Paul takes this occasion to express his deep concern for his fellow Jews. He wishes their situation could be otherwise (10.1), for, as he testifies on their behalf, "they have zeal for God, but (their zeal is) not according to knowledge" (10.2). It is important to note the connotations of the word "zeal". Jewish literature of Paul's day demonstrates clearly that "zeal" was frequently employed in reference to Jewish nationalistic piety.<sup>54</sup> In their attempt to honour God by obeying his commandments and preserving the purity of the covenant, the Jews considered themselves to be zealous for God and his law, a quality which took on various forms of expression. On the one hand, zeal is said to have characterized those Jewish activists who, at various times in Jewish history, fought to preserve Israel's ethnic and political identity.<sup>55</sup> This ideal is characterized in the Maccabean literature as "zeal for the law".<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the Qumran sectarians also spoke of their "zeal for just laws" (1QS 4.4; cf. 9.23) and of their "zeal against all the workers of iniquity and the men of deceit" (1QH 14.14). Their "zeal", however, led them to remove themselves from the larger society in order to preserve the covenant, a reaction quite different to that of the Maccabeans.

Despite the diversity of zealous expression, "zeal" was characteristic of Jewish commitment to the preservation of the covenant relationship. This zeal Paul cannot help but admire;<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Barrett (1977: 112-13) Meyer (1980: 64) and Gaston (1987: 129) think the stone to be the Torah. See criticisms by Badenas, 1985: 106-107; Aageson, 1987: 61; Evans, 1984: 563-66. Rom 10.11 should also be read with this identification in mind. Cf. Lübking, 1986: 86; contra Gaston, 1987: 131.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Dunn, 1988a: 586-87; Donaldson, 1989: 672-74.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Hengel, 1974: 305-309. Dunn cites the following references: Simeon and Levi (Jud 9.4; Jub 39.5-20), Mattathias (1Macc 2.19-26; Josephus, *Ant* 12.271), Phinehas (Num 25.10-13; Sir 45. 23-24; 1Macc 2.54; 4Macc 18.12) Elijah (Sir 48.2; 1Macc 2.58). Cf also m. *Sanh* 9.6.

<sup>56</sup> 1Macc 2.26, 27, 50, 58; 2Macc 4.2.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Dunn, 1988a: 594.

it is a characteristic he knows all too well, since he elsewhere admits that his persecution of “God’s church” arose out of his great zeal which exceeded that of others (Gal 1.13-14, Phil 3.6; cf. Acts 22.3-4). But as he implied in 9.31, zeal for God which is motivated by, or channelled into, Jewish ethnocentrism is not properly guided; it misses the target because it is “not according to knowledge”.

In 10.3, Paul continues this point concerning the knowledge of God. Having argued that righteousness comes only by faith, Paul accuses Israel of not knowing God’s righteousness (10.3a) and of not submitting to it (10.3c). This double-barreled accusation is explained by the middle term of 10.3: “because they seek to establish their own righteousness” (10.3b). Again, it must be said that what Paul finds wrong with unbelieving Israel is not some tendency on their part to attempt to win salvation through self-achievement; that is not in Paul’s view. When he speaks of them as seeking “to establish (*στυῆσαι*) their own (*ἰδίαν*) righteousness”, Paul has in mind the nationalistic understanding of God’s ways which he has tried to discredit in 3.21-31; Israel has considered righteousness to be their own and theirs alone (*ἰδίαν*), as a nationalistic possession.<sup>58</sup> They have defined the covenant along ethnic lines, thereby excluding others. Because they possessed the law, they thought themselves to “possess” the covenant as well. But as Paul argues throughout this letter, a truly enlightened reading of scripture illustrates that ethnocentric restrictions of the covenant fail to do justice to God’s self-revelation in scripture. In support of this reading of *ἰδίαν* is Dunn’s observation concerning the significance of *ἴσθημι*. He notes that this verb appears on occasion in Jewish literature to indicate the preservation of Israel’s exclusive relationship with God in covenant.<sup>59</sup> For Paul it is precisely because of their definition of the covenant that Israel has failed to enjoy God’s righteousness and has been unmindful of the true ways of God (10.3a). Accordingly, in Paul’s mind, ethnocentric covenantalism disqualifies the majority of Israel from participating in God’s righteousness (just as Isaiah prophesied). They are blind to God’s ways and have misunderstood the nature of the

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Mundle, 1932: 100, n. 3; Howard, 1969: 336; Wright, 1978: 83; *idem.*, 1980: 98, 175, 122; Sanders, 1983a: 38; Räisänen, 1983: 174; *idem.*, 1986c: 74-75; Dunn, 1988a: 587; *idem.*, 1985: 530; Gaston, 1987: 129; F. Watson, 1986: 165; Ziesler, 1989: 256-57. Contra, e.g., Westerholm, 1988: 114-15; Johnson, 1989: 157.

<sup>59</sup> See esp. Sir 44.20; 1Macc 2.27; cf. Jer 34 (LXX 41).18, 35(LXX 42).16; Sir 11.20, 44.20. Refer to the discussion by Dunn, 1987a: 222; *idem.*, 1988a: 588.

covenant by misreading the scriptures which they have held in their possession.

Rom 10.4 has been the focal point of much debate in scholarly circles. There Paul writes: *τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι*. The main point of debate surrounding this verse, of course, is whether *τέλος* here has a teleological or temporal sense – that is, whether Paul meant to say that the law culminates in some sense with Christ or that Christ abrogates and does away with the law. We cannot review the evidence for each position herein. It only needs to be mentioned that, however one views the matter, the point Paul is seen to be making is no different from others he has made already; Paul is saying either that (faith in) Christ fulfills the law (being the goal of the law), or that (faith in) Christ rules out ethnocentric covenantalism. Either way, no new light is shed on Paul's concerns.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps he intends the phrase to be ambiguous and to include both meanings,<sup>61</sup> for he goes on in 10.5-13 to argue both points from scripture. In fact, however, because of its immediate connection with Paul's case in 10.5 (cf. the explanatory *γάρ* of 10.5), the temporal sense seems to have been uppermost in his mind, as we will see.

In 10.6-10, Paul argues that righteousness which comes by faith in Christ has been foretold in the scriptures (Deut 30.12-14),<sup>62</sup> thereby fulfilling scriptural prophecy: "The word is very near to you, on your lips and in your heart". Paul understands this to be the "word of faith which we preach" (10.8). The confession of Jesus as Lord equals the word "on the lips", and the belief of Jesus' resurrection equals the word "in the heart" (10.9-10). Thus Paul reads Deut 30.12-14 with Christ in view, and demonstrates from scripture that faith fulfills the law apart from ethnic qualifications.

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<sup>60</sup> Räisänen's comment is, to a certain extent, quite appropriate: "the never-ceasing controversy about the meaning of Rom. 10.4 seems immaterial" since both the teleological and temporal possibilities within this verse are contained elsewhere in Paul's writings (1986a: 10-11). Cf. Howard, 1969: 332.

<sup>61</sup> Cf., e.g., Harrington, 1980: 62; Wedderburn, 1985: 615; Kuss, 1959: 3.752-53; Leenhardt, 1961: 266. Jewett insists that this option is the least defensible, considering it to be theologically motivated with little attention paid to the context in order to gain the advantages of both Lutheran and Calvinist exegesis (1985: 353). Jewett's polemic at this point is unwarranted.

<sup>62</sup> Several scholars argue that Paul did not quote from scripture in 10.6-8; cf. Sanday & Headlam, 1902: 289; Davies, 1980: 153-54; Barrett, 1957: 199. But see, e.g., Badenas, 1985: 126.

To reinforce this point, in 10.11 and 10.13 Paul quotes two other passages of scripture. In each, the key word is  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$ , "all", which is coupled in Isa 28.16 with "faith",<sup>63</sup> and in Joel 3.5 with calling upon God (apart from ethnic membership). Moreover, to bolster his point all the more Paul once again calls up the principle of divine impartiality, which he had already established in Rom 1-3: "there is no difference between Jew and gentile, for the same one is Lord of all" (10.12).

In Paul's mind, all this evidence rules out the principle upon which "righteousness from the law" (*viz.*, nomistic service) is founded – that "the one who does them [the commandments] shall live by them" (10.5).<sup>64</sup> Paul quotes this scriptural passage (Lev 18.5) and understands it to express a fundamental premise of ethnocentric covenantalism: "do and live". That is, the one who obeys the commandments of the law ( $\delta\ \piοιήσας\ αὐτά$ ) which God has given exclusively to Israel will retain his place within the ethnic community of the righteous people of God ( $ζήσεται$ ). This is precisely how Paul's contemporaries seem to have understood the relationship between "do" and "live". In Pseudo-Philo, for instance, God states concerning his people:

I gave them my Law and enlightened them in order that by *doing these things they would live* and have many years and not die. (23.10; cf. PsSol 14.2-3)

This appears in the heart of the covenant renewal ceremony between Israel's God and his exclusive people, Israel. Paul recognizes this popular understanding of "do and live", with all its ethnocentric connotations, and, accordingly, cites Lev 18.5 as characteristic of the attempt to hoard the covenant within Jewish boundaries by making it "their own" (10.3; cf. 9.31),<sup>65</sup> an attempt which fails in the light of (1) other scriptural passages exegeted by Paul, and (2) the

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<sup>63</sup>  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$  does not occur in the LXX or MT of Isa 28.16. Paul has inserted it himself, perhaps under the influence of Joel 3.5.

<sup>64</sup> We read Rom 10.5 according to UBS 3 = Nestle-Aland 26 editions, considering internal evidence to render a mute judgement on the proper reading while external evidence favours the  $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$  being placed after  $\nu\acute{o}\muου$ , with the other textual discrepancies following accordingly. Cf. Seifrid, 1985: 12-13. Seifrid also defends the adversative sense of the grammatical construction  $\gammaαρ\ \dots\ δε$  in 10.5-6 (1985: 16-17).

<sup>65</sup> F. Watson places the emphasis a little differently: "the emphasis is not on 'doing' *per se*, but on 'doing *them*', i.e., living the way of life which is confined to the Jewish community" (1986: 165). No matter where the emphasis lies, the righteousness of the law (*viz.*, nomistic practice) is for Paul "a barrier separating Jew and Gentile, an exclusive privilege of Israel which must... be removed if unity is to be attained in the church" (Moo, 1983: 81).

principle of divine impartiality referred to once again in 10.12.

It is interesting to note that, in its original context, Deut 30.12-14 functioned in the same manner as Lev 18.5. That is, it encouraged the maintenance of Israel's obedience to God by the doing of the law, a practice which differentiated them from the pagan nations. As such, this passage from Deuteronomy promoted the ethnocentric covenantalism which Paul attempts to discredit. It even has the same verb of Lev 18.5 which, for Paul, characterized Jewish attempts to hoard righteousness for themselves - ποιεῖν, the doing of the commandments in order to distinguish the people as righteous in contrast with the other nations. In Paul's hands, however, Deut 30.12-14 contests the attempt to restrict the covenant of God's righteousness to an ethnic group. For this reason, he neglects to include the mention of "doing" (ποιεῖν) in Deut 30.14<sup>66</sup> since it appears to him to connote the maintenance of ethnocentrism. We might find this peculiar, but from Paul's standpoint such a reading was the self-evident meaning of the passage. If Paul seeks to apply scripture to his current situation, he also applies his situation to scripture. It is little wonder then that he "hears the motif 'righteousness by faith' speaking out of the law".<sup>67</sup>

It is also curious that Paul cites Lev 18.5 in an effort to set it aside as invalid while admitting it to be an utterance of Moses himself. Although Paul elsewhere claims his gospel to have Mosaic authority (9.15, 10.19; 1Cor 9.9), here his case is more complex. Paul's words in 10.5 approximate those of other passages wherein Moses' significance is downplayed in the present age. In Rom 5.14, for instance, Paul relegates Moses to the Adamic, pre-Christ age (cf. 1Cor 10.2, 2Cor 3.7-15). The same temporal delineation has evidently influenced Paul's portrayal of Moses in 10.5; what Moses wrote in Lev 18.5 is not a valid expression of the covenant in the present age. (In this way, the temporal sense of τέλος in 10.4 should be highlighted: Christ puts to an end the law as a way of life; with the change of the ages, previous ways of life have become irrelevant, and only faith is salvifically sufficient.<sup>68</sup>)

Paul's citation of Lev 18.5 also needs to be understood within the context of his earlier

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. Beker, 1980: 246.

<sup>67</sup> Rhyne, 1985: 498. Dunn contends that Deut 30.12-14 was already uprooted from its ethnocentric context, functioning instead in a more universal context (1987a).

<sup>68</sup> Wright: The παντί of 10.4 "is to be emphasized as the contrast to τὴν ἰδίαν" of 10.3 (1978: 83). Cf. van Dülmen, 1968: 127.



discussion concerning the *knowledge* of God (cf. the fourfold  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  construction throughout 10.2-5). He argues in 10.2-3 that Jewish ethnocentrism is rooted in ignorance of God's eschatological ways; in 10.5 he cites Lev 18.5 as an example of that ignorant perspective, one which is no longer an appropriate guide of understanding and behaviour since it fails to be enlightened by the events of the present age. It is a relic of the past, but not one to be honoured for, when practiced, it impedes the righteousness of God in the present.<sup>69</sup>

A word of clarification must be registered here. We are not intimating that Paul saw the need to *overrule* Moses. Paul considered himself wholly in line with Mosaic tradition, and firmly believed that scripture supports his position, as the many proof-texts within Romans illustrate. Nonetheless, as his proof-texting of Rom 10.5-8 indicates, he seems to have considered that the temporal boundary which marks off the ages also runs throughout scripture; in at least one passage (and a good number more!<sup>70</sup>), what God has revealed to and through Moses does not apply as a description of his eschatological ways since it is not in line with his self-revelation in Christ and the gospel of faith.<sup>71</sup> Paul's handling of Lev 18.5 is due to his understanding of the process of salvation history; various passages of scripture are pertinent to each stage of that process, so that the development within those stages provides for some temporal "discrepancies" within scripture. In this way Paul can undermine the authority of other perspectives – even if they are contained within scripture – in order to defend his own "innovation".<sup>72</sup> It is not wholly accurate, then, to say that, for Paul, "Moses was incorrect".<sup>73</sup> Nor do we think it correct that Paul considered Lev 18.5 to prescribe a *theoretical* way of salvation, but one which is impossible in

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<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, if he did not mean this in 10.4 anyway, Paul could have expanded his comments of 10.4 to say that Christ was the end of a former understanding of God's ways (cf. 2Cor 3.12-18). Cf. Dugandzic, 1977: 287. See Williams' discussion of 10.4 within the context of proper and improper knowledge (1980: 282-84).

<sup>70</sup> The doing of God's law is equated with life in Deut 4.1, 5.32-33, 6.24-25, 8.1, 30.15-20; Ezr 18.9,21, 20.11,13,21, 33.19; Neh 9.29.

<sup>71</sup> Dunn: "Lev 18.5 speaks for the old epoch before Christ, represented by Moses, while Deut 30.12-14 speaks for the new age of God's wider grace introduced by Christ, characterized by 'the righteousness from faith'" (1987a: 219).

<sup>72</sup> Those scholars who argue that Paul could not have juxtaposed Lev 18.5 and Deut 30.12-14 do so on the basis that Paul "would never make Scripture contradict itself" (Guthrie, 1969: 102). Cf. Bring, 1971: 47; Badenas, 1985: 121,123; W.S. Campbell, 1980b: 78. But this is too simplistic a view. Paul's hermeneutic contains a temporal distinction which he perceived to be inherent within scripture itself.

<sup>73</sup> Sanders, 1983a: 41.

practice.<sup>74</sup> Paul's handling of Lev 18.5 is explained by the temporal aspect of his understanding of salvation history and, accordingly, of scripture. Paul relegates Lev 18.5 to a previous age, although precisely how it pertains to the old age is not altogether clear from Paul's brief case. (Was he unprepared to comment?) It may be that Sanders' understanding (informed by Phil 3) is correct. He states:<sup>75</sup>

In Romans, he [Paul] draws a contrast between two righteousnesses, one based on law and sought by the Jews in ignorance, and the other one, "the righteousness of God," which is based on Christ. . . The difference between them is not the distinction between merit and grace, but between two dispensations. There is a righteousness which comes by law, but it is now worth nothing because of a different dispensation. *Real* righteousness (the righteousness of or from God) is through Christ. It is this concrete fact of *Heilsgeschichte* which makes the other righteousness wrong.

If this scheme of salvation history lies behind Paul's hermeneutical technique in 10.5-8, larger questions are raised which go beyond the bounds of this project, such as: What was Paul's christian view of the efficacy of nomistic practice before the advent of the new age? In any event, it is fair to his case to say at least that, for Paul, what Moses stated in Lev 18.5 is not appropriate *in this age*.

In all this, then, we have noticed an intriguing dynamic within Paul's argument and scriptural proof-texting. On the one hand, Paul can claim that his gospel has been testified to by the law (3.21), establishes the law (3.31) and was foretold by Moses himself (9.15, 10.19). His proof-texting in Romans indicates the extent to which he attempts to root his gospel in scripture. On the other hand, Paul's handling of scripture in 10.5 results from his schematization of salvation history; he does not attempt to align a passage like Lev 18.5 with his own case but considers it to represent a perspective which, with the dawning of the new age, has been shown to be inappropriate within the eschatological age. The temporal boundary between the ages of salvation history is critical for Paul's hermeneutic; whatever scriptural evidence can be used against his case is considered to be the residue which is left over from a previous age. Such scriptural passages lead to a misunderstanding of God's self-revelation made manifest in Christ and are not to trespass the eschatological boundary into the eschatological "now". Paul

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<sup>74</sup> Lindars, 1961: 229. Cf. Westerholm, 1988: 145, n. 16; Gundry, 1985: 18-19. See too Ridderbos' strained case concerning Moses' real intention (1975: 156-57).

<sup>75</sup> 1983a: 140.

hears, in a sense, "two voices of the law",<sup>76</sup> which have their respective places on either side of the eschatological boundary. And all this corresponds with Paul's comments in 3.27 where he made a distinction between the "law of (ethnocentric) works" (= Lev 18.5) and the "law of (christocentric) faith" (= Deut 30.12-14).

Paul's mission was a controversial one, and his attempts to legitimate it are marked by a tension between received tradition and (revelatory) innovation, between established "doctrine" and (eschatological) experience. In Rom 10.5-10, this same tension is apparent in Paul's reading of scripture. As R.B. Hays suggests, if "Paul's temporal sensibilities are apocalyptic in character, the same must be said of his hermeneutics".<sup>77</sup> So too J.L. Martyn states that Paul's hermeneutic demonstrates "an inextricable connection between eschatology and epistemology" which is due to "the new means of perception" gained in the new age.<sup>78</sup> This new perception, which was foretold in the law (1.2, 3.21; cf. Gal 3.8) and which has come to light with the change of the ages, necessitates the abandonment of previous perceptions of God's ways and the abandonment of previous practices of covenant fidelity, even if they be attributed to Moses himself, for those perceptions and practices have no place in the new age, as the scriptures themselves professed.

With these results from Rom 3.21-31 and 9.30-10.13 as the backdrop, we turn now to Rom 7.7-8.4, a passage which will prove to be significant for Paul's presentation and its legitimation.

### **13.3. Insider and Outsider Ethics: 7.7-8.4.**

In Rom 7.7-25 Paul describes in vivid detail an encounter between the "I" (*ἐγώ*) and the law, wherein the "I" explains his frustration at his inability to do the law on account of sin. Precisely who this "I" represents is not altogether clear. As Westerholm states:

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<sup>76</sup> Johnson, 1989: 155.

<sup>77</sup> Hays, 1989: 191. He continues: "Scripture must be read with new eyes. The reader who stands at the turn of the ages can no longer believe that Scripture merely authorizes religion-as-usual for Israel; instead, it must promise the New Creation. Scripture must adumbrate, for those who have eyes to see, the coming of eschatological transformation".

<sup>78</sup> Martyn, 1967: 272. He states later: Paul "is saying that there are two ways of knowing and that what separates the two is the turn of the ages... There is a way of knowing which is characteristic of the old age... and by clear implication there is a way of knowing which is proper either to the new age or to that point at which the ages meet" (p. 274).

No chapter in the Pauline corpus has aroused more controversy than Romans 7, and no question in that difficult chapter is more disputed than the identity of the "I" who speaks there.<sup>79</sup>

On this matter, interpreters have generally tended to follow one of three basic approaches, thinking that Paul is speaking of either (1) his "pre-conversion" experience, (2) his christian experience, or (3) the experience of unregenerate humanity from the perspective of christian faith. In the following section (13.3.1.), this issue will be addressed and a general approach to Rom 7.7-8.4 will be set out which will be followed in the closer analyses of sections 13.3.2. through 13.3.4.

**13.3.1. Identifying the "I" of Romans 7.7-25.** Those who advocate the "pre-conversion" interpretation consider 7.7-25 to be Paul's confession of personal inadequacy before God prior to putting his faith in Christ. So J.S. Stewart writes:

Romans 7 is Paul as he was right up to the eve of the Damascus journey – torn in spirit, disintegrated in personality, sunk into an abyss of self-loathing and despair.<sup>80</sup>

A modified version of this interpretation has recently been proposed by G. Theissen. Interesting himself in the "psychological aspects" of Paul's thought, Theissen argues that Rom 7 portrays the inner frustration of Paul's "pre-conversion" days, although Paul was unaware of this frustration until he encountered the risen Christ; only then did Paul come to realize what lay in his unconscious mind all along.<sup>81</sup>

Others maintain the "christian experience" interpretation, finding in Rom 7.14-25 Paul's portrait of the frustration felt by the believer in his struggle against the power of sin, a struggle which continues as long as he remains "in the flesh". Paul's "already"–"not yet" tension, this interpretation contends, is not just a scheme of salvation history but realizes itself even within the life of the believer. The boundary between the two ages of history – the Adamic and Christic ages – runs even through one who identifies himself with Christ; although he has died with Christ, he has yet to be resurrected with him, and although he lives in newness of life, he has yet to experience the fulness of the resurrected life. Accordingly, while he is "in the flesh", the

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<sup>79</sup> 1988: 52. Hübner gives a good survey of interpretation, 1987: 2668-76.

<sup>80</sup> 1935: 108. Cf. Gundry, 1980; Sanday & Headlam, 1902: pp. 186-87.

<sup>81</sup> Theissen, 1987. A fascinating Freudian analysis of Paul is Rubenstein, 1972.

believer still stands with one foot in the Adamic age which will not give way until death is finally overcome. As such, he is still prone to attack from the power of sin. This position has become associated with such notable (contemporary) scholars as A. Nygren,<sup>82</sup> C.K. Barrett,<sup>83</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield,<sup>84</sup> and J.D.G. Dunn.<sup>85</sup>

A third approach, the "anthropological" interpretation, reacts against the first two interpretations, both of which highlight the experiential, biographical aspect of Paul's account in 7.7-25; what Paul writes he himself feels or has felt. In contrast, the "anthropological" interpretation, associated especially with W.G. Kümmel,<sup>86</sup> undermines the biographical aspect of 7.7-25 in Paul's own experience, finding in Paul's words an accurate description neither of life before Christ nor of life between the ages. Instead, it is a *christian reflection* upon what life is like apart from Christ (whether "before" or "without"). That is, Rom 7.7-25 is simply a caricature of "unregenerate man" apart from faith, as seen through the eyes of faith.

Not one of these approaches has proven itself beyond doubt, and even within the last decade or so each approach has had its vigorous supporters. It would take more space than we can afford to reiterate once again all the evidence for consideration when identifying the "I" of Rom 7. In fact, we find one point to be fundamental in this matter: that is, in 7.7-25 Paul depicts the condition of impotent slavery to the all-encompassing power of sin (cf. 7.14).<sup>87</sup> It seems unlikely that such a scenario could apply, first of all, to the believer in Paul's scheme. While he recognizes that the believer is *vulnerable to attack* from the forces of the old age while living in the flesh (cf. Rom 6.12-13, Gal. 5.17), this is different from *living in the control of sin*, which Paul insists is inappropriate for the believer who has died with Christ (6.1-14; cf. Gal 5.24), who is no longer a slave to sin but to righteousness (6.15-23), and who lives by the Spirit (8.1ff).<sup>88</sup> In 7.7-25, only one force is at work: sin. The "I" is sold to sin (7.14), a helpless wretch, who does not know from where his deliverance will come (7.24). It seems highly unlikely that Paul

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<sup>82</sup> 1949.

<sup>83</sup> 1957: 146-53.

<sup>84</sup> 1975a: 341-42.

<sup>85</sup> 1975; *idem.*, 1988a: 404-412. Cf. also Espy, 1985; D.H. Campbell, 1980; Wenham, 1980.

<sup>86</sup> 1929.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. esp. Ridderbos, 1975: 127.

<sup>88</sup> Theissen: "One is always committed to a master. The new commitment excludes 'remaining in sin'" (1987: 180).

could have aided his case by portraying *the believer* in the terms of 7.14-25. It is precisely this situation which he thinks can be overcome when one participates in the christocentric covenant, the covenant which is confirmed in the giving of the Spirit who brings the hope of victory both now and in the future when the process of salvation history comes to completion. (In 7.25a, Paul anticipates his description of christian existence of 8.1ff with an interjection of confidence in God; this interjection should not be used as evidence of the identity of the "I". Paul is thanking God that he is not like the sinner he is describing.<sup>89</sup>) For Paul, then, the norm for the believer is not the frustration vividly expressed in 7.14-25 but the realization that he can now hope to overcome that frustration by living "according to the Spirit" (8.4; cf. 7.6).<sup>90</sup>

The same point is problematic for the "pre-conversion" view also. The description of slavery to sin which Paul gives in 7.7-25 does not fit well with what Paul tells us elsewhere about what he thought of his life "under the law". In Phil 3.6, for instance, he quite proudly relates how he had been blameless in terms of righteousness under the law. Various considerations may lessen the apparent tension between the two portrayals, but 7.7-25 is, in the end, difficult to reconcile with the "consciousness" of the pious Jew – replicated by Paul in Phil 3.6 – whose own sin in no way contributed to a sense of slavery to the power of sin in the absence of grace. (Theissen's reconstruction avoids this criticism but seems to owe as much to speculation as to evidence; despite the extent of his work, a psychological approach is limited in view of the nature of the sources.) It is unlikely, then, that the pre-christian Paul would have written Rom 7.7-25, or that the christian Paul is providing a *factual* account of how it felt to be an unbelieving Jew.

The approach which we think to have the most in its favour is the third, outlined above, which finds Paul's reflections in 7.7-25 to be the product of a christian mind as it reflects upon the state of existence outside the christian community. In its traditional form, however, we do not find this interpretation to be wholly convincing. This approach has traditionally found Rom 7 to depict "the basic nature of human existence in general",<sup>91</sup> "the general human predicament

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. F. Watson, 1986: 155; R.N. Longenecker, 1964: 113-14.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. the traditional criticisms of Kümmel, 1929: 104-110; Martin, 1981; Theissen, 1987: 183; Gundry, 1980: 236-38.

<sup>91</sup> Bornkamm, 1969b: 94.

in this world",<sup>92</sup> or "(e)ach of us...under the curse of Adam's fall".<sup>93</sup> Paul's analysis of this desperate situation is carried out through the voice of "the pious Jew",<sup>94</sup> the "Jew under the law",<sup>95</sup> who, it is said, represents *homo religiosus* – a microcosm of humanity apart from Christ, the epitome of human striving for salvation.<sup>96</sup> But from what we have already seen of Paul's case, very little of this is evident in Rom 1-11; the fundamental problem with "the pious Jew" for Paul is not so much his perversity at thinking he can earn salvation through his own striving apart from God's grace but his ethnocentrism, whereby he considers himself to be righteous by reason of God's grace upon the people Israel, symbolized by their possession of the law. If Paul intends the "I" of Rom 7 to give voice to the frustration (from a christian perspective) of "the pious Jew", his argument throughout the rest of Romans should provide the context for interpreting who it is that "the Jew" represents. Paul characterizes "the Jew" as one who, although he may boast in the law (2.17-20), fails to keep it (2.1-3, 21-27). The law, in fact, causes trespasses to increase (5.20) because "the Jew" remains in the Adamic condition (1.18-3.20; cf. 5.12-21), under the power of sin (3.9). He has zeal for God but misses the mark (10.2); he pursues the law but fails to "reach" it (9.31). This is precisely what is portrayed in Rom 7, wherein Paul addresses his Jewish "brothers" ("those who know the law" and who had been "bound to the law", 7.1-2). If Rom 7 is to be read with Paul's interests in Rom 1-11 in view, the "I" is not "the pious Jew" understood as the representative of all humanity in its sinfulness, but "the pious Jew" understood as the representative of the non-believing Jewish community. Paul's critiques of "the Jew" throughout Romans have all been motivated by his interest in undermining Jewish ethnocentrism. We suspect, then that the description of the "I" (*viz.*, "the Jew") in Rom 7 is not meant to be an all-encompassing portrait of the whole of unredeemed humanity, an "Existentialanalyse des Menschen".<sup>97</sup> Instead, Paul's sights are narrower, being focused precisely upon the ethnocentric Jew. In the paragraphs to follow, we will give reason why this view should be considered as a valid interpretive option which does justice to the broader

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<sup>92</sup> Dahl, 1977: 85.

<sup>93</sup> Käsemann, 1980: 205-206. Cf. Dunn: The "I" of Rom 7.7-13 is "every human being, fallen humanity caught within the realm of sin and death" (1988a: 404, emphasis his).

<sup>94</sup> Käsemann, 1980: 195.

<sup>95</sup> Stauffer, 1955: 93.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. esp. Bultmann, 1952: 247. See also (on Israel in Rom 9-11), *idem.*, 1955: 43.

<sup>97</sup> Schlier, 1977: 228.

interests of Paul's case.

The first thing to notice is the structural relationship between 7.1-6 and 7.7-8.11. As most commentators agree, 7.5-6 serves not only as a summary statement for 7.1-6, but also as the springboard into his discussion in 7.7-8.11.<sup>98</sup> What unites the whole of 7.1-6 is Paul's emphasis on being "released from the law" (7.2, 3, 6) or "dying to the law" (7.4) in the present time ( $\nu\hat{\nu}\nu$ ) after a period of being subordinated to the law (7.1, 2, 5).<sup>99</sup> It is in 8.1ff that Paul's description of the age of the Spirit in the "now" begins (picking up his point of 7.6), while his description of the "then" of subordination to the law is described in 7.7-25 (elaborating his point of 7.5). There is, then, a structural indicator within 7.5-6 to the developments within 7.7-8.11 (*viz.*, 7.7-25 complements 7.5 while 8.1-11 complements 7.6<sup>100</sup>). This is significant since several important themes operate in terms of this structural outline of 7.5-6 and give clues as to the character and meaning of Paul's case in 7.7-8.11, as we will see below.

Before proceeding along those lines, however, it is necessary to notice that when speaking of being "released from the law" in 7.1-6, Paul is not referring to the law in its function of declaring faith in Christ as the badge of the eschatological covenant. Instead, he has in mind the law in another sense – the law as a symbol of Jewish security and superiority, the law as a catalyst of a nomistic way of life. In the "now", claims Paul, two things have become obvious: (1) the law is established by christian faith (3.31; cf. 3.21b, 27, 9.31-32), and (2) the connection between law and ethnocentric definitions of the covenant has been broken (e.g., 3.27, 9.30-10.13). The law appears in Paul's case either positively or negatively, depending upon the context of his thought at any given point. Many scholars dispute such a view categorically, but it is firmly rooted in such passages as 3.27 and 9.31-32 wherein Paul distinguishes between two ways of attempting to "reach" the law: faith and works. Although Paul makes no programmatic distinction in 7.1-6, he has only the "negative" side of the dichotomy in view (*viz.*, the law in its connection with

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Bornkamm, 1969b: 88; Luz, 1969: 166.

<sup>99</sup> Paul's discussion in 7.1-6 is directly related to his comment in 6.14: "Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace". In this verse, Paul introduces the law into his case of 6.1-13 that, having died with Christ and been made alive to God in Christ Jesus, the believer is freed from sin. But Paul has nowhere demonstrated the fact that the believer is freed from the law, as he claims in 6.14, and so he addresses the issue finally in 7.1-6.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Stuhlmacher, 1989: 96.



“works”). Dunn writes of the law in this case:

it is not the law per se from which Paul speaks of being liberated; it is the law as manipulated by sin and death (especially 7:9-13), the law operating within the context of the age of Adam (5:20-21), the law understood at the level of the flesh and outward definition (*γράμμα*).<sup>101</sup>

Throughout 7.1-6, what Paul envisages when he speaks of “release from the law” is the believer’s freedom from the law as a symbol of Jewish ethnocentrism (cf. *χωρὶς νόμου*, 3.21a) – that is, the law within the context of ethnocentric, rather than christocentric, covenantalism.

With this in mind, we turn to themes within 7.5-6 which, operating within the “then”–“now” structure established there, indicate the context of Paul’s thought. The first to be noticed is Paul’s contrast between “the Spirit” and “the letter” in 7.6. Paul states that, because believers have been released from the law, they now serve by the newness of the Spirit, not by the oldness of the letter. Paul has employed the same “Spirit”–“letter” contrast earlier in 2.29 where he juxtaposed the one who thinks himself to be a Jew by reason of the external mark of circumcision with the one who is truly a Jew by reason of the inner circumcision of the heart, carried out “by the Spirit, not the letter”. Before getting into his survey of 7.7-8.4, Paul makes precisely the same juxtaposition in 7.6 as in 2.29 (cf. 2Cor 3.6-12). Evidently, then, a connection can be traced between Paul’s case in 2.29 and 7.6. Since, in the former, Paul contrasted (*in nuce*) ethnocentric and christocentric covenantalism, it would not be surprising to find the same juxtaposition being established in 7.6, the springboard to his case of 7.7-8.4. The point is that if 7.7-25 describes the “then”, the “I” described therein is none other than the ethnocentric Jew who has yet to be freed from the law as a symbol of Jewish privilege and superiority (*viz.*, the law as “letter”) and who, in fact, transgresses the law, just as Paul stated in 2.27 that “the Jew” whose life is defined by the letter of the law is a transgressor of the law.

Support for this comes from Paul’s use of *σάρξ* in 7.5. This term is sometimes employed by Paul to characterize Jewish confidence in their ethnic status; they boast “in the flesh” (Phil 3.3-6 [twice], Gal 6.13; cf. Eph 2.11; somewhat differently, Rom 9.5). In Rom 2.28, before contrasting the Spirit and the letter in 2.29, Paul decried circumcision “in the flesh” (*ἐν σαρκί*) as salvifically irrelevant, despite the expectation of “the Jew”. The same overtones can be heard

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<sup>101</sup> 1988a: p. 419.

in 7.5; whereas we lived then “in the flesh” (*ἐν τῇ σαρκί*), we now live by the Spirit. Paul then describes life “in the flesh” in 7.7-25 and life in the Spirit in 8.1ff. This again suggests that the “I” of 7.7-25 describes the inadequacy with regard to the law of the one who lives “in the flesh” by nomistic practice.

Paul’s characterization of the law in 7.5 suggests a similar point. There he describes the law (within the ethnocentric context) as the means through which the sinful desires were provoked “in our body parts” (cf. 7.23), leading us unto death. This, of course, is what Paul depicts in 7.7-25; when one is “in the flesh” the law is hijacked by sin, thereby producing every kind of sinful desire, preventing the doing of God’s law, and resulting in death. The plural referent “we” of 7.1-6 has changed to the “I” of 7.7-25, but the pattern is precisely the same. Earlier in Romans Paul has spoken of the law in this same connection with sin and death. In 2.27, Paul states that those for whom the law operates within the realm of the “letter” are transgressors of the law. This same charge is elaborated in striking terms in 5.20, wherein Paul claims that the law actually caused the trespass to increase and death to result.<sup>102</sup> That situation arises whenever one is “in Adam”, apart from Christ. This characterization of the law with sin and death is carried out in the light of Paul’s case in 1.18-3.20 wherein he denounces Jewish ethnocentrism. There Paul argued that the law should force “the Jew” to recognize his Adamic condition (3.9-20). When the law is placed in that Adamic context, instead of symbolizing Jewish superiority and security, the law actually aids in the process of condemnation, sin and death (5.20). This is what Paul is describing in 7.7-25: the law encountered by the ethnocentric Jew.

If we skip over 7.7-25 momentarily, we can see from 8.1ff that Paul’s concern there is still to discredit the law as a regulator of nomistic practice. Although the point is controversial, we will defend below the view that Paul’s words in 8.2 demonstrate again the two contexts in which Paul speaks of the law – the christocentric and the ethnocentric (as in 3.27 and 9.31-32). There Paul contrasts “the law of the Spirit of life” with “the law of sin and death”.<sup>103</sup> It is the latter, says Paul, from which believers have been freed. No doubt this theme of freedom from the

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<sup>102</sup> Meyer speaks of Paul’s description in 5.20 of the law compounding sin as “the most idiosyncratic feature of Paul’s view of the law” (1980: 67) but he notes a biblical precedent in Ezek 20.25 (p. 77, n. 23).

<sup>103</sup> See below, pp. 231-33.

law in 8.2 carries on the same theme of 7.1-6<sup>104</sup> wherein Paul denounced the salvific efficiency of nomistic living. Accordingly, in the context immediately preceding and following 7.7-25, Paul's concern is to discredit the salvific necessity of nomistic practice, even portraying the law as the "law of sin and death" when it is used to promote ethnocentric practices. Since 7.7-25 is closely bound to its surrounding context (cf. 7.5-6, 8.1), it too must be animated by Paul's same concern to undermine Jewish ethnocentrism.

Moreover, the (convoluted) analogy in 7.1-3 confirms our suggestion in yet another way. There Paul composes a characterization of a married woman who is freed from her marital responsibilities upon the death of her husband, thereby allowing her to marry another. It is best, we think, to understand the first husband as representing not the law,<sup>105</sup> nor God,<sup>106</sup> but Adam.<sup>107</sup> As such, the analogy works in this way: The death of the woman's first husband represents the death of the believer's connection with Adam;<sup>108</sup> the woman's marriage to the second husband signifies the believer in his connection with the second Adam, Christ; in the process the believer has been released from his obligations to the law (*viz.*, the law in its connection with ethnocentrism). In this way Paul maintains that nomistic practice actually binds one to the Adamic condition, as he has suggested throughout (2.27, 3.20, 27, 5.20); only when one is "in Christ" does that bond with the Adamic condition become severed, thereby nullifying one's duty to the law – that is, the law in its connection with Adam (5.20), the law as a way of life (3.21a,27), the law as a symbol of Jewish security (2.17-20), the law of sin and death (8.2).<sup>109</sup> The thrust of Paul's argument, of course, is that ethnocentric definitions of the covenant sink the covenant precisely in the Adamic condition of sin which it was thought to correct. 7.7-25 goes

<sup>104</sup> Cf. ἡλευθερωσέν of 8.2 with ἐλευθέρα of 7.3, and κατήργηται, κατηργήθημεν of 7.2,6.

<sup>105</sup> Contra Derrett, 1970: 466-71; Schoeps, 1961: 192.

<sup>106</sup> Contra Theissen, 1987: 247-48.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Wright, 1980: 148. Käsemann (1980: 187) and Dunn (1988a: 369) make the case that the identification of the two husbands is not the point of the analogy, but only the fact that "death dissolves obligations valid throughout life" (Käsemann). While it is true that release from the law is the main point of the analogy, that analogy includes fuller significance and reference.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. 6.6: "our *old man* (ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) has been crucified with Christ"

<sup>109</sup> Segal: Paul's point in 7.4-6 is "that since they, the Jewish Christians, have entered the Christian community, they are discharged from the Torah, dead to that which held them captive, so that they now have a new freedom" (1986b: 362). By Torah, Segal means "Torah practice" – *viz.*, those practices peculiar to Jewish lifestyle. Paul is not, however, discharging christian Jews from doing those practices, but is denying that they carry any salvific significance.

on to describe precisely that fact.

From these considerations, it seem best to think that 7.7-25 furthers Paul's attempt to discredit ethnocentric definitions of the covenant. His strategy is to describe, from the perspective of christian faith, the anguish of the Jew who tries to accomplish the law while remaining outside of the community of faith. (7.25a represents Paul's anticipatory interjection before the concluding summary of 7.25b.) This is the Jew who understands the law to be a symbol of national security whereby he, as a member of the ethnic people of Israel, naturally participates in the community of grace.

Rom 7.7-25 places us, therefore, within the arena of ethical polemic, for the issue is the performance of the ethical requirements of the law – an indicator of one's standing *vis-à-vis* the covenant of grace. By definition, the one inside the community of grace fulfills the law while the one outside that community fails to keep the law. Thus, Paul talks about the righteous requirement of the law being fulfilled by the christian community (8.4), just as later he talks of love as the fulfillment of the law, by which he means love demonstrated within the christian community (13.8-10; cf. Gal 5.14). Both claims stem from the underlying conviction that those within the community of grace fulfill what the law requires.<sup>110</sup> This explains why Paul's letters to his churches have such a heavy emphasis on ethical behaviour; if the communities which he has established among the gentiles cannot evidence within themselves ethical integrity, they have little claim to embody the community of grace. To make bold claims about one's community demands that those claims be demonstrated ethically.

The whole of Rom 1.18-3.20 is established on this conviction. There, Paul seeks to discredit "the Jew's" ethnocentric definition of the covenant by means of ethical polemic. Whether or not "the Jew" was morally deficient matters little for Paul's argument; the "grammar" of covenantal definition allows for such a charge. Because "the Jew" is not a participant in the community of God's grace, so Paul can charge him with failing to live up to the ethical demands

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<sup>110</sup> Ziesler argues that since *δικαίωμα* is singular rather than plural, Paul does not mean in 8.4 that believers fulfill the *whole* law, but only the commandment against covetousness mentioned in 7.7-8 (1988: 50; *idem.*, 1989: 206-207). Better, however, is Schreiner's explanation of the singular: "the singular in 8.4 is used to show that the moral norms of the law could be fulfilled as a unity by the power of the Spirit" (1989: 61).

of the law.

In essence, then, Paul's sights turn in 7.7-25 to "the Jew" in order to fill out this ethical charge, for the "I" of 7.7-25 is none other than the Adamic (= ethnocentric) Jew of 1.18-3.20 who now admits his own ethical failure. Paul here is a ventriloquist, projecting his voice into the mouth of his "dummy", "the Jew" of Rom 2-3. For Paul, since the christian community enjoys the grace of God, its members fulfill the requirements of the law (8.4). Accordingly, Paul hopes to show that the Jew who puts his hopes in his ethnic position and considers himself to have natural rights to God's grace finds his expectations dashed by the realization that he fails to fulfill the law's requirements, despite whatever desires he might have to do so. (No doubt, Paul's Jewish contemporaries would not have perceived their situation as Paul describes it here, as was the case also in Rom 2 [*viz.*, "You do the same!", 2.1]. These passages are polemical denunciation of a sort that does not rely upon empirical observation but which follows on from prior convictions concerning the boundaries of covenant grace.<sup>111</sup>) This realization is described for us by Paul, as if by "the Jew" himself, in Rom 7.7-25. The "we" of 7.1-6 has become a single representative, just as "the Jew" of Rom 2-3 represented the whole of the unbelieving Jewish community. Evidently, then, the dialogue partner of Rom 2-3 has here reappeared, having recognized that the problem of the anthropological condition of sin permeates even himself, an ethnic Jew, and that, just as Paul argued in Rom 2-3, sin operates within him to prevent him from doing the ethical requirements of the law.<sup>112</sup> Paul's diatribe partner now accuses himself of the same charge laid against him earlier by Paul. Thus, Paul's "you" of Rom 2 resurfaces here as "the Jew's" "I" (cf. "the Jew's"  $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\gamma\omega$  of 3.7); the charge imposed earlier upon the ethnocentric Jew by Paul is here self-imposed.

We have attempted to show that structural and thematic considerations combine to indicate that the "I" of 7.7-25 is not "the hidden Jew in all of us",<sup>113</sup> but, as Wright well states, "the hidden Adam in Israel".<sup>114</sup> Says Wright:

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<sup>111</sup> Räisänen: Paul's "thesis is clear in advance, and Paul snatches up more or less suitable arguments to support it wherever he meets them" (1983: 113).

<sup>112</sup> Dunn argues that the pious Jew cannot be the subject of Rom 7.7-25 since, as Phil 3.4-6 illustrates, Paul had never known such despair before putting his faith in Christ (1988a: 394). It is illogical, says Dunn, to see both 7.7-25 and Phil 3.4-6 as descriptions of the pious Jew. But Dunn seems to be working with a definition of logic which excludes polemic.

<sup>113</sup> Käsemann, 1969: 186.

<sup>114</sup> Wright, 1980: 152; 1982: 15.

Insofar as 7.7-25 'describes' anybody, it describes, with Christian hindsight, the Jew who (rightly) rejoices in the law, but whom the law binds to Adam so that he cannot but sin, that is, break the law.<sup>115</sup>

Rom 7.7-25 depicts "the Jew" who, because he is not a member of the community of covenant grace, is not able to perform the law. This depiction is arrived at by the rules of the logic of covenant self-definition; those outside the boundary of grace fail, by definition, to do the law. In 7.7-25, Paul lays out for his readers a description of the kind of frustration felt by this Adamic (= ethnocentric) Jew in order to solidify his own christocentric definition of the covenant. In 8.1ff, Paul begins the ethical legitimation of his own position. In 8.4, then, he states that those in Christ meet in full "the righteous requirement of the law" by the Spirit. His main point in all this is that the law is in the "possession" of the christian community; that community wears the badge of covenant membership spoken of in the law (*viz.*, faith), and their identity as the community of grace is verified in their ethical fulfillment of what the law requires. In 8.2, he even describes the law as "the law (= Torah; see below) of the Spirit of life", a characterization possible when the law is rooted within a christocentric context. Those (Jews) who are outside the christian community of faith and who claim to be the possessors of the law are actually in bondage to "the law of sin and death", for the law is impotent and cannot bring life when one remains in the weakness of the flesh (8.3). Thus, the law is a law of life only within the community of believers who have been set free from the law of sin and death.

Before analysing Rom 7.7-8.4 in closer detail, two final points deserve mention. First, there is general agreement that in Rom 6 Paul is motivated to defend his case against the charge that freedom from the law promotes libertinism and immorality. We saw such a charge in 3.7-8 where Paul brushed aside such objections to his case as nonsensical.<sup>116</sup> In Rom 6, Paul constructs his full defense against the charge. In 6.1 he frames the issue in the terms of his discussion in 5.12-21: "Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?". In 6.15 he asks the same thing, this time in terms which include the law: "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?". In each case Paul replies, "By no means". In 6.1-14 Paul's point is made by means

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<sup>115</sup> 1980: 148.

<sup>116</sup> Dahl: "the argument in Romans does not move steadily forward in a straight line. . . Several times Paul introduces a theme and appears to leave it undeveloped only to take it up again later in the letter" (1977: 139).

of his emphasis on the death of the believer with Christ, wherein he dies to sin. In 6.15-23 the same point is made by a complementary analogy – that of having been released from slavery to sin and becoming slaves to righteousness. In Paul's definition, although believers are not "under the law" (6.15), neither are they "lawless" in an amoral sense. In fact, it is precisely because they are not "under the law" as a way of life that they have escaped the dominion of sin.

Paul expands upon this defense, going on the offensive in 7.7-8.4. There he first depicts the frustration of the Jew who, expecting his ethnic standing to assure him a position within the covenant of grace, finds that his behaviour does not match the demands of covenantal ethics, as laid out in the law. In this way, Paul hopes to demonstrate that such a Jew is sold under sin (7.14) despite his noble desire to fulfill the law; it is precisely his ethnocentrism which causes him to "carry on in sin" (6.1; cf. 3.8). Conversely, it is the believer who escapes the condition of sin, having been set free by the Spirit (8.2) to meet in full the requirement of the law (8.4). Accordingly, in 7.7-8.4, Paul is motivated to defend his case against the charge that release from a nomistic lifestyle leads to ethical depravity; instead, says Paul, it is Jewish ethnocentrism which results in ethical impotency, as 7.7-25 depicts. As such, Paul has fully answered his objectors who lie behind 3.8. There he could only rebuke them briskly; herein is his full defense and reversal of their charges against him. In the process, he has undermined their restrictive definition of the covenant.

Second, it should be noted that a close parallel to this description is found in Ezra's words in 4Ez 3.20-36, wherein he too demonstrates the great anguish of the Jew who, despite his ethnic laurels, cannot find it within himself to do the law because of the sinful condition which he shares with Adam. In contrast to some Jewish writers, however, both Paul and the author of 4 Ezra are sympathetic towards "the Jew" for whom God's grace is not presently effective. As a result, they transform the expected grammar of ethical denunciation. That is, in each of their presentations, the Adamic (= ethnocentric) Jew is not depicted in the same light as the Jewish apostates of, for instance, Psalms of Solomon or 1QH, wherein the Jewish "outsiders" are said to have flagrantly disregarded the law in order that they might revel in perverse sin. Instead, both authors of this study portray the Adamic Jew as intent on doing the law but,

ultimately, as unable to do so. As we will see, Paul's more sympathetic rendering of the Adamic Jew is explained by his concern for his people's salvation.<sup>117</sup> But, despite his sympathies, Paul is convinced that the ethnocentric Jew stands outside of the boundaries of divine grace, in the anthropological condition of sin, and therefore, is unable to do the law.

At this point, having identified the "I" on the basis of contextual matters, and having noted Paul's basic motivation throughout this section, we can now analyse more closely Rom 7.7-8.4.

**13.3.2. Romans 7.7-13.** Paul has been talking in 7.1-6 of release from the law in its connection with Adam (*viz.*, the law in the context of ethnocentric covenantalism). In fact, throughout the whole of 6.1-7.6, whenever the law has appeared in Paul's case it has stood "on the same side as 'sin' and 'death'",<sup>118</sup> just as in 5.12-21 (*esp.* 5.20). In 7.7-13, Paul seeks to clarify his argument concerning the law. Although the law has received some "bad press" by Paul, he nonetheless wants to vindicate the law to a certain extent, which he carries out in 7.7-25 – Paul's "apology for the law".<sup>119</sup> Thus he asks initially whether the law itself is sin, and answers with an emphatic "No" (7.7). In 7.10, in fact, he describes the law (now in terms of the "commandment", the "representative summation of the Mosaic law"<sup>120</sup>) as being "unto life" (*εἰς ζωὴν*), and in 7.12 it is said to be "holy and righteous and good".

This aspect of Paul's argument should not be overlooked. Paul affirms the inherent value of the law as something intrinsically life-giving in and of itself, and proceeds to show that the problem lies not with the law itself but with sin. As he says, sin worked its way "through the commandment" (7.8, 11) so that what was good (*viz.*, the commandment/law) became an instrument of sin unto death (*εἰς θάνατον*) (7.10-11). The culprit is not the law, but sin.<sup>121</sup> So Paul emphatically denies that the law/commandment itself promotes death (7.13). Instead, sin works death through what is good (the law/commandment) in order that it (sin) might be

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<sup>117</sup> Ezra's sympathy transpires from the fact that, instead of denouncing Jewish sinners, his project is to indict God.

<sup>118</sup> Theissen, 1987: 181. Sanders, 1983a: 73.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Beker, 1980: 105; Stendahl, 1976: 92; Bornkamm, 1969b: 88; Dunn, 1988a: 376-77.

<sup>120</sup> Moo, 1986: 128. Cf. Ziesler, 1988: 50; Stuhlmacher, 1986: 86.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Keck, 1980: 47-48; Snodgrass, 1988: 99.



recognized as sin (7.13). Had the commandment not been good in itself, sin would not have been shown to be its opposite. Paul always keeps sin as the middle term between the (good) law/commandment and death; without that middle term, the result would be life rather than death (7.10, 8.7).

It is important to notice that Paul presents the "I" (*viz.*, "the Jew") in terms which call to mind Adam's fall into death by his transgression of God's order in the garden. As E. Käsemann has stated: "There is nothing in the passage which does not fit Adam, and everything fits Adam alone".<sup>122</sup> That Paul's description is styled upon the story of Adam's fall is especially apparent in 7.9-11: Adam alone can be said to have existed in a time that had no law (*χωρὶς νόμου*), and Adam alone can talk of the coming of the commandment as the occasion when sin sprang to life.<sup>123</sup>

This, then, explains why Paul introduces this section with a reference to the law but then proceeds to talk about the commandment; the commandment is the command given by God to Adam in the garden. Paul here seems cognisant of the idea that the Mosaic law was contained within the single commandment given to Adam.<sup>124</sup> (The author of 4 Ezra makes use of this same idea in 7.11 where he cites Adam as transgressing "the commandments",<sup>125</sup> which, in the context, can only mean the Mosaic law.) Paul sees in this identification of the Mosaic law and the Adamic commandment a corresponding identification of the ethnocentric Jew and Adam who sins unto death.<sup>126</sup> Throughout Romans, "Paul's theologizing about Adam is aimed specifically at the Jewish nationalistic self-consciousness".<sup>127</sup> Paul inserts the ethnocentric Jew

<sup>122</sup> Käsemann, 1980: 196. The sin of covetousness described in 7.7-8 fits this portrayal since covetousness was perceived by many Jews as the fundamental condition of sinfulness. See Theissen, 1987: pp. 204-206; Wedderburn, 1980: 420-21. By "covetousness" Paul is not thinking simply of sexual lust; contra Gundry, 1980; F. Watson, 1986: 151. He uses the term more broadly to include "all kinds of covetousness" (*πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν*), and is thinking more generally of "the passion to assert oneself against God and neighbor" (Käsemann), of "wanting what is not one's own, and especially wanting it at the expense of one's neighbour" (Ziesler, 1988: 47).

<sup>123</sup> For other parallels, see F. Watson, 1986: 152; Theissen, 1987: 202-208. He concludes: "Paul unmistakably has the model of Adam in view in Rom 7:7ff" (208).

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Philo, *SpecLeg* IV.84-94, *Decal* 142, 150, 173; ApMos 19.3; ApocAbr 24.10; 4Ez 7.20; *TgNeo* I Exod 20.17 and Deut 5.18; *Mek* on Exod 20.17. See Wedderburn, 1980: 420; Käsemann, 1980: 196; Dunn, 1988a: 379; contra Deidun, 1981: 197.

<sup>125</sup> Plural in the Latin and Syriac texts.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Moo, 1986: 128; Leenhardt, 1961: 186.

<sup>127</sup> Garlington, 1990: 148.

into the story of Adam's fall, just as in 1.25 he recalled Israel's idolatry before the golden calf as demonstrative of the anthropological condition of sin, described in 1.18-32. The point, of course, is that the ethnocentric Jew, rather than having been rescued from the Adamic condition of sin, stands firmly in sin and remains outside the boundaries of the community of grace. Paul argued this point strongly already in 1.18-3.20. Now, instead of arguing his point, Paul paints a picture of "the Jew" in his desperate situation, stuck in the anthropological condition of sin.

**13.3.3. Romans 7.14-25.** It is not wholly proper to separate this section from 7.7-13, as the  $\gamma\lambda\rho$  of 7.14 well indicates.<sup>128</sup> Paul here continues along similar lines as he did in 7.7-13 to arrive at the same place; the vindication of the law. Nonetheless, in 7.14, Paul's argument begins to follow a somewhat different track to make this point.<sup>129</sup> Still at issue, then, is the negation of the idea that the law of God produces death (7.13); it simply cannot be the case that the law works evil since God would necessarily be indicted as the mastermind of the crime. Paul does not allow God to be culpable of this offense,<sup>130</sup> asserting that the problem is not on account of the law of God. This was the point of 7.7-13 as well. What is new in 7.14-25 is his defense of the "I" himself. Paul is intent on showing in 7.14-25 that, just as the problem does not lie with the law, so neither does it lie ultimately with the "I"; although the "I" is fleshly, his earnest desire is to do the good. The culprit, then, is neither the law (7.7-13, 14-25), nor the "I" (7.14-25), but sin (7.7-13, 14-25). What Paul highlights in 7.14-25 is the unwillingness of the "I" to cooperate with sin, although he is inevitably enslaved to its overbearing power (7.14). As K. Stendahl states, "The argument is one of acquittal of the ego, not one of utter contrition".<sup>131</sup> If, as we suspect, the "I" is Paul's own caricature of "the Jew", 7.14-25 is nothing other than Paul's "apology for the ethnocentric Jew" who is zealous for God but who "misses the mark" nonetheless (10.2-3).

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<sup>128</sup> Bornkamm: "The connection between the two sections (7-13 and 14-25) cannot be overemphasized" (1969b: 95). Some scholars make a separation between 7.12 and 7.13. Cf. Wilckens, 1978: 2.74-75; Wright, 1980: 151-54. We follow the structural outline set out by, for instance, Theissen, 1987: 184.

<sup>129</sup> We do not overemphasize the shift to present tense verbs within this section. This shift only serves to contemporize the Adamic past of 7.7-13 which is now no longer in Paul's view; Paul "has moved from story to analysis" (Ziesler, 1989: 193). Cf. F. Watson, 1986: 155; Martin, 1981: 43.

<sup>130</sup> This is the point which Sanders articulates in 1983a: 70-81, although he tends to over-emphasize its importance within Paul's case.

<sup>131</sup> 1976: 93.

Paul introduces this section in 7.14 by juxtaposing the *spiritual* quality of the law with the *fleshly* quality of the “I” (7.14). Here, Paul sets up two “planes” of existence – the spiritual and the fleshly, as in 7.5-6 and 2.28-29. The law belongs to the spiritual plane, the “I” to the plane of the flesh which is susceptible to attack from the power of sin. The despair of the “I” arises because, although he desires the good, he does not stand on the same plane as the law. Instead, he is enslaved to sin because he is in the flesh, “the workshop of sin”.<sup>132</sup> Of course, Paul works his case to show that this desperate situation is overcome when one “participates” in the spiritual plane (the natural habitat of the law; 7.14),<sup>133</sup> a situation which Paul describes in 8.1-4 wherein the law is said to be fulfilled by the believer “according to the Spirit” (8.4). But there is much to transpire in Paul’s argument before reaching that solution.

Although Paul begins in 7.14 speaking of the law in singular fashion as the spiritual law (*viz.*, the Torah), his argument proceeds in 7.22-8.2 seemingly to force a division within the law itself so that it (the Torah) is split into two, each “law” being polarized. In the latter verses of Rom 7, Paul makes mention on two occasions of “the law of God” (ὁ νόμος τοῦ θεοῦ, 7.22, 25). This should be understood as referring to the Torah, which is spiritual (7.14), and holy (7.12), just as in 8.7 the same expression is used in reference to the Torah.<sup>134</sup> The “I” rejoices in this law in his inner self (7.22), describing it in fact as “the law of my mind” (ὁ νόμος τοῦ νοός μου, 7.23).

Paul also mentions, however, “another law” (ἕτερον νόμον, 7.23) which is at work “in my members” (ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου, 7.23) and which the “I” serves “with (my) flesh” (τῇ σαρκί, 7.25). This is “the law of sin” (νόμος τῆς ἁμαρτίας, 7.23, 25) whose results end in death (7.25). The question, then, is whether this νόμος also refers to the Torah or, as many think, to a “principle” of sin. In our estimation, the former has more in its favour. We have seen how 7.7-25 expands upon Paul’s words in 7.5, and therein νόμος clearly refers to the Torah, albeit the Torah in the “context” of ethnocentric covenantalism. A constellation of ideas which relate

<sup>132</sup> Käsemann, 1980: 205.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Keck, 1980: 53.

<sup>134</sup> Attempts to see the νόμος τοῦ θεοῦ as “the will of God” are unconvincing, and inevitably must qualify this to mean, as Ziesler does, the will of God “as expressed in the Torah” (1989: 198). Three sentences later Ziesler drops all talk of “God’s will” and reverts wholly to talk of “the Law of God”; “the power of sin...perverts *the Law of God*”.

to the νόμος of sin in 7.23-25 have already appeared in relation to the νόμος (= Torah) in 7.5: When one is in the flesh (ἐν τῇ σαρκί), the law (= Torah) is the instrument (διὰ τοῦ νόμου) through which sinfulness arises in the members of the body (ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν) unto death (τῷ θανάτῳ). The parallels in thought and expression signify that the equation νόμος = Torah in 7.5 is to be continued in 7.23-25 when Paul speaks of the νόμος of sin. Within these verses, then, Paul presents the Torah in a double function as the Torah of God and (provocatively) the Torah of sin (cf. the Torah of faith and the Torah of works in 3.27).

A similar situation arises in 8.2 wherein Paul juxtaposes the νόμος of the Spirit of life and the νόμος of sin and death. Whereas the law of sin and death must be the law (= Torah) of sin mentioned in 7.22-25 (cf. freedom from the νόμος [= Torah] in 7.1-6 and freedom from the νόμος [= Torah] of sin and death in 8.2), so the law of the Spirit of life (*viz.*, the spiritual law [7.14] empowered by the Spirit) must be equivalent to the law (= Torah) of God mentioned in 7.22-25. Here too Paul seems to be making a distinction with regard to the law, the νόμος in each case referring to the Torah. This is supported from Paul's case in 8.3ff, which elaborates 8.2 (cf. the connective γάρ) and wherein νόμος appear thrice, each time referring to the Torah (8.3, 4, 7).

Throughout 7.22-8.7, then, we find νόμος to refer consistently to the Torah.<sup>135</sup> What is at variance is not the referent of νόμος but the context to which it is applied; the Torah itself is not a primary character in the drama of Romans 7 except when acted upon by various powers. Just as in 3.27 (cf. 9.31-32), so here too the genitive modifiers of νόμος are the determining factors of Paul's various statements concerning the law in 7.14-8.2, or as Snodgrass argues:<sup>136</sup>

*The determinant for the law is the sphere in which it is placed...* [I]n Paul the law does not stand for itself; it occurs in a context and in connection with something else. It refers to the law as *used* in various specific ways.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Lohse, 1982; Hahn, 1976: 48-49, 60; Moule, 1974: 181-87 (but see his concession, 1987: 48); Hübner, 1984a: 144-48; Meyer, 1980: 73; Dunn, 1988a: 416-17; Theissen, 1987: 256-57; Stuhlmacher, 1985: 99; Wilckens, 1978: 2.90, 122-24; Osten-Sacken, 1975: 226-34; *idem.*, 1989: 13-23; Snodgrass, 1988; Reike, 1985: 243-44; Wright, 1980: 153. Contra, e.g., Ziesler, 1989: 202; Luz, 1968: 153, n. 173; Räisänen, 1986d; *idem.*, 1986e: 113-14. See Hübner's review of the secondary literature, 1987: 2682-91.

<sup>136</sup> 1988: 99, emphasis his.

In the spiritual sphere or plane (cf. 7.14), the law operates as the “law of God”; in that context it is holy, just and good, and something in which to rejoice. But the law within the plane of “the flesh” operates so differently as to be a different law, a “law of sin”. In this situation, the law is nothing other than “the Torah in the possession of a man unable to keep it: it is a treasure, but when set in an unworthy context (cf. v.14) it becomes a liability, a dispensation of death at work ‘in the members’”.<sup>137</sup> Accordingly, the simple portrayal of the law as operating on the spiritual plane in 7.14 becomes fragmented in 7.22-8.2 by the recognition that it can also work on the fleshly plane, hijacked by the power of sin.

After setting up the alternative “planes” in 7.14, the “I” exclaims: “I do not know what I am doing” (7.15a). This is explained more fully on three occasions (7.15b-16a, 7.18b-19, and 7.21), each of which highlights the fact that the “I” wants to do the good but simply cannot accomplish it; instead he ends up doing the evil that he does not want to do. This principle,<sup>138</sup> stated thrice, is the basis for three conclusions in 7.16b-17, 20 and 22-23. In 7.16b-17, because the “I” is unhappy with his inability to do the good, the fault of doing evil lies not with him so much as with the power of sin: “But now<sup>139</sup> it is no longer I working this but sin which dwells in me” (7.17). Although sin dwells in the body of the “I”, it is not a welcome guest there. It has hijacked the body parts and controls them, without the cooperation of the “I”, who is unable to dislodge the power of sin. Herein, then, Paul has furthered his accusations against “sin” to include an explicit defense of the “I”. And the same point is made in exactly the same terms in 7.20. Thus 7.18-20 makes no progress on 7.15b-17,<sup>140</sup> but simply reiterates the point that the “I” himself is not wholly to blame for his condition under sin.

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<sup>137</sup> Wright, 1980: 153. Cf. especially Dunn, 1988a: 416-17. Somewhat similarly, Scroggs, 1989: 131-32. Contra, e.g., Keck, who understands “the law of sin” as a simple reference to the ability of sin to enslave one in its web, as if “the law of sin” could be translated as “the *power* of sin” without reference to the Torah (1980: 49). As Snodgrass states, “If that is true, Paul has stretched the word [*νόμος*] almost beyond recognition” (1988: 106).

<sup>138</sup> Only in 7.21 do we take *νόμος* to refer to something other than the Torah. Here it means “principle”, as most commentators agree. Cf., e.g. Moo, 1984: 77. This principle was widespread in Greco-Roman literature; see Theissen, 1987: 212-219 for references. Some have argued that even here *νόμος* refers to the Torah. Cf. Dunn, 1988a: 393; Gaston, 1987: 176; and most convincingly (although tentatively) Snodgrass, 1988: 105.

<sup>139</sup> A logical, rather than temporal, *νῦν*; contra the *νῦν* of 8.1.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Kuss, 1959: 2.454-55.

Evidently, then, Paul wants to emphasize this point. He takes great care not to depict the “I” in terms <sup>in</sup> which the speaker of 1QH, for instance, describes Jewish apostates who are included under the designation “Sons of Darkness” (cf. Rev 2.9: “the Synagogues of Satan”). For that author, the Jews who fall outside the covenant loathe the law and take no delight in the commands of God (1QH 15.18). Paul, however, is not prepared to portray “the Jew” who falls outside the boundaries of the community of faith in such an extreme fashion.<sup>141</sup> The “I”, representing unbelieving Israel, is not in an irretrievable position, for he is desirous of the good, although he cannot accomplish it because he is “in the flesh”. At present “the Jew” remains within the domain of sin, but Paul does not depict his condition as unsalv~~able~~able. Is there a possibility for correction? Paul’s characterization in 8.1-4 would suggest that there is, and his hope for his gentile mission and for the future conversion of unbelieving Israel, expressed in Rom 11, would support this contention. We will return to this point below.

The final mention of the principle (that good desire does not translate into doing the good) appears in 7.21. The problem has been cited twice since 7.14: it is sin (7.17, 20). In 7.22-23, Paul applies this principle to the issue of the law, and it is here that the separation within the law (= Torah) first appears. First, Paul states that the “I” rejoices in the “law of God” (7.22; cf. 8.7),<sup>142</sup> but then introduces into his discussion what he first calls a “different law” (7.23: *ἕτερον νόμον*). This different law works “in my body parts” (*ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου*) and must equal what Paul calls in 7.23 “the law of sin”, for Paul says of both that they operate “in my body parts” (cf. 7.5). This “different law” (*viz.*, “the law of sin”) wages war on “the law of God”, the law which the “I” wants to uphold (*viz.*, “the law of my mind”). In 8.2 Paul resolves the tension between these two “laws”, saying that those in Christ are freed from “the law of sin and death” by “the law of the Spirit of life”.<sup>143</sup> As we have seen, Paul does not

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Stendahl’s comment quoted above at p. 230 n. 131.

<sup>142</sup> We take the “inner man” (*τὸν ἑσω ἄνθρωπον*) here to be simply the “I” in his desire to do the law.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. those cited in n. 135 above. Räisänen (1986d: 115-16) notes that if *νόμος* is to mean Torah in 8.2, then Paul is saying that believers’ freedom is acquired by means of the Torah itself. This is a strange position for the Torah to be in. Accordingly, Räisänen suggests that, in fact, *νόμος* in 8.2 does not mean Torah. But if *νόμος* is not the Torah, another irregularity arises between 8.2 and 8.3 where *νόμος* appears again, and clearly in reference to the Torah. Moreover, the strangeness of Paul’s depiction of the Torah as both the agent of freedom and the slave owner is paralleled precisely in Gal 2.21: “I died to the law through the law”.

have two laws (or "principles") in mind here so much as the one law (= the Torah) as it operates within two different situations. In 8.2-4, Paul makes the same point as in 7.5-6, stating that believers have been freed from the law of sin and death by the Spirit (8.2), adding here that in this way the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in them (8.4); for believers the law is "the law of the Spirit of life".<sup>144</sup> The problem, as Paul states in 8.3, is that the law is impotent when in the context of the flesh, so that only those who walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh, fulfill the law (8.3) – the law which is spiritual by nature (7.14). In fact, however, the passive sense of the verb should be highlighted, for the fulfillment of the law is not done by means of an active campaign on the part of believers but by the Spirit working in and through them.<sup>145</sup>

From Paul's comments in 7.22-8.4 it has again become apparent how tenuous it is to speak without qualifications of Paul's view of the law, for the law (= Torah) stands on both sides of the eschatological boundary and is qualified by the context in which it appears; in the context of the flesh, the law is the law of sin, whereas in the context of the Spirit it is the "law of God", the "law of the Spirit of life". What determines one's position *vis-à-vis* the law of God or of sin is where one stands in relation to the eschatological boundary. The ethnocentric Jew who has no recourse to the Spirit remains trapped within the old age of the flesh; in that situation, the law is nothing more than a "law of sin", a law which perpetuates the Adamic condition by causing the trespass to increase (5.20). The full force of this realization allows the "I" to cry out: "I am a wretched man. Who will deliver me from this body of death" (7.24).

Immediately, Paul supplies the answer, in anticipation of Rom 8: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7.25a).<sup>146</sup> Rescue is possible only in the community of the Spirit. Paul does not wait until the "I" has stated his conclusion (in 7.25b) to introduce the eschatological solution (in 8.1-4) but speaks with his own voice in 7.25a to interject the obvious

<sup>144</sup> This is the law in its "natural" (*viz.*, spiritual) context, the law "understood and responded to at the level of the *πνεῦμα* (rather than of *σάρξ*)" (Dunn, 1988a: 419).

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Ziesler, 1989: 208. Unlike Ziesler (p. 207), we find no "contradiction" between 7.1-6 (wherein believers are said to be free from the law) and 8.4 (where believers are said to be passive fulfillers of the law); the different contexts of flesh and Spirit allows for the different evaluations of the law. Here too we differ from Deidun, who argues that *νόμος* (= Torah) in 7.1-6 "is gradually broadened in its connotation, with the result that by the time we reach ch. 8 the Mosaic law as such is no longer at the centre of the stage" (1981: 196).

<sup>146</sup> F. Watson: 7.25 "is merely an interjection anticipating the description of liberation from the law of sin in 8:1ff" (1986: 155). Cf. R.N. Longenecker, 1964: 113-14.

answer to the desperate outcry of 7.24. Finally, the “delayed conclusion”<sup>147</sup> to the whole of 7.14-25 is stated in the voice of the “I”: although I (the ethnocentric Jew) want to serve the law of God,<sup>148</sup> I end up serving only the law of sin by means of my flesh.

**13.3.4. Romans 8.1-4.** In the preceding discussion the main function of this section has been noted; Paul’s primary concern herein is to juxtapose the position of the “I” in himself (*αὐτὸς ἐγώ*, 7.25) as a slave to sin, for whom the law is a law of sin and death, with the position of those in Christ Jesus (*ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*, 8.1) for whom there is no condemnation since, by the Spirit, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in them (8.4). It is only when the spiritual nature of the law (7.14) is matched by the possession of the Spirit by those in Christ that the ethical requirement of the law is fulfilled; it is only then that the condemnation spoken of in 2.1-29 is avoided, for the ethical failings of “the Jew” are corrected only by the Spirit in the christian community. In 8.5-11 Paul develops further the juxtaposition of walking by the Spirit and by the flesh. In 8.12-17, he characterizes the believer’s existence as one of sonship to God, thereby transposing to a higher key his tone of 6.15-23, wherein the believer is depicted as a slave, albeit to righteousness; in fact, says Paul, the believer’s credentials are even more impressive, for the slave of righteousness is a son of God – a co-heir with Christ in his glory, although at present the co-heir shares also in Christ’s sufferings. These, however, are not worth comparing to the greater glory of those who await their (full) adoption as sons (8.18-27), leading Paul to a confident celebration of God’s ways (8.28-30) on behalf of those whom Paul has described throughout as the (sole) beneficiaries of divine grace: those who are “in Christ Jesus” who have been freed from the law of sin and death.

Throughout this chapter of our project, we have noted two aspects of Paul’s understanding of the law – one concerning the identity markers prescribed by the law for the eschatological age (3.21-31; 9.30-10.13), the other concerning the ethical dimension of the law (7.7-8.4). In this regard, it has been suggested from time to time that Paul’s perception of the law is explained by a distinction between (1) the cultic and ritual aspects of the law and (2) the moral aspects of the

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<sup>147</sup> Dahl, 1977: 85, rather than a scribal gloss (most recently, Ziesler, 1989: 199, 209).

<sup>148</sup> Literally: “I serve with my mind the law of God” – that is, “with my volition”, indicating again the great desire of the “I” to do the law.



law. For Paul, the suggestion goes, the latter continues to be in force while the former has been abrogated.<sup>149</sup> This interpretive option has generally fallen out of favour, primarily because no such distinction functioned within Early Judaism; the law was recognized to be a unity. Several comments need to be made in this regard.

It is, we think, not enough to say that, since the law was perceived as a unity in Early Judaism, Paul could not have made a distinction between the ethical law and the ritual law. As we have seen, much of Paul's case depends upon just such a distinction, just as his case often fails to coincide with traditional Jewish perceptions. In Rom 2, for instance, Paul argues in such a manner as to remove circumcision from the arena of "doing the law". His (polemical) argument there proceeds on the basis that to do the law is to live ethically. In this regard he both argues that gentiles can keep the law (2.14, 26-27) and denies that Jewish rituals have anything to do with keeping the law (2.25-29). Similarly, in Rom 14 Paul seems to be arguing that *ethnic* dietary practices are salvifically irrelevant. In both cases, Paul's is a most provocative case because it introduces a distinction in the law where none seems to have existed for most of his contemporaries. By discarding circumcision (Rom 2.25-29) and dietary observances (Rom 14) from the necessary prescriptions of the law, Paul is attacking what was an accepted "given" for his Jewish contemporaries – the unity of the law.<sup>150</sup> In some sense, then, it is true to Paul's message to speak of the negation of the ritual law and the fulfillment of the the ethical law by believers. What was a given in Early Judaism (*viz.*, the unity of the law) both confronted, and was challenged by, Paul; in his capacity as the apostle to the gentiles, he forced, in effect, a distinction within the law, distinguishing the law as a moral code from the law as prescriptive of ethnically restrictive practices.

Several qualifications need to be registered here, however. First, although Paul wants to affirm the fulfillment of the law as a moral code by the christian community in 8.4 and 13.8-10 (cf.

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<sup>149</sup> Cf., most recently, Schreiner, 1989: 59-65.

<sup>150</sup> Although indifference towards Jewish identity markers would have forced Paul to the periphery of Early Judaism, such a move was not unprecedented. Something of the sort seems to have motivated the messages of John the Baptist and Jesus (although perhaps in a less pronounced manner and in a more restrictive context). Moreover, we know from Philo of some Alexandrian Jews who denied that such practices as circumcision were meant to be observed literally, thinking them to be ethical symbols of inner transformation (cf. *MigrAbr* 89-94). Paul's case in Rom 2 is hardly different.

Gal 5.14), he does not seem concerned, at least throughout most of his (extant) letters, to work out his prescriptions for community ethics on the basis of Torah commands. In general, rules of conduct are not founded upon scriptural prescriptions for moral behaviour.<sup>151</sup> When he states that believers fulfill the law by love he “is describing, not prescribing, Christian behavior”.<sup>152</sup> He is “not commanding their observance, but arguing that Christian love inevitably meets the standard set by the law”.<sup>153</sup>

Second, Paul does not set out *programmatically* to negate the “ritual law” and uphold the “ethical law”. A dichotomy of this sort does not *explain* Paul’s understanding of the law, but it is a *result* of his arguments at various places.<sup>154</sup> Räisänen may be right to say that such a distinction was unrecognized by Paul himself and was made possible by the fact that the term “law” is lacking of consistent definition in Paul’s letters.

Third, in partial explanation of the second point above, the distinction between moral and ritual is itself not framed in terms appropriate to Paul’s case; what seems more fundamental to it is the temporal distinction of the ages – a distinction which falls even within the law, or so Paul seems to have thought. We have suggested, on the basis of Rom 10.5-8, that for Paul the eschatological divide corresponded to a divide permeating scripture itself. Scriptural prescriptions which promote ethnocentrism belong to the past age and are not appropriate in the present age (cf. 10.5), for the law prescribed that the sole identity marker valid for the eschatological “now” is faith. By prescribing both ethnocentric (Lev 18.5) and universalistic (Hab 2.4) identity markers, the law itself includes a temporal distinction which encompasses both sides of the eschatological boundary. If Paul is granted this temporal argument, the unity of the law in some sense remains intact. That is, Paul makes no distinction between the law’s prescription for the *eschatological* membership (faith) and for ethical behaviour fulfilled by love;

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<sup>151</sup> Räisänen, 1983: 200. Cf. Westerholm, 1984; Lindemann: “Ethik ist für Paulus also keinesfalls die Praktizierung der Tora... Christen führen ihr Leben ‘in Christus’... Dies ist für Paulus der Ursprung der ἀγάπη, an der als höchstem Wert sich das Handeln auszurichten hat” (1986: 265). But see Schreiner, 1989: 59-65; Deidun, 1981: 188-93.

<sup>152</sup> Westerholm, 1988: 201.

<sup>153</sup> Westerholm, 1988: 202.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Segal: “Paul did not simply recommend that his community observe the ethical requirement of the Torah while ignoring the ceremonial parts. Yet his argument has that force” (1986b: 373). Cf. Sanders, 1983a: 105.

both are maintained in the christian community. For Paul, the law's ethical prescriptions and its prescriptions concerning the badge of covenant membership in the eschatological age are both fulfilled only by the "in Christ" community; that community alone fulfills the law *as a unity in the "now"*, or *as it was meant to be a unity in the eschatological age*. Conversely, unbelieving Jews demonstrate their failure to fulfill both aspects of the one law; they do not exhibit the proper mark of covenant membership in the eschatological "now" and their position outside of the covenant of grace is evidenced (in Paul's mind) by their failure to keep the ethical prescriptions of the law. Untypical in this is only Paul's perception of the prescribed marker for membership in the eschatological covenant, but once that is granted to him the unity of the law is maintained. Ironically, the only way Paul's case can have the effect of keeping the law as a unified entity, while at the same time making the claim that the law is fulfilled by the christian community of faith, is by undermining the validity of the law for the present wherever it seems to prescribe ethnocentric practices as badges of covenant membership (such as Lev 18.5).

In this way, the temporal disjunction between the two ages provides the scaffolding for two seemingly contradictory phenomena in Paul's case: (1) the resulting dichotomy between the law's requirements concerning (a) moral behaviour and (b) the ethnocentric distinguishing marks of the Jewish people, and (2) the claim to uphold the whole law appropriately in the eschatological present by faith (3.31).

One final issue remains to be noted before concluding this chapter – what might be called "affective" influences on Paul's depiction of "the Jew" throughout 7.7-25. It will be argued herein that Paul's presentation of "the Jew" in this section has itself been determined to a significant extent by an underlying motivation which does not arise out of the inner workings of Paul's gospel but which springs ultimately from his great concern for his fellow Jews. We learn of his great affection for his people in 10.1: "My heart's desire and prayer is that they might be saved" (cf. 9.1-3, 11.14). It is precisely because of this affection on Paul's part that his portrayal of "the Jew" is not wholly dismissive. Although "the Jew" fails at present to belong to the community of faith, Paul guards his depiction of him, taking care not to portray him in terms of the deliberate and flagrant sinner who has no chance of ever participating in the "in

Christ" community.<sup>155</sup> "The Jew" is not in a position beyond hope; although he currently does not know from where his salvation will come, his earnest desire is for salvation, just as Paul's desire for him is the same. In the case of the Jewish people, Paul considers the soil to be fallow; all that is needed is proper seeding and harvesting. So, as we have seen, he recognizes them to be zealous for God although their zeal is not properly "targeted". Accordingly, Paul's comments in 7.14-25 are rightly understood not only as a vindication of the law but also as a curious apology for unbelieving Israel.

Moreover, similar lines of thought seem to underlie Paul's convictions and hopes in both 7.7-8.4 and 11.11-14. In Rom 11, Paul expresses his hope that the Jews will become jealous of the fact that salvation is bypassing them and going to the gentiles; spurred on by their jealousy, they too might enter the covenant community. Like the mule who follows the carrot wherever it goes, so too will the Jews follow salvation; when they recognize that they cannot contain it within an ethnocentric community, they will join the community wherein grace is at work (or so Paul hopes). This involves a process of disorientation (*viz.*, they have been bypassed) and reorientation (*viz.*, they enter the covenant community). And it is this process which Paul describes in Rom 7-8: the "I" of Rom 7 is the disoriented Jew who recognizes that he cannot keep the law; in Rom 8, Paul shows how "the Jew's" dilemma can be resolved when he (re)orients himself within the "in Christ" people, the community which encompasses even the gentiles by their faith (Rom 3.21-4.25) and whose constituents are slaves to righteousness, having been freed from enslavement to sin (6.1-23).

It would seem, therefore, that alongside Rom 10.1, 9.1-3 and 11.11-32, Rom 7.7-8.4 provides us with insight into the character of Paul's affection for his people. So great was that affection that it influenced the manner in which he portrayed the problem of the unbelieving Jew. Paul does not portray him as a flagrant sinner for whom there is no hope of salvation whatsoever. And in this way Paul distinguishes himself from, for instance, the authors of PsSol and 1QH who viewed the Jews who remained outside the boundaries of their particular communities as apostates. Paul's depiction of Jewish outsiders is not nearly so negative; for him, they are the

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<sup>155</sup> Contrast 9.22, where unbelieving Israel are described as objects of God's wrath "prepared for destruction", an estimation which he "corrects" in 11.11-32 (esp. 11.26).

unwilling victims of sin who simply need correction for their sinfulness to be put aside. It is this same concern which shapes his expectations of the manner in which salvation history will unfold to include those of Israel who are presently excluded from the covenant people, an issue with which the next chapter of this project deals.

**Chapter 14:**

**The Ethnic Component of Christocentric Covenantalism**

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In Rom 9-11, Paul reargues his case concerning christocentric covenantalism, but this time he does so with one issue specifically in mind: God's relationship to Israel. Underlying this whole section is the question of God's faithfulness to Israel. Paul's gospel is open to the charge that God is favouring the gentiles at the expense of the Jews; if, as Paul has argued, God's covenant grace is operative within the christocentric community, and if most Jews are "outsiders" to that community, then God's promise to Israel has come to nought and he has been unfaithful in his constancy towards them.<sup>1</sup> This "Jewish problem" impinges on the persuasiveness of Paul's own gospel, for <sup>if</sup> it can be concluded that God is unfaithful in his relationship to Israel, there is little <sup>^</sup> reason to think that he should be otherwise in his relationship with the christian community.<sup>2</sup>

It might appear strange for Paul to concern himself with the question of God's faithfulness to Israel, for Paul has been arguing throughout Rom 1-8 that those in relationship with God are believers, without regard for race. Has Paul set aside his arguments in Rom 1-8? Such might be a proper conclusion were it not for several indications found within his earlier case that there does exist a bond between God and Israel which the principle of divine impartiality does not negate. Paul recognized in Rom 2-3 that Jewish possession of the law gives evidence of a relationship between God and Israel (2.17, 3.1-2). Although he rejects Jewish claims to superiority, Paul does not reject the basis for that claim: God's relationship with Israel, symbolized by Israel's possession of the law. As we saw in ch. 12, the discussion throughout 3.1-8 was facilitated by Paul's two convictions (1) that God is impartial, and (2) that a relationship of some sort exists between God and Israel. In Rom 9-11, Paul analyses the latter with regard to his case for christocentric covenantalism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Badenas, 1985: 81-87.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Davies, 1984c: 131; Beker, 1986: 14; Sanders, 1983a: 197.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Räisänen, 1986g; J.A.T. Robinson, 1979: 108-109; Achtemeier, 1985: 153; Ellinson, 1966: 25; and esp. Johnson, 1989: 120, 138-39. The "appendix" theory concerning Rom 9-11 should not be maintained; contra Schmithals, 1975b: 20-22; Dodd, 1932, 148; Kuss, 1959:

Throughout this chapter, our primary goal will be to evaluate Paul's claim in 11.26 that "all Israel will be saved" in the light of his fuller case in Rom 9-11, especially 11.11-32. Section 14.1. provides a brief overview of Rom 9-11 so that Paul's strange, but fascinating, argument in Rom 11 (examined in 14.2.) might be located within its larger context.

#### **14.1. An Overview of Romans 9-11.**

Paul sets his new agenda around the issue of Israel in Rom 9.1-5. After stating in explicit terms his concern for his fellow Jews, Paul recognizes that to them belong special privileges: the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. Moreover, from them have come the patriarchs (*οἱ πατέρες*) and, even more, the Messiah (*ὁ Χριστός*; cf. 1.3).<sup>4</sup> Here Paul is continuing the list of Jewish advantages referred to in 3.1 (*viz.*, Jewish advantage is "much in every way"), after having cited only one example in 3.2.<sup>5</sup> As he begins this section of this epistle, Paul does not skirt the issue of God's relationship with Israel but establishes it in bold relief at the outset, as if to suggest that what follows concerns this very fact.

In 9.1-5, Paul looks back on Israel's history from the beginning (the patriarchs) to the recent culmination of that history (the Messiah), and claims that God is the one who has directed the whole process of that history ("God is over all").<sup>6</sup> But if salvation history, directed by God and culminating in the Messiah, progresses in such a way as to exclude unbelieving Jews from participating in salvation, if the relationship between God and Israel has had no beneficial result for Jews who do not believe, the implication is that God himself is culpable. But Paul curtails such a conclusion, arguing in fact that "God's word has not failed" (9.6). He explains this in 9.6-13, stating that Israel's advantages were never intended to be enjoyed by the whole of Israel inclusively, but have always been restricted to one part of that group. Here Paul no longer speaks

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3.664-65.

<sup>4</sup> More than anywhere else in the Pauline corpus, the titular sense of *Χριστός* is evident in 9.5.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lübbing, 1986: 31.

<sup>6</sup> This phrase in 9.5, *ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεός*, is not a christological but a theological description, and refers most probably to God's role in the process of the unfolding drama of salvation history. So, Barrett, 1957: 175; Luz, 1968: 27; Käsemann, 1980: 260; Lübbing, 1986: 56.

of Israel collectively, as he did in 9.4-5, but draws out two strands within the one people; not all of Israel are Israel in the true sense of the word (9.6),<sup>7</sup> not all of Abraham's offspring are his children (9.7). Paul demonstrates this from Israel's history, as told in scripture; God chose Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau (9.7-13).

Since God has always been one to choose a part from within the whole to be the beneficiaries of his grace, so he cannot be said to be unjust (*ἀδικία*, 9.14) if the same is currently happening. As his dealings in history well show, God has always been characterized by his acts of hardening as much as by his mercy (9.15-18). The same applies to his dealings with Israel. God's calling of Israel entails that both his mercy and his hardening fall on respective parts of that one people: some within Israel enjoy his mercy while others experience his hardening. The point is made further by the analogy of the potter and his clay; from the one lump of clay can come two separate objects, some of the clay being used for honourable objects and some for dishonourable objects (9.21). Both parts of the one lump are useful to the potter; as Paul explains in 9.22-23, God is being patient with the "object of his wrath" (*viz.*, unbelieving Israel) in order that the riches of his glory might be enjoyed by "the objects of his mercy".<sup>8</sup> Those objects of divine mercy are called from the ranks of both Jews (the remnant) *and* gentiles (9.24, where Paul makes his "first distinctively Christian claim of the argument"<sup>9</sup>), and again Paul supports this from scripture (9.25-29). The obvious results of Paul's argument are (1) ethnic heritage in itself is no assurance of God's grace, and (2) God's ways in the present are as they have been from the start; his word has not failed.

Moreover, it is important to note that, while distinguishing between those Jews who are rightly Abraham's children and those who are not (9.6-13), Paul maintains that the latter are useful to God and perform a function for which they were chosen within the process of salvation

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<sup>7</sup> οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ. Some scholars contend that Paul here identifies true Israel with the christian community, as he does in Gal 6.16. Cf. Ellis, 1957: 137-39; Williams, 1980: 281; Aageson, 1987: 55. But those who Paul has in mind here are almost certainly those of ethnic Israel who have faith in Christ, the *true* members of Israel, in contrast to the rest of ethnic Israel. Cf. Mussner, 1984: 29; Hübner, 1984a: 58; Beker, 1980: 316; W.S. Campbell, 1981b: 32; B.W. Longenecker, 1989: 96-97.

<sup>8</sup> That the hardening of some leads to the salvation of others is also inherent in Paul's reference to God's hardening of Pharaoh in 9.17. Cf. Dahl, 1977: 144.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, 1989: 148.



history (9.19-23). God is being patient with them now, thereby putting off the final day and allowing the riches of his glory (which belong to Israel: cf. 9.4) to go to the full number of God's eschatological people. This point will be fundamental to Paul's case in 11.11-32: God is working his design even through the disobedient members of Israel.

Rom 9.30-10.13 has already been examined in some detail. Israel has stumbled by their lack of faith (as Isaiah prophesied), for they considered the covenant to be restricted to the community of the Jews, whereas scripture foretold that no such restrictions would apply in the eschatological age. It is not that Israel has not heard (10.14-18). They simply remain disobedient (10.21) while gentiles enter into covenant with God (10.20), thus provoking Israel to jealousy (10.19). Paul leaves this latter point undeveloped until 11.11-32.

Paul then makes the claim that God has not rejected his people (11.1), as demonstrated by the existence of the remnant who live by grace (11.2-6). The remnant ("the elect") now obtain what the rest of Israel so zealously pursued (11.7; cf. 9.31, 10.2-3). And in fact, says Paul, God is the one who has caused the rest to stumble (11.7b-10). Here Paul is building on his case of 9.6-29 that God's ways include the choosing of some and the hardening of others.<sup>10</sup> And just as he argued in 9.22-23 that the hardening of one part of Israel works for the benefit of others, so in 11.11-16 he makes the same point; unbelieving Israel has stumbled and by their stumble salvation has gone to the gentiles. God's hardening of them has a purpose within the larger scope of his design in salvation history.

But in 11.11-16 a new development appears in Paul's case. He argues that, despite their stumble, unbelieving Israel has not fallen; instead, provoked by jealousy at the sight of the gentiles being saved, the "fullness" of unbelieving Israel will copy their remnant counterpart and enjoy God's salvation (11.11-12, 15). Paul expresses his hope that his gentile mission will aid in the process, so that some Jews may be saved (through jealousy) as result of it (11.14). Within this section, then, Paul entertains a note of optimism concerning the future of unbelieving Israel which is unprecedented thus far in Rom 9-11. No longer are they depicted as "objects of wrath, prepared for destruction" (9.22). Paul has stepped back to bring into view a broader scope of

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Munck, 1967: 90.

salvation history and perceives a favourable scenario for the “fullness” of Israel alongside the remnant.

In 11.17-24, Paul presents his extended olive tree analogy which expands upon 11.11-16. Two aspects of Paul’s case in 11.11-16 facilitate the analogy: (1) the conviction that unbelieving Israel is playing a role in the process of salvation history, and (2) the hope that, as the process of salvation unfolds, it will come to include those of unbelieving Israel who at present have been cut off. Paul elaborates on these points, arguing that although gentiles have been grafted in, they are not natural participants, whereas unbelieving Israel are natural members; although unbelieving Israel have been lopped off at present, their regrafting is likely. Despite the disparate courses of believing and unbelieving Israel, Paul highlights their common heritage and entertains the hope of their common destiny.

Paul takes this one step further in 11.25-32 where, as in 9.1-5, both parts of Israel are spoken of as a single entity, here under the designation “all Israel”. Paul repeats the point of 11.11-16 once again – *viz.*, the hardening of a part of Israel has facilitated the salvation of the fullness of the gentiles (11.25) – and again he is optimistic for the future salvation of unbelieving Israel. Whereas this optimism had been expressed in 11.17-24 as a hope for the ingathering of unbelieving Israel, here it is stated as a certainty, a mysterious certainty which includes *all* of Israel – that is, both parts: “all Israel will be saved” (11.26).<sup>11</sup> Paul explains the certainty of Israel’s salvation on the basis of their election: “they are loved on account of the patriarchs (*διὰ τοὺς πατέρας*; cf. 9.5), for God’s gift and his call are irrevocable” (11.28b-29). Finally, Paul states once again that their election has involved their hardening by God in order that God might be merciful to others (11.31), and, in the end, might be merciful to all (nations) (11.32). In a concluding doxology (11.33-36), Paul salutes God’s sovereign ways in history – ways which transcend human expectations.

#### **14.2. Paul’s Understanding of Salvation History in Romans 9-11.**

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<sup>11</sup> There is no reason to believe that Paul means in 11.26 to identify the christian community as “all Israel”. Contra Whiteley, 1964: 97; Wright, 1980: 193-210; Güttgemanns, 1971: 47-49; Aageson, 1986: 284-85; Jeremias, 1977: 193-205. See B.W. Longenecker, 1989: 96-97, for further elaboration.

With this overview in mind, it is obvious that Paul's case in 11.11-36, which facilitates his claim that "all Israel will be saved" (11.26), is not necessary to his case throughout 9.6-11.10 where he insisted that God's faithfulness is not compromised if some of Israel remain outside the boundaries of his grace.<sup>12</sup> Romans 11 could well have concluded at 11.10 with no loose ends remaining; nonetheless, Paul continues along a somewhat different path to argue a somewhat different point in 11.11-36. We want to show, however, that the two sections (9.6-11.10, 11.11-36) are not necessarily incompatible theologically. The worst that Paul can be accused of is having a large agenda on the subject of ethnic Israel. In this regard, his claim that "all Israel will be saved" cannot be fully understood without a proper understanding of his view of salvation history. Two aspects are of special importance: (1) the *temporal* aspect of Paul's view of salvation history, wherein the "already" awaits the "not yet", and (2) the *ethnic* (as opposed to "ethnocentric") aspect of Paul's understanding of salvation history, wherein salvation is going out to all humanity by God through the instrument of his chosen people, Israel. These two aspects will be examined in 14.2.1. and 14.2.2. below. In 14.2.3., both will be compared with popular eschatological expectations in Early Judaism.

**14.2.1. Israel and the Temporal Distinction in Paul's View of Salvation History.** If we are right to recognize in Paul a hope for the salvation of all Israel, that hope will need to be placed within the larger context of his presentation in Romans.

Throughout Rom 1-8, Paul concerns himself with the requirements for being a member of the people of God in the present age. Paul's case is that, in the present age, the identity marker of the people of God is not an ethnic peculiarity but faith and living by the Spirit. In that way, one has membership with the eschatological people of God. Nonetheless, although Paul thought the previous age to have given way with the death and resurrection of Christ, he still awaited the consummation of the present age. Those "in Christ" have life now, but with the culmination of the age they will have resurrection (6.5) and glory (5.2, 8.17-18). They have the Spirit now (5.5), but only the firstfruits of the Spirit (8.23); the full harvest is yet to come. They are sons of God (8.14-16) and heirs with Christ (8.17), but they have yet to receive their full adoption

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Noack: "the paragraphs from ix.1 to xi.10 do not contain the slightest hint at the final solution" of 11.11-36 (1965: 166).

as sons (8.23). Just as all creation groans in anxiety while awaiting the final day (8.19-22), so believers too groan inwardly and await the redemption of their bodies (8.23-25). In this way, Paul's vision of the present age is proleptic, always marked by anticipation; the penultimate of salvation history is already present, but the ultimate is yet to come.

It is this same plan of the temporal stages within salvation history (the "already" <sup>and</sup> the "not yet"), established in Rom 1-8, which facilitates Paul's two estimates of ethnic Israel in Rom 9-11 (*viz.*, 9.6-11.10 and 11.11-36): In the present age, ethnic lineage has no part in determining the membership of the community of grace; with the culmination of this age, however, all Israel will be turned to faith in Christ – that is, their godlessness (unbelief) will disappear.<sup>13</sup> This temporal distinction is one of the determining factors underlying Paul's various estimates of Israel. It is best seen in Paul's use of the stumbling motif. In 9.32, for instance, with his eyes on the present time, Paul states that Israel has stumbled (*προσκοπέω*). The implication is that they are down, and therefore out. They have lost the race (*cf.* 9.30-31). But in 11.11, when he turns his sight to the future, Paul distinguishes between stumbling (*πταίειν*) and falling (*πίπτειν*). Israel has stumbled, but they have not fallen. In fact, Paul looks forward to the time when they will recover from their stumble and, in their fullness, come into membership with God's people of faith.

When we speak of Paul's view of Israel, therefore, we must qualify our remarks carefully. Our conclusions must be determined by the same temporal considerations that determined Paul's thought on the issue. With his sights focused on the present stage of salvation history, Paul excludes all considerations of race. Those of Israel who do not believe are excluded from membership in the community of God's grace. Although their disobedience has been used to bring others into the people of God, they themselves fall outside of this community. *In the present age*, therefore, Israel is said to be an "enemy" on account of the people of God (11.28). *In the culmination of this age*, however, Israel will be shown to be "loved on account of the

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Dahl, 1977: 153. Some have argued that Paul expected unbelieving Israel to be saved apart from faith in Christ. Cf. Mussner, 1976; *idem*, 1987: 34-53, 62-64, 153-59; Gaston, 1987: 92-99; Stendahl, 1976: 4, 40; Williamson & Allen, 1989: 34-39, 82-84; Lapede, 1984: 51; Gager, 1985: 261-64; Klappert, 1981: 58-137. Räisänen calls this interpretation "simply insupportable" (1988: 189). See arguments against it in B.W. Longenecker, 1989: 98-101; Räisänen, 1988: 189-92; *idem.*, 1987: 2917-18; and esp. Johnson, 1989: 176-205.

patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (11.28-29). Because they are elect, a deliverer – probably Christ himself<sup>14</sup> – will come to Israel and their sinful condition (unbelief) will be turned away. They are a part of the chosen people and will not be forsaken, in spite of their present hardening. Ultimately, God will prove his faithfulness to Israel once and for all; in the end, even those whom he has hardened will be turned to faith in the Messiah of God, *precisely because of their membership in the ethnic race of the Jews*. As J.C. Beker writes: "At the end, Israel's beginning, that is, its election by God, will be confirmed."<sup>15</sup>

In this temporal scheme of the stages within salvation history, the tension between (1) Paul's case for salvation by faith, where ethnic boundaries are disqualified, and (2) his certainty concerning the ultimate salvation of Israel, can be accounted for somewhat; both aspects of his case pertain to different stages in the unfolding drama of salvation. Nonetheless, one significant question remains: What is the basis for Paul's optimism concerning Israel's future incoming into the community of faith? The answer to that lies in the recognition of the ethnic character of Paul's understanding of salvation history, a vital aspect of Paul's case which will be examined in 14.2.2. below.

**14.2.2. The Ethnic Character of Paul's View of Salvation History.** Just as his sketch of salvation history within Rom 1-8 includes the whole picture, from beginning to end, from Adam to the resurrection, so also he answers the Israel question within this broader frame of reference (but, as we have seen, with different verdicts at different points of the drama). In Rom 11.11ff, Paul pulls back from his case concerning the present stage of salvation history and broadens his sights to include the events of the future and Israel's place in them; all Israel will be saved by the deliverer who will turn away their godlessness (11.26). Paul repeatedly explains that the inclusion of the gentiles is itself a way to bring unbelieving Israel to salvation; salvation is presently going to the gentiles in order to provoke Israel to jealousy and to lead them to salvation. Although his ministry might appear to some to concern itself solely with bringing

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<sup>14</sup> For discussion of this issue, see B.W. Longenecker, 1989: 98; Stuhlmacher, 1971: 561; Hübner, 1984b: 114. Some have suggested that ἐκ Σιών includes a reference not only to the heavenly Zion but to the earthly Zion as well. Cf. Zeller, 1973: 259-61; Aageson, 1986: 285; Dahl, 1977: 153, n. 47; Räisänen, 1987a: 2920; Luz, 1968: 294-295.

<sup>15</sup> Beker, 1980: 87. Cf. *idem*, 1986: 14; Käsemann, 1980: 305.

salvation to the gentiles, Paul wants his readers to understand that there is a deeper motivation behind his mission – that is, the salvation of Israel, for whom he has already expressed his great concern (9.1-3). Although he is the apostle to the gentiles, he does not presume his ministry to entail God's abandonment of Israel. In a roundabout way, in fact, Paul understands his gentile mission as a rescue operation for Israel's sake. Although Paul is working for the salvation of the gentiles, that does not mean that the gentiles have taken centre stage in God's plan. God has not transferred his favour to the gentiles at the expense of the Jews. He still has Israel in view and in fact, as we have seen, the process of salvation culminates with them. He argues, then, that even his gentile ministry is a catalyst for the eventual salvation of Israel.<sup>16</sup>

As soon as Paul has established this point in 11.11-16, he proceeds immediately to warn the gentiles against boasting (11.17-24), just as he had earlier condemned *Jewish* boasting (2.17-24, 3.27). Paul seems aware at this point that his characterization of his gentile ministry could be misperceived as indicating that Israel is indebted to the gentiles for their ultimate salvation, that Israel has no existence apart from the christian community, that it is the gentiles who are in a position to save Israel, rather than *vice versa*. Furthermore, Paul's own gospel of salvation apart from ethnic boundaries may well have motivated an anti-Jewish sentiment within some gentile circles of the christian community, just as it did less than a century later in the theology of Marcion (85-160 C.E.).<sup>17</sup> Paul recognized this danger and took immediate steps to steer clear of it by clarifying, specifically for his gentile readers, what he was *not* saying. Although gentile believers are "inside" and unbelieving Israel are "outside" of the community, gentile believers have no grounds to boast in themselves at the expense of the Jews. Paul hopes to undermine their pride, and his olive tree analogy serves this purpose well.<sup>18</sup> With this analogy, Paul portrays

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<sup>16</sup> Kim has suggested that *from the very beginning* Paul conceived of the gentile ministry as ultimately bringing about the salvation of all Israel (1981: 82-96). Better, however, is Räisänen's argument that Paul's views developed in the light of his later experiences in ministry (1986c) and represents an attempt at theological legitimation (1988: 187-88, 195-96). Cf. Dunn, 1987b.

<sup>17</sup> Many think that Paul was aware of anti-Jewish tendencies within the Roman churches. See, for instance, W.S. Campbell, 1981a: 36; *idem.*, 1981b: 37; Wiefel, 1977; Minear, 1971: 79; Badenas, 1985: 83, 87; Mussner, 1984: 35-36; Davies, 1984c: 144. On the other hand, Käsemann writes: "The admonitions of vv. 16-24 arise naturally *out of the problem of the chapter* and give evidence of Paul's foresight, but tell us little about the situation in Rome" (1980, p. 305; emphasis ours). Cf. Schlier, 1977: 333; Dunn, 1988a: 673.

<sup>18</sup> We were evidently wrong to state in 1989 that Paul's olive tree analogy is horticulturally problematic (1989: 119, n. 40; cf. Shaw: "horticultural nonsense" [1983: 171]), Baxter & Ziesler

the complexities of his view of salvation history. He perceives it to involve a process whereby God's promises to Abraham unfolds (= the root<sup>19</sup>) – a process which works through an ethnic people (= the natural branches), some of whom have turned to faith in the Messiah of their God while others are expected to believe only in the final stage of the process. But, since faith is the means of admission into this stage of salvation history, the process is no longer exclusive to that ethnic group; gentiles (= the unnatural branches) are admitted on the same basis. They must, however, be aware of their place, for they are like wild branches grafted into a tree who, in fact, function merely as parasites who become productive only when they are nourished by the nutrients of the root. The process itself does not end with them. It culminates, as it began, with Israel, for if the wild olive branches were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will the natural branches be grafted back into their own tree.

Here Paul has stepped back and perused the whole of salvation history in order to place the present situation into its fuller context. That is, when the whole picture of salvation history is in view, those of the present age who are admitted as members of the people of God apart from Jewish heritage must recognize that what they are participating in is fundamentally an *ethnic* process whereby the salvation of all humanity is effected. Gentiles are welcome to take part and, at this stage of the process, can enter fully into it. But, in fact, what gentile believers have associated themselves with is the salvation which God has effected through the vehicle of the Jewish people.<sup>20</sup> God began the process of salvation with an ethnic people (9.4-5). Ethnic Jews keep up with the process when they believe in their Messiah. Only then can they claim to be the true Israel (9.6). As the programme of salvation history unfolds, some of the ethnic people with whom it began have “evolved” with it by their faith in Christ. Others, however, have lagged behind by their lack of faith. Nonetheless, Paul retains a central role in the process of salvation

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have reargued that the process of ingrafting wild olive branches was a common practice in Paul's day which allowed a diseased olive tree to be reinvigorated (1985). We remain somewhat sceptical, however, of their conclusion that “the main point... [is] the rejuvenation of the tree” (1985:29). Although this would fit well with Paul's general concerns, it does not seem to be the “main point” of Paul's case.

<sup>19</sup> We mean here to suggest that the unfolding of God's promises to Abraham constitutes the root, rather than a more precise identification of the root as a specific person or group (*viz.*, Abraham, the patriarchs, Israel, the remnant or Jesus Christ).

<sup>20</sup> D.W.B. Robinson: “the very pattern of salvation remains part of the heritage of Israel, and can only be learned by the Gentiles from Israel” (1974: 235). Cf. Jacob, 1968: 32.

history for those of Israel who do not believe; by their disbelief they have made room for others to join the ranks of God's people. Even their disobedience is a medium whereby salvation goes to those who will believe.<sup>21</sup> God is working the salvation of others through those of Israel who have stumbled. They have a vital role in the process in which God is now recognized to be the God not only of the Jews, but of the gentiles as well (3.29). When the process, of which they are a part, is completed, they themselves will be turned to faith in the Messiah. Thus, things at present are not as they will be finally. Paul awaits the culmination of the age when God's ethnic agents, through whom he brings salvation to all, will be saved.

Since Paul perceives every stage of salvation history as operating through the agency of the ethnic race of the Jews, Paul draws out significant implications of this for his gentile-Christian audience, whose apostle he is. He advises them that the benefits which they have received must always be kept in their proper perspective, for he views them as the *proleptic deposit of what God will bestow upon Israel at the culmination of salvation history*. This is the whole point, for instance, of Paul's jealousy motif; when Israel realizes that the gentiles are taking part in the salvation which was promised to them (Israel), they will be provoked to jealousy and be saved by faith themselves. In this respect, it is interesting to examine what Paul says about adoption. On one hand, he states that believers are presently awaiting their full adoption as sons (8.23). On the other hand, he says that adoption as sons belongs to Israel (9.4). The relationship between these two statements is explained later in 15.27 where Paul speaks of the gentiles as *sharing in the spiritual blessings of the Jews*. In the present stage of history, those who believe in the Jewish Messiah are (proleptically) participating in the eschatological salvation of all Israel. At present, only the firstfruits of those blessings are evident. Paul looks forward to the time when all Israel – that is, both “parts” – will be saved by faith in Christ, for only then will the whole of salvation history be complete and the full blessings of Israel fall upon the community of believers. This community does not displace Israel. Instead, it is “an extension of the promises of God to Israel... the proleptic dawning of the future destiny of Israel.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Contra, e.g., Segal: “Paul... seems unwilling to allow the Jews any significant part in the salvation of mankind until the fulfillment of history” (1986a: 172).

<sup>22</sup> Beker, 1980: 332, 316. He continues: Paul “intends to show that the true *ekklesia* is a future eschatological reality that will only be realized when it comprises the whole people of Israel.”



At this point, Paul's presentation of the course of salvation history and the place of Israel and the gentiles respectively within that process needs to be compared with other eschatological expectations in the Judaism of his day in order to highlight points of continuity and innovation in his understanding of salvation history.

**14.2.3. Paul's Ethnic View of Salvation History in Comparison with Popular Expectations in Early Judaism.** Like most issues, no uniformity existed in Early Judaism concerning Israel and the gentiles in the final day. But despite the diversity of Jewish opinion, one conviction was presupposed by them all: "that Judaism as the one true religion was destined to become the universal religion."<sup>23</sup> As Zechariah proclaimed: "The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name" (14.9). This prophetic announcement captures a fundamental assurance of Judaism: "The golden age in the future, the goal toward which all history moved, was, above everything else, the fulfillment of Israel's destiny."<sup>24</sup> The literature of Early Judaism demonstrates repeatedly the common belief that, in the end, the religion of the true God will be established at the expense of all others (cf., e.g., PsSol 17).

If this can be said to be a given of Jewish eschatological expectations, the specifics which describe how that supremacy is awarded to the Jewish religion vary. In general, however, they can all be contained within one of three categories: the nations will be (1) subjugated, (2) destroyed, or (3) converted.<sup>25</sup> For our purposes, it is, of course, the conversion of the nations which is of particular concern.

Within the book of Isaiah, especially, God commissions his people to be a means towards the establishment of his rule for all humanity: "I will make you a light to the gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49.6; cf. 51.4). Similarly, in the last days,

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<sup>23</sup> Moore, 1927: 1.323. A parallel phenomenon is the popular Jewish belief that any honourable aspect of pagan society originally sprang from Jewish culture. Cf., e.g., Russell, 1987: 98-102.

<sup>24</sup> Moore, 1927: 1.225-26.

<sup>25</sup> Russell, 1964: 297-303; Moore, 1927: 2.371. Sanders finds six basic prophetic predictions concerning the gentiles in the end-times (1985b: 214), but all his categories are included in these three more general classifications.

it is said that Mount Zion will be established above all others,

and all the nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (2.2-3 = Mic 4.1-2; this is also a common theme of the Psalms)

Elsewhere, it is said that those of other nations who bind themselves to the Lord, and who serve, love and worship him will be brought to Zion and into the house of prayer, for God's house "will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (56.6-7). In this way, God will gather to himself both Israel and other nations with them (56.8). Zechariah also proclaimed that, in the end, men from all nations will grab hold of the skirts of the Jews in order to enter Jerusalem with them and worship their Lord (Zech 8.20-23). On that final day when God will live in Zion with his people, many nations will be joined with the Lord and will become his people (2.11).<sup>26</sup> In these passages, salvation is not granted without conversion to the Jewish religion.<sup>27</sup> That is, salvation comes to the gentiles only as they learn the ways of God and walk in his paths by aligning themselves with the law and its practices, and this itself comes about through the instrumentality of the people of Israel.

This same expectation is evident in much of the literature of Early Judaism,<sup>28</sup> so much so, in fact, that Sanders estimates that most Jews of Paul's time who gave the issue any consideration would have expected the gentiles to be converted to the true (Jewish) religion at the end of the age.<sup>29</sup> But, whether or not it is true that *most* Jews believed this, the conviction was certainly in the air in Paul's day and had strong roots in the prophetic tradition. In the end, Israel will be vindicated and the true religion will emerge uncontested as all the world turns to worship the God of Israel. Contending religions would be wiped out by the emptying of their membership ranks by means of conversion to the true religion, thereby ensuring the final triumph

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<sup>26</sup> Isaiah looks forward to the time when even Egypt will turn to the Lord and worship him (19.19-25).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jeremias, 1958: 60.

<sup>28</sup> 1En 10.21, 50.2-5; SibOr 3.115-31, 3.195; TDan 9.2, 10.5, 9-11; TLevi 14.4; PsSol 17.34-35; Tob 14.6-7.

<sup>29</sup> Sanders, 1985: 216-18. Davies is more cautious, finding this expectation to be "well marked" in Early Judaism (1984a: 126). Cf. Levenson, 1985: 126; Beker, 1980: 248.

of God over all creation. Salvation lay with Israel's God, and the way to him was through his people. So J. Jocz writes:

Between the God of Israel and the Gentile world stands the Jewish people. To come to God meant primarily to come to the Jews. Without first coming to Israel, the way to God remained barred.<sup>30</sup>

In this way, the universalism of Judaism's outlook is "nothing more than an extension of particularism, implying the absorption of the Gentile world by the chosen people."<sup>31</sup>

Paul evidences the same ethnic view of salvation history and the ingathering of the gentiles. The process began with an ethnic entity, continues as that ethnic entity places their faith in their Messiah, and will be completed when all of that ethnic people have turned to faith, after first allowing others to enter the covenant by their absence. All this follows from Paul's christocentric definition of the covenant. Because Judaism proper has outgrown its previous garb and is now marked out by faith, so even the gentiles can participate in this eschatological form of Jewish religion and share proleptically in the blessings which are Israel's. All of salvation history is rooted in the history of Israel and will be completed with Israel. In the process, God will have mercy on all humanity, and Israel will have been the instrument of his grace. In essence, the gentiles are coming to salvation on the skirts of the Jews – the whole point of Paul's olive tree analogy. For Paul, gentile faith in the Jewish Messiah is the actualization of the Jewish hope for the eschatological ingathering of the nations. Paul must have considered his gentile mission as fulfilling the "eschatological expectation of the Old Testament that in the latter days the nations will come to worship the God of Israel."<sup>32</sup> Of course, by insisting that nomistic practice has no salvific significance, Paul has changed the guise of Jewish religion,<sup>33</sup> but he maintains a fundamental Jewish conviction that in the end "Judaism as the one true religion was destined to become the universal religion." Paul's point is not simply that gentile believers *cannot exist without* Israel but, even more, when the whole scope of salvation history is in view, gentile believers *cannot exist except within* Israel.<sup>34</sup> In this way, God's salvation is going to the

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<sup>30</sup> 1979: 306.

<sup>31</sup> Guignebert, 1939: 157.

<sup>32</sup> Hultgren, 1985: 136. Cf. Davies, 1980: 59-61.

<sup>33</sup> Or, as Byrne well states: "Paul represents a Judaism *one stage ahead* of Palestinian Judaism in the apocalyptic programme" (1979: 232). Cf. Hooker, 1981: 308; *idem.*, 1982: 54.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Getty, 1988: 459; Clark, 1980: 27; W.S. Campbell, 1988: 10.

ends of the earth by way of Israel, just as God foretold (Isa 49.6).<sup>35</sup>

In the light of these considerations, it is not right to say, as does J. Klausner, that Paul "took from the Jewish Messianic idea its universalistic side, and ignored . . . its politico-national side."<sup>36</sup> Such a distinction did not exist in Paul's mind and does not do justice to his case in Rom 9-11. Instead, his universalism is an extension of his peculiar view of the unfolding drama of Israel's history, through which God works the salvation of the world. In an elaborate argument, Paul asserts two fundamental convictions: (1) one does not need to adopt the *ethnic symbols* of the people of Israel in order to experience God's grace; and (2) God works the salvation of the world *through an ethnic people, Israel*. Both aspects of his case are maintained in complementarity by a dynamic awareness of the process whereby God works in history with a particular people for the salvation of humanity. The fact that Paul allows for no ethnocentricity in the present age does not deny the ethnic character of his understanding of salvation history; he simply gives different answers to different issues. Within Paul's christocentric covenantalism there is an ethnic component which roots his innovative understanding of God's eschatological ways firmly in the soil of the history of the Jewish people.

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<sup>35</sup> This is an essential aspect of Paul's presentation in Rom 1-11. It is not, then, simply an expediential move on Paul's part to pacify christian Jews (Watson, 1986: 171-73), nor is it a later interpolation into the text (Plag, 1969: 41-45).

<sup>36</sup> Klausner, 1943: 446. Correctly, Munck, 1959: 258-59; Richardson, 1969: 133; Hahn, 1982: 223-24.

## PART IV: CONCLUSIONS

## Chapter 15

## Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11

**15.1. Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11.**

This study has analysed two texts of Early Judaism whose authors were each confronted by a "crisis event" which proved to be a serious challenge to prevalent Jewish perceptions and expectations, at least for them. For the author of 4 Ezra, that event appears right at the outset of his work, as if to frame the whole of what transpires: the destruction of Jerusalem. Throughout the rest of 4 Ezra, the implications of that event are worked out, and Ezra (the author's "alter ego" in the process of transformation) arrives at a new perspective which is presented as "the source of understanding, wisdom and knowledge" (14.47). This perspective is proven to be valid by its experiential "cash value"; that is, it alone restores comfort and confidence in God. For Paul, the critical event is not mentioned explicitly in Romans (although it lies behind the whole of his presentation there), but it is referred to elsewhere in his letters: the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1.12) who appeared to him (1Cor 15.8; cf. 1Cor 9.1; Acts 9.17, 26.16) in exalted form (cf. Rom 1.4; 2Cor 4.6; Acts 9.3, 22.6, 26.13) and who commissioned him to be the apostle to the gentiles (Rom 1.1-5, Gal 1.16). As a consequence of this event, Paul declares his perspective to have been dramatically altered (2Cor 5.16); what he clung to previously he has relinquished for something far greater (Phil 3.7-9, 2Cor 3.7-11). This event, then, "is clearly the watershed that is responsible for the work and thought of the Apostle".<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence of these events and the theological reflection which they necessitated, each author considered himself to be the beneficiary of the true understanding of God's ways, in contrast with the rest of the Jewish constituency. The author of 4 Ezra recognized his perception to be shared by, and valid for, only a few; the rest of Israel (*viz.*, "all the people...from the least to the greatest", 13.40) are ignorant of it. Paul too held convictions which, despite his claim to the authentic form of Judaism (cf. 9.6), were perceived by most of his contemporaries

<sup>1</sup> Hagner, 1980: 157.

as idiosyncratic innovations, if not “heresies”.

For both authors, the claim to proper knowledge was substantiated by the fact that their perceptions were informed by, and corresponded with, God’s eschatological ways. Such claims to exclusive truth were, of course, in no way novel. Nor is the manner whereby those claims are substantiated; the claim to have true insight concerning God’s eschatological ways is fundamental to the majority of apocalyptic texts. What is seemingly novel, however, is the general thrust of their respective perceptions; that is, for each author, proper knowledge involves the rejection of what we have called “ethnocentric covenantalism”. Although various Jewish groups seem to have defined the covenant in various ways (envisaging differently what loyalty to the covenant entailed), few seem to have undermined the basic ethnocentric character of the covenant. They simply (re)defined that ethnocentric element according to their respective social situations. So, the Qumran sectarians considered themselves to be the true Israel – the remnant who alone embodied what Israel as a whole were meant to be. Similarly, those who produced and circulated Jubilees considered that, by their observance of the solar calendar in distinction from the majority of their contemporaries, they alone upheld the covenant between God and Israel. The examples are numerous. Each one includes an ethnocentric slant, although each one interprets it along different lines.

This is not the case, however, for either Paul or the author of 4 Ezra (although this will have to be nuanced somewhat with regard to both). The revelation of God’s eschatological ways has forced them to refute the ethnocentric slant of traditional Jewish covenantalism. Quite simply, in both 4 Ezra and Rom 1-11, eschatology does not complement but, in fact, disqualifies ethnocentrism. In 4 Ezra, Uriel’s constant pointing to the eschaton wherein only the few will be saved by their perfect works forced Ezra to abandon (eventually) his historical perspective which focused with singular interest upon the merciful character of God in relation to his people and his creation. Similarly, Paul’s christological solution, which is set within an eschatological context throughout (cf. 3.21a, 26, 5.12-21, 7.1-6, 8.1-17, 10.4-8), contravenes any ethnocentric interest. For both authors, then, knowing how God operates in the eschatological age erases any prior convictions concerning Jewish ethnocentrism in relation to the covenant.

Moreover, the manner by which both authors facilitate the breakdown of ethnocentrism is precisely the same; that is, they both dwell on the Jewish commonplace that all are guilty of sin, manipulating it to such an extent as to discredit an ethnic sense of security in God's favour. In the light of the desperate condition of sin which pervades the whole of humanity, the very justice of God would be compromised if his mercy were ethnically conditioned (cf. Rom 2.1-11, 3.5-8; 4Ez 7.17-25). Each author maintains the spotlight on the anthropological condition of sin at the expense of traditional ethnocentric explanations of the covenant as the corrective to that condition.

While the problem to be solved is the same in each work (*viz.*, human sinfulness), the corrective to that condition is, of course, quite different in the respective works. For the author of 4 Ezra, human sin must be countered by human effort in accordance with the standard of the law. In the eschatological age, God will respond in his mercy and save the few who have proven themselves to be worthy by their works and faithfulness to the standard. For Paul, the decisive initiative has already been taken by God and the responsibility rests with his creatures to respond properly (*viz.*, without ethnic restraints) to that divine initiative. Since God's grace is restricted to the boundaries of the <sup>r</sup>christian community of faith, Paul accuses ethnocentric Jews of a type of legalism (*viz.*, trying to earn salvation by their ethnocentric works in a context apart from God's grace: 4.4-5). Conversely, the author of 4 Ezra *prescribes* a type of legalism in which salvation is attained to by works of merit, thereby earning the right of God's "grace" in the eschaton. Whereas Paul substitutes one community self-identity for another, the author of 4 Ezra seems to abandon a community identity in favour of individual piety and perfection (although what this entails in practice is never stated).

The fundamental differences between these two solutions are these. First, for Paul, God's grace is a *present reality*, whereas such is not the case for the author of 4 Ezra. Second, for Paul, the eschatological age has *already* begun, whereas for the author of 4 Ezra that age is *not yet*. These two aspects are explained by the nature of their respective crisis events. Paul's crisis event was a *positive* one which revealed something definitive about the way God is working now in the new age. The eschatological life has already been inaugurated (but not fully "realized")



for those “in Christ” – those who uphold the law and fulfill what it requires. The crisis event for the author of 4 Ezra, conversely, was a *negative* one which demonstrated for him God’s absence in history. Although God has left his standard of judgement behind, he himself takes no part in the course of events; his mercy is restricted to the bounds of the future eschatological age and is available only to those who merit his favour by their works in accordance with the law (that is, grace is available to those who have no need of it!).

But while the *nature* of their crisis experiences explains something of the differences between these two authors, it does not ultimately explain the radical cases set forward by them in contrast with their respective contemporaries. That is, the fact that Paul’s experience was positive does little to explain his case in distinction from other believing Jews who failed to see things as Paul did. Similarly, the destruction of Jerusalem was most likely a negative experience for the majority of Jews of the late first century CE, but we know of no evidence that they considered this event to indicate the absence of God’s grace in the present apart from ethnic consideration. In this regard, it is not simply the *nature* of their respective crisis events but the *profundity* of these events which leads to each author’s innovative case. This is not to suggest that they were in any sense more perceptive than others to the “real meaning” of those events. Our point is only a psychological one, suggesting that each author took to heart **his** crisis events in a manner quite distinct from the majority of **his** contemporaries. And, in this regard, each author shows his dissatisfaction with traditional explanations of God’s ways; **he** grappled to understand the significance of **his** respective crisis event, even if that process involved discarding some long-treasured tenets of belief or practice. For each, Jewish ethnocentrism was considered “loss”, resulting in the radical alteration of **his** perceptions, beliefs and expectations.

What is intriguing about their respective cases is the manner in which each author handles the concepts of “law” and “Israel”. In their rebuttals of ethnocentric definitions of the covenant, each one encounters similar difficulties. One issue to be answered is: What then of the law? In answer to this pressing issue, these authors demonstrate similar techniques of self-definition and legitimation. First, each one stakes his claim to scriptural authentication of his eschatological perspective (cf. 4Ez 7.129-30; Rom 1.2, 3.21b, 31, etc), as most pious Jew<sup>s</sup> would

have done.

Second, each one makes a *distinction* with regards to the law. For Paul, that distinction is between what is and is not a valid prescription for the eschatological age; if the whole of scripture serves a function, only some of it (*viz.*, those passages which Paul can cite in support of his case for faith and equality of membership) functions within the boundaries of the eschatological “now”. If other passages can be cited which challenge or repudiate his case, they are illegitimate within the eschatological age. The law is properly the “law of faith” (3.27), a law which is “pursued” properly by faith rather than by ethnocentric works (9.31-33). If others consider the covenant to be an ethnocentric phenomenon and stake their claim to the law, what they have in their possession is not the law which is “unto life” (7.10), the “law of God” (7.22, 25, 8.7), the “law of the Spirit of life” (8.2); instead they possess the law as a “law of works” (3.27) which leads them to attempt to earn salvation outside the boundaries of God’s grace (4.4-5) and which keeps them enslaved to sin (7.14), thereby becoming for them “the law of sin and death” (8.2, 7.23, 25). In this way, Paul legitimates his own case in terms of the law while discrediting the claims of others who cite scripture in support of their counter cases.

The author of 4 Ezra proceeds with precisely these two concerns in mind: (1) to legitimate his case, and (2) to discredit any attempts to negate his case on scriptural grounds. Although the author makes his claim (*via* Uriel) to Mosaic authority on one occasion (7.129-30), this is a unique reference; proof-texting does not have any further part in his case. At places, it might appear that the author wants to *redefine* the nature of the law, or to infuse the concept “law” with a meaning which is in line with his eschatological perspective (13.54, 14.20-22). Ultimately, however, his real technique of legitimation lies in his public-private distinction; that is, claiming continuity with Moses, the author distinguishes between what Moses *publically revealed to the people* and what he *secretly withheld from them* (14.5-6). We have called these “the public law” and “the private law” respectively. The problem with the public law is that it is incomplete and, as such, promotes a perspective (*viz.*, ethnocentrism) which is inadequate for understanding the ways of God. The people have in their possession this public law. Just as Ezra drew on these twenty four books for his expectations of God in I-III – especially in his initial speeches of each,

thereby contributing to his lack of understanding – so “all the people” are guided by the same public law and, accordingly, misjudge their position before God. In this way, any challenge to the author’s case is, naturally, in error, even if it has scriptural support, since such a challenge arises from an inadequate understanding of scripture itself. The twenty-four books are revealed to both “the worthy and the unworthy” (14.45), which is to say that the public law *alone* has no definitive quality. Only the seventy books (a numeric metaphor) provide wisdom and understanding (14.47), but only to the few who are wise. The author does not suggest, however, that the private law renders the public law superfluous. He seems to maintain that the public and private belong together, almost as text and interpretation; the true meaning of the public law comes to light only when it has the benefit of its proper interpretive key – *viz.*, the private law, which brings understanding.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, without the eschatological wisdom of the private law to enlighten the true meaning of the public law, the public law itself (*viz.*, the Jewish scriptures) promotes a misunderstanding (ethnocentrism!) of God’s ways.

In this fashion, both authors of this project can be seen to treat the law in similar ways. Not only do they each claim to have true insight into the law, as is expected, but each substantiates that claim by making a distinction within the concept of “law” itself; for the author of 4 Ezra, the distinction is between the public law and the private law, while for Paul the distinction is between the law of works and the law of faith. In each case, the former is rejected – that is, the law as a symbol for, and promoter of, Jewish ethnocentrism. In this way, each author hears two voices within the law: one voice promotes ethnocentrism, while another disqualifies ethnocentrism in view of the revelation of God’s eschatological ways. Paul has the luxury of restricting the former to a previous age, since the new age has already dawned. The author of 4 Ezra does not share this option, since, for him, the new age is still to come; accordingly, he attributes an ethnocentric reading of the law to an inadequate understanding, an understanding shared by nearly all except the few who are wise.

It needs to be noted, however, that such distinctions within the law are not programmatically set out by either author; they are employed to legitimate innovation *vis-à-vis* claims

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<sup>2</sup> It is little wonder, then, that biblical proof-texting plays such a minor role in Uriel’s case!

of legitimacy by others. Distinctions of the sort illustrated above allow for a degree of one-upmanship; what is possessed by the particular author is the law in its fullest character, in contradistinction with others who claim to uphold the law. Paul's distinction is most clearly seen in 3.27, and, although he does not maintain the distinction *in explicit terms* (cf. the undifferentiated "law" of 3.31), it nonetheless explains his various references to the law, both positive and negative. For example, when he speaks of the law positively (e.g., 3.31), it is because his gospel is wholly in line with the law in its proper character as the spokesman of faith; when he speaks of it negatively (e.g., 7.1-6) it is because the law has been hijacked by others to promote ethnocentrism, even in the eschatological age.

For the author of 4 Ezra, the distinction within the law is made explicit only at the end of his piece in order to legitimate his preceding case. Apart from that, the law appears without distinction and always as a guide to proper living, the divine blueprint for salvation through works and perfection. Nonetheless, although the distinction between public and private is not explicit until episode VII, it is necessary for the author's case throughout. As soon as the law is removed from the context of God's abiding covenant mercy on behalf of his people and is put into a context of (what Sanders calls) "legalistic perfectionism", it takes on a new nature; although it remains *the standard* of divine judgement, *the system* in which it operates forces an implicit distinction within the law itself. This is evident in the case of the law's provisions for repentance of, and atonement for, transgression – an aspect which cannot be included in the law which the author wants to uphold, for transgressions themselves rule out the possibility of salvation altogether. Repentance and atonement have salvific import only if God's grace is presupposed, but such is not the case for the author. The consequence of this for his view of the law is readily obvious; although he speaks of the law without distinction throughout I-VI, an implicit distinction within the law is necessary to his case, a distinction made explicitly in VII.

The second major issue for each author is "the Jewish problem": What, then, of Israel? In their respective cases, each author initially narrows the concept of Israel to a small number – a remnant. Several things must be noted in this regard. First, for Paul the remnant (11.1-7; cf. 9.6) includes those who embody what Israel is meant to be, due to their participation in

the community undergirded by God's grace. The remnant concept evident in 4 Ezra, however, is quite different. There the remnant (*viz.*, the few, those who remain) are not portrayed as a community *per se*, and especially not a community undergirded by God's grace.<sup>3</sup> Instead, "the remnant" is the collective term applied to those few individuals who merit eschatological salvation by their own stringent efforts in obedience to the law. In both Romans and 4 Ezra, the concept of (true) "Israel" is (initially) reduced to a remnant, but the character of that remnant is at variance in each presentation.

Second, after narrowing the concept of (true) Israel to a remnant, both authors broaden the concept of Israel to include a much larger group once again. Paul argues a case throughout Rom 1.16-11.10 that God's righteousness is not negated by the fact that only some of Israel (the remnant) have believed in the Messiah. Nonetheless, Paul puts a different perspective on things in 11.11-32, demonstrating a dimension of salvation history which his earlier case did not touch on (except in 3.1-8, where he left it inchoate). In 11.11-32, Paul shows how unbelieving Israel perform a function within the process of salvation history – a function in line with their election by God whereby he (the potter) uses them (a part of the clay) for his purposes to bestow his mercy on all humanity. Their temporary displacement does not entail their ultimate rejection; instead, it is an outworking of their calling (cf. 9.22-24) – a calling which is incontrovertible (11.28-29) and which assures their ultimate salvation (11.26). His argument in 11.11-32 is not necessary to the case which precedes it in 1.16-11.10, but it demonstrates Paul's dissatisfaction at the prospect of leaving "Israel" (in the sense of *true* Israel) as only a small remnant; in the end, "Israel" will embrace both the remnant and those Jews outside the remnant.

The author of 4 Ezra maintains that only a few out of all the people are righteous. Like Paul, he too argues that this does not negate God's righteousness; the fault lies not with God but with the people themselves (cf. 7.19-25, 9.30-37). Moreover, the author expects salvation to be enjoyed by an innumerable group consisting not only of the few but also of the ten tribes who were preserved in another land (13.39-47). The final constituency of eschatological Israel, then, is

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<sup>3</sup> If 4 Ezra was intended as a piece of community "evangelization", such a community is barely evident throughout the pages, and its inner cohesion would result from phenomena other than the notion of divine grace.

not just the “remnant” from within the two tribes but a magnificent twelve-tribe conglomerate. One suspects, however, that the author is simply posturing on this score in order to root his innovation more firmly in traditional expectations, or, restated, to protect the righteousness of God in a way which the rest of his case could not. The salvation of a twelve-tribe entity offers no reprieve to “all the people”, who remain in their ignorance, destined for destruction. In this regard, the author’s description of the twelve-tribe entity of eschatological salvation is somewhat feeble, transparent and unconvincing, at least from our “detached” point of view. Paul too may be guilty of posturing somewhat in Rom 11.11-32, but he does seem to have integrated his argument there more successfully into his larger case than does the author of 4 Ezra at 13.39-47.

A word must be included about naming the “patterns of religion” observed herein. We have argued that both authors are discontent with traditional ethnocentric definitions of the covenant. Paul’s gospel has the effect of removing the adjective “ethnocentric” while keeping a type of covenant structure;<sup>4</sup> God’s initiating grace offsets the anthropological condition of sin for those who bear the mark of covenant membership, faith. Although Paul does not make much use of the term “covenant” in Rom 1-11,<sup>5</sup> a covenant perspective gives his case coherence at every point. What he ends up with we call *christocentric* covenantalism – “christocentric” in that faith in Christ excludes the salvific import of ethnic practices. Nonetheless, even this christocentric covenantalism contains within it an ethnic (as opposed to “ethnocentric”) clause; all Israel plays a part in salvation history and will be saved as the final stage of the process. Thus, in Paul’s case, the covenant itself seems not to be repudiated. That is, contrary to Sanders’ insistence, Paul did *not deny* the “two pillars common to all forms of Judaism: the election of Israel and faithfulness to the Mosaic law”.<sup>6</sup> Granted, Paul has profoundly *revalued* the significance of these “pillars”; nonetheless, they remain significant aspects of his case. Paul’s redefinition of them only testifies to the diversity within Early Judaism (cf. section 1.3.). We cannot speak, then, as Sanders does in the conclusions to his study, of “Paul and the Break with Judaism”,<sup>7</sup> nor,

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<sup>4</sup> Wright: “Paul, in rejecting the *nationalist* view of the covenant, does not reject covenant theology itself” (1982: 14).

<sup>5</sup> *διαθήκη* is found only in 9.4 (plural) and 11.27 (quoting scripture), and both times it has reference to ethnic Israel.

<sup>6</sup> 1983a: 208.

<sup>7</sup> 1983a: 207-210.

as V.P. Furnish does, of “Paul’s conversion to Christianity...*from* Judaism”.<sup>8</sup> If we speak of “conversion” in Paul’s case, we must do so with historically-sensitive care, for Paul wanted to insist that the communities which he was founding embodied in themselves what God intended the covenant community to be in the eschatological age. His argument in Rom 1-11 is carried out with this demonstration in view, as he revalued the covenant in the light of the eschatological Christ-event.

In the case of 4 Ezra, a definitional label is harder to obtain. What transpires looks more like an individualistic legalism than anything else – “individualistic” in that a community dynamic is (almost?) absent from the text,<sup>9</sup> and “legalism” in that, for all intents and purposes, God’s grace is removed from the scene altogether, the onus being placed on the individual to forge his own salvation by works apart from a community identity. Nonetheless, the author dresses up his innovation with the garb of covenantalism, perhaps even an ethnocentric covenantalism; that is, he would argue that his case upholds the grace of God (but only as an eschatological reflex to human merit), the law as the divine standard of judgement (apart from divine grace), and the salvation of a twelve-tribe Israel (although that translates into very little salvific hope for “all the people”). But the system into which the author drops these characteristics is about as foreign to their traditional context as can be imagined; divine grace and the salvation of a twelve-tribe Israel are better understood as legitimating posturings rather than the core of his perspective.

Finally, four implications of this study may be in order concerning the character of Early Judaism and the relation of these authors to it. First, it needs to be said that if Paul’s letters and 4 Ezra represent exceptions to a generally predominant “pattern of religion”, they are exceptions which help to prove the rule. That is, these works give indication that ethnocentric covenantalism *was* prevalent in Early Judaism; in fact, the author of 4 Ezra characterizes it as being shared by “all the people”. Whereas other Jewish works indicate the various ways in which *ethnocentric* covenantalism took form in various situations, 4 Ezra and Paul’s letters

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<sup>8</sup> 1989: 338, emphasis his.

<sup>9</sup> The individual is not urged to remain with or join the remnant community wherein is salvation, for there is no obvious community referred to in the text. As Meeks states, 4 Ezra comes close to “personal salvation” (1986: 95). Cf. Kolenkow: “What one sees in 4 Ezra... may be called salvation in the private sphere... 4 Ezra emphasizes the possibility of ascetics saving themselves” (1982: 249).

(esp. Romans and Galatians) are exceptional in their attempts to undermine such a system (*viz.*, ethnocentrism) altogether.

Second, it is telling to notice the techniques whereby ethnocentric covenantalism is discredited in Rom 1-11 and 4 Ezra. Paul's extended "attack" upon ethnocentrism is found in Rom 2. Therein, his technique is to extrapolate principles which were common in Early Judaism and to apply them in a new manner (e.g., the impartiality of God, salvation by works, the notion of the righteous gentile). This is fair enough; Paul has every right to perceive principles in a new fashion. The point we are making, however, is that in his attempt to discredit the ethnocentrism of "the Jew", Paul does not do full justice to the prevalent convictions of his contemporaries. "The Jew" who appears in that context is a "man of straw" of sorts who is never quite allowed to speak for himself, and so his position is naturally shown to be indefensible. Paul is not to be faulted for this; such is the nature of polemic.<sup>10</sup> (The same thing is noticeable, for instance, in the letter of James, where a "Pauline" position seems to be set up in order to be knocked down [Jas 2.14-26].<sup>11</sup>) The point to notice is that, for whatever reason, Paul never really "comes to grips" with the ethnocentric covenantalism against which he launches so many arguments.

In 4 Ezra, conversely, ethnocentric covenantalism is given a fairly honest voice in Ezra's initial speeches of I-III. But, as a result, the author (speaking through Uriel) has no rational arsenal against it; it is simply wrong. He has one reason why it is wrong – it does not explain God's ways – but that reason is mediated by means of eschatological description and apocalyptic revelation rather than logical deduction. This partially explains the great length of the dialogues and their open-ended closure; Ezra was looking for rational solutions to explain his dilemma, but none were satisfactory, and he remained unconvinced by rational persuasion (cf. 9.14). His "conversion", then, takes place outside the context of argumentative debate. In fact, it is not even recorded for the reader; Ezra simply appears in IV a transformed character. It might be supposed that the author knew of no way to transcend the traditional mindset by means of rational deductions. He simply knew that such had to be done.

Taken together, then, these two texts give evidence of the cohesion and compellingness

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Levenson, 1985: 110; Räisänen, 1987b: 411.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hengel, 1987.



of the system of *ethnocentric* covenantalism. One author (Paul) mounts argument after argument against it, but, from our perspective, fails to orchestrate an ultimately convincing rebuttal of it *for its own sake*. The other (the author of 4 Ezra) portrays it in its own terms, but then has no real arguments to level against it. It is little wonder, then, that Paul's career seems to have been plagued by the constant blockages erected by unconvinced Jews (and gentile sympathizers of Judaism); and it is little wonder that the author of 2 Baruch (writing after 4 Ezra, we think) found the need to offset the idiosyncrasies of 4 Ezra, placing the events of 70 CE once again within the context of a confident ethnocentric covenantalism.<sup>12</sup> Neither Paul nor the author of 4 Ezra did much to *prove* that ethnocentric covenantalism was wrong; they simply believed that such had to be the case in the light of their respective crisis events.

Third, if it can be said that the notion of divine grace is the foundation for Jewish practice and theological reflection in Early Judaism and in emerging rabbinic Judaism (as Sanders and Segal argue<sup>13</sup>), this notion is shared wholly by Paul, but not by the author of 4 Ezra (except as an eschatological concept which has been redefined to the point of losing all salvific substance). On this score, then, Paul is a better representative of the prevailing ethos within Judaism, despite his untypical definition of the covenant. On the other hand, if it can be said that "Judaism was... much less concerned about 'right *belief*' than about 'accepted *practice*'",<sup>14</sup> then, on this score, Paul is representative of very little within Early Judaism. Conversely, despite the idiosyncratic perspective of the author of 4 Ezra, one can expect that his practice remained within the bounds of acceptable praxis in Early Judaism and nascent Rabbinic Judaism; there is little indication to the contrary. All in all, then, the theological innovations of these two first-century Jews help to contribute to our understanding of the diversity of Early Judaism.

In this way, the two authors, writing 25-30 years or so after their respective crisis events, demonstrate something of the direction of the Judaisms which they represent – on the one hand, the need of the christian movement to work out its self-identity in the light of its ever-increasing gentile constituency, and, on the other hand, the post-destruction rabbinic concern to regulate

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sayler, 1984; Murphy, 1985.

<sup>13</sup> Sanders, 1977: 33-288; *idem.*, 1980; Segal, 1985. Cf. Rowland, 1985: 25.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, 1967: 155.

more specifically what faithfulness to the law entailed without recourse to the temple.<sup>15</sup> For its part, the christian (or better here, Christian) movement would develop along the “universal” side of Paul’s case while all too often neglecting the “ethnic” component of his case. For its part, the rabbinic movement shared the concern of the author of 4 Ezra for exactitude in practice, although, if Sanders and Segal are correct, that movement tended not to share a legalistic motivation with the author of 4 Ezra.

Fourth, one final observation should be registered. We have already made mention of the manner in which both authors allow the anthropological condition of sin to overrun ethnocentric covenantalism: the encyclopedic problem means that the people of Israel cannot rest on their ethnic laurels for salvation. Paul does not introduce a new anthropological understanding on this point; he leaves intact the notion of universal sinfulness and replaces an ethnocentric solution with a christocentric solution. We may ask of him, then, why one solution is structurally any better than the other? Could not ethnocentric Jews have argued that if the human condition of sin is used to undermine their perspective, it can be used just as well to undermine Paul’s case? Unless Paul is willing to insist that sin is altogether foreign to christian existence (which he is not willing to do; cf. 4.25), may not Paul’s criticisms of “the Jew” in Rom 2 be returned to him with the same amount of polemical “spin” to discredit his own solution? The fact that Paul thinks of sin as a *power* from which believers are to be released, even if they commit transgressions, does not dispell this possibility, since Paul’s argument in 2.1-3.20 operates on the presupposition that transgression is itself evidence of the fact that “the Jew” is “under (the power of) sin” (3.9). No doubt, Paul would not allow the same presupposition to be used against his own case. Judging from his comments in 3.5-9, 6.1 and 6.15, however, something of the sort seems to have happened in response to his case by other believers who accused him of promoting ethical libertinism and antinomianism. Evidently, then, in the process of christian self-definition polemical arguments were being thrown back and forth which followed similar lines, despite their different points of origin within the christian movement. This phenomenon seems to have been facilitated by the fact that the Jewish commonplace of human sinfulness remained a commonplace within christian

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<sup>15</sup> Mundle: 4 Ezra depicts the post-destruction conviction that atonement could be effected “in noch peinlicherer, noch trüerer Gesetzeserfüllung” (1929: 249). For a comparison of 4 Ezra and Matthew in this regard, see Syreeni 1987: 212-13.

redefinitions of God's covenant mercy.

The author of 4 Ezra, however, sidesteps this arena of debate, but only by allowing an exception clause to modify the human dilemma: a few manage to escape the anthropological condition of sin. Since divine grace is excluded from the scene, salvation must be by human effort with the hope of transcending the otherwise all-encompassing condition. Here is a radical anthropology which transcends the kind of polemic evident between Paul and his "opponents", but its radicalness is achieved at the expense of the notion of divine mercy.

The point, then, is this. In the christian movement, because traditional views on anthropology were retained (at least on the point under discussion here), so too was the traditional solution retained: divine grace. How that grace is mediated was not so obvious within the movement, facilitating the inevitable disputes concerning the identity markers and social make-up of the new movement. In IV Ezra, however, a new view on anthropology is arrived at which allows for an obvious solution (perfection by works), but only by negating, for all intents and purposes, the notion of divine grace (and community self-definition).

### 15.2. Summary.

This project has traced the cases of two pious Jews in provocative re-evaluation of the covenant *vis-à-vis* the eschatological insight afforded them. For each, their respective experiences of crisis so profoundly shaped their outlook that they discarded prevalent traditions, which they previously had embraced, and adopted new understandings of salvation which they thought to be properly aligned with the eschatological ways of God. Neither author considered his case to entail a rejection of YHWH; neither abandoned the conviction that the God who revealed himself on Mt Sinai was altogether righteous. If traditional Jewish covenantalism did not explain the ways of God adequately, another perspective was necessary, for the righteousness of God could not be doubted. If God's actions did not match the traditional understanding of his ways, the former was not to be questioned, but the latter.

What animates Rom 1-11 and 4 Ezra is primarily the repudiation of Jewish ethnocentrism and, consequently, the revaluation of the law and the people of God. We do well to

recall S. Sandmel's appropriate characterization of common Jewish conviction: "Israel and the Torah constituted a blended entity; without Israel the Torah had no significance, and without the Torah Israel had no uniqueness".<sup>16</sup> It is this conviction with which both Paul and the author of 4 Ezra grapple as they attempt to reconcile their own "crisis" experiences with the conviction that YHWH is a righteous God. It is this inseparable bond between the ethnic people and the law which they are forced to break, or at least redefine, thereby rendering God's ways free from ethnocentrism. Their writings illustrate the extremes to which each had to go in order to accomplish this task in the light of contemporary understandings of the law and the people of God.

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<sup>16</sup> 1978: 182.

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