

## Article

# What about Abraham? Abraham as Ingroup Exemplar and “Children of Abraham” as Superordinate Identity in Romans 4

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**Abstract:** In Paul’s eschatologically informed reading of Scripture, the Torah was never intended by God to be itself sufficient to secure membership in Abraham’s family. Because membership here had always been secured on the most fundamental level by God’s *hesed*, a future move of divine initiative is what the Torah and the prophets had all along anticipated. The redemption and reconciliation wrought by Christ has happened then in order to fulfill the original promise to Abraham, as seen through the lens of a broader salvation–historical matrix, in which the restoration of Israel and consequent ingathering of the nations envisaged by the prophets is integral. Romans 4 centrally concerns this new social phenomenon—the coming together of Jews and gentiles into a single, unified, eschatological covenant community, in which previous social identities necessarily retain their fundamental significance. The crucial implication of Paul’s theologizing is that to be a child of Abraham neither eradicates the import of traditional ethnic markers of Judaism, nor, wholesale, the ethnic distinctiveness of the varied people groups of the non-Jewish world. However, both groups are also therein transformed and united as one renewed humanity in Christ. Moreover, as the first person to be brought into a covenant relationship with God on the basis of God’s *hesed*, which was then met by the appropriate response of faithfulness toward God, Abraham functions for Paul as an ingroup exemplar for the Christ community.

**Keywords:** Romans 4; Abraham; identity; righteous/ness; faith/fulness; covenant; mercy; grace



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## 1. Introduction

There should be little doubt that critical insight is brought to the study of the New Testament by social-scientific methodologies, including resources from not only social history but also social theory. However, fewer interpreters have sought to fully integrate the findings from the social sciences with a theological interpretive method that seeks to discern the theological substructure informing the biblical authors’ claims.<sup>1</sup> This need for integration is particularly relevant as interpreters explore the phenomenon of early Christ-movement identity. In this light, I wish to explore the issue of identity precisely from such an integrative approach. As a test case, I have chosen Romans 4. In this passage, Paul attempts to justify the reality of the multiethnic Christ community as representing the fulfillment of God’s eschatological program revealed in the Jewish Scriptures. That is, the inclusion of nations qua nations alongside Israel qua Israel in the family of Abraham has now happened in Christ and this is precisely what the Torah and the prophets anticipated (Rom 3:21–22). Thus, both the Jewish and gentile Christ allegiants in Rome, while maintaining the relative saliency of their respective ethnic affiliations, can also lay claim to membership in Abraham’s family and thus to Abraham as Father.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Social Theory

As I have argued elsewhere, the interrelated contemporary social psychological theories, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), are helpful in discerning the nature of much of Paul’s identity-shaping rhetoric in several of his letters, Romans included. SIT is a theory that seeks to predict intergroup behavior vis-à-vis social

identity. SCT is a related theory concerning how individuals understand themselves and others in relation to groups to which they respectively belong (Turner 1987, pp. 42–67). “Social identity” refers to “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his [sic] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978, p. 63).

An aspect of SIT/SCT that is pertinent to my understanding of Paul is the notion of a superordinate identity. A superordinate identity is a larger identity category that may encompass persons with other group affiliations.

Such larger social identifications serve to create a common in-group social identity, which may, in turn, reduce intergroup bias, and thus promote greater harmony and a basis for unified action among subordinate groups. Contemporary social-scientific research demonstrates that a common in-group social identity can be most successfully established if it simultaneously allows (in some fashion) for group members’ continued identification with and commitment to their respective subordinate group affiliations (Stone and Crisp 2007, pp. 493–513; Zoccali 2017, p. 4; 2023, p. 2)

Another relevant aspect of SIT/SCT is the notion of ingroup exemplars that serve in a prototypical capacity. As Hogg et al. explains, “people cognitively represent social groups in terms of prototypes. A prototype is a subjective representation of the defining attributes (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, behaviors) of a social category” (Hogg et al. 1995, p. 26). Hogg further points out that “[w]ithin a salient group then, people who are perceived to occupy the most prototypical position are perceived to best embody the behaviors to which other, less prototypical members are conforming” (Hogg 2001, p. 139).

In all, these aspects of SIT/SCT are employed here heuristically to describe the social dynamics that Paul, as a seasoned missionary and bicultural mediator (Ehrensperger 2013, p. 101), would have likely come to recognize and appreciate, given that such dynamics seem to be well-grounded in the general human experience and perhaps even especially so in the collectivist culture of the ancient Mediterranean world (Nebreda 2011, pp. 109–10). Accordingly, I will argue that in order to achieve his rhetorical goal in this section of the letter, Paul utilizes the category of “children of Abraham” as a superordinate identity descriptor and further points to the figure of Abraham as an ingroup exemplar for the multiethnic Christ community in Rome.

### 3. Contemporary Scholarship on Romans 4

Scholars generally fall into two camps concerning what they hold as the central theme of Romans 4 in the context of the larger argument in the letter. Benjamin Schliesser succinctly refers to these camps as “faith” and “fatherhood”, with the former emphasizing the notion of “justification by faith” (cf. vv. 1–8, 19–25) and the latter emphasizing Abraham’s fatherhood of Jews and gentiles (cf. vv. 9–18) (Schliesser 2007, p. 222). Joshua W. Jipp’s study of the chapter suggests, however, that Paul’s argument is too complex to be narrowed down to a single theme, and that Paul’s appeal to Abraham serves a “multifaceted” purpose (Jipp 2009, p. 218). Nevertheless, Jackson Wu rightly points out that the fundamental question underlying the chapter is: “Who belongs to Abraham’s family?” (Wu 2019, p. 84). But, as Wu also notes, the matter of how persons are brought into a proper relationship with God is inextricable from the matter of who, i.e., what group(s), is(are) or can be in a proper relationship with God, and it is these interconnected notions that Paul is pursuing in this section of the letter.<sup>3</sup>

As a contextual grounding for the following analysis, it is helpful to offer a brief overview of the three main approaches to Paul’s claims regarding Abrahamic ancestry, as the respective conclusions that have been offered here bear significantly on the question of identity within the Christ movement.

The first approach is that Abraham serves as an exemplar of the principle of salvation by faith through grace and not good works. This approach is constituent of the traditional Protestant view of Paul, the so-called “Old Perspective”. According to this view, in Romans

4, Paul continues his assault on the notion of “works righteousness”, a chief characteristic of first-century Judaism, by establishing a precedent with the Jewish patriarch Abraham—he was declared righteous by God based on his faith alone. In making this rhetorical move, Paul replaces Torah submission with “faith” as the grounds for a proper relationship with God and, in doing so, he effectively renders first-century Jewish identity obsolete. As Ernst Käsemann remarks, “[T]he ground is cut away from under the feet of the Jewish tradition and the Jewish interpretation of the scriptures, and that the patriarch himself is removed from its context” (Käsemann 1971, pp. 79–80).

A second approach to the passage is that Paul’s extension of Abrahamic ancestry to gentiles serves as an attack on Jewish ethnocentrism—the idea that first-century Jews sought to confine “grace to one race” (Wright 1991, p. 24). This is the general approach taken in New Perspective scholarship.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the traditional Protestant approach, this view understands the emphasis in the passage to be on Abraham as the “father” of the faithful rather than on Abraham’s own faith. Nevertheless, Torah observance is here similarly replaced by “faith” as demarcating Abraham’s family. As such, ethnic distinctions between Jews and gentiles are rendered insignificant within the Christ community (Cranford 1995, p. 71).<sup>5</sup>

A third set of interpreters, critical of both Old and New Perspective readings, argue that Abrahamic ancestry serves for Paul as a fictive kinship for gentile Christ allegiants in particular. In as much as Paul’s rhetoric of faith points to the implications of the Christ event, namely that it is the basis of right standing with God, it is targeted only toward gentiles. Paul assumes that Jews should continue to relate to God as they always have. Caroline Johnson Hodge remarks accordingly, “Abraham’s faithfulness resulted in the guarantee that God’s promise would come to all his descendants, both Jews and gentiles. Christ’s faithfulness implements this promise *for gentiles*” (Johnson Hodge 2007, p. 91; italics mine).<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. The Theological Coherence of Romans 4

In my view, all three of these approaches miss the central point that Paul advances in this section of the letter. Paul’s fundamental conviction is that the final eschatological redemption of Israel and all creation has been brought about through the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Paul’s eschatologically informed reading of Scripture, the Torah was never intended by God to be itself sufficient to secure membership in Abraham’s family, the community of righteous ones, the covenant people of God. Because membership here has always been secured on the most fundamental level by God’s *hesed*<sup>7</sup>—that is, God’s covenant love and abiding faithfulness<sup>8</sup> manifest in God’s sovereign grace and mercy,<sup>9</sup> a future move of divine initiative is what the Torah and the prophets had all along anticipated (Rom 3:21–31; 8:1–4; 9:30–10:13; 11:26–32).

The redemption and reconciliation wrought by Christ has happened then in order to fulfil the original promise to Abraham, as seen through the lens of a broader salvation–historical matrix, in which the restoration of Israel and consequent ingathering of the nations envisaged by the prophets is integral. Romans 4 centrally concerns this new social phenomenon—the coming together of Jews and gentiles into a single, unified, eschatological covenant community, in which previous social identities necessarily retain their fundamental significance. Indeed, I will attempt to demonstrate that this is not only a pragmatic matter for Paul’s mission, namely maintaining group cohesion and stability for the multiethnic Christ communities he founded or addresses in his letters, but that it is deeply rooted in his theology vis-à-vis the fundamental significance of the Christ event that is, for Paul, the ultimate expression of God’s *hesed*.<sup>10</sup>

The crucial implication of Paul’s theologizing is that to be a child of Abraham neither eradicates the import of traditional ethnic markers of Judaism,<sup>11</sup> nor, wholesale, the ethnic distinctiveness of the varied people groups of the non-Jewish world. However, both groups are also therein transformed and united as one renewed humanity in Christ. Moreover, as the first person to be brought into a covenant relationship with God on the basis of

God's *hesed*, which was then met by the appropriate response of faithfulness toward God, Abraham functions for Paul as an exemplar or prototype for the Christ community.

### 5. Immediate Context of Romans 4

In Romans 1:16–17, Paul establishes the central claim of his gospel: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone demonstrating faithfulness,<sup>12</sup> to the Jew first and also the Greek”. He suggests here that the true basis for claiming honor among the Christ community is not in their ethnic affiliations but in their shared identity in Christ (cf. Rom 5:1–5). Though social values were not monolithic in the ancient Mediterranean world, “honor” and the avoidance of “shame” were undoubtedly among the central concerns across the spectrum of ancient Mediterranean people. Honor was typically conceived of as a limited good, in which one’s acquisition of honor was ipso facto at another’s expense. Thus, given the highly agonistic inclination of the general culture, the natural desire for honor among the members of the Roman Christ community would have to be cautiously negotiated by Paul. In a scenario in which their respective subgroup identities rose in salience over their “in Christ” identity, the pursuit of honor and consequential competition between subgroups over its acquisition could severely inhibit the sort of unity that he hopes to affirm among them.

As such, he explicitly includes in v. 17 the two primary subgroups, Jews and gentiles, as participants in the salvation wrought by God through Jesus Christ. In doing so, he is careful to preserve his auditors’ subgroup affiliations while emphasizing their superordinate identity as Christ allegiants. In contemporary social-scientific terms, Paul recategorizes these subgroup affiliates of Jews and gentiles, respectively, into the larger group of Christ allegiants/the faithful (i.e., “us”) in distinction from those outside the Christ community (i.e., “them”) who will not participate in God’s salvation, do not possess this claim to honor, and who instead will be shamed in the final judgment (cf. Rom 10:9–13).

Directly following Paul’s assertion in 1:16–17, he indicts in 1:18–3:20 both the gentile and Jewish world as evidencing the reality of sin within their respective groups. While Paul maintains that the Jewish people are advantaged due to their historical election and possession of the Scripture (3:1–2), he nevertheless concludes that neither group stands in a privileged position in the final judgment, at which time all people will be held accountable for sin. In 3:19–20, he points to the Torah’s role in explicating and condemning sin (cf. Rom 7:7–24). Whereas God’s historic people, Israel, demarcated by the “works of the Torah” (v. 20),<sup>13</sup> possessed a provisional status of righteousness in the former age (cf. Phil 3:6b), now that the new age has dawned and God has provided the once-and-for-all means through which the power of sin has been broken, a righteous status for God’s people is no longer available outside of what God has done in Christ (cf. Rom 10:3–4; Gal 2:15–16; 3:10–11; Phil 3:9).<sup>14</sup>

Romans 1:18–3:20 serves, therefore, as the critical premise for Paul’s gospel of Jesus Christ explicated in 3:21–26. Here, Paul explains that the Christ event represents the eschatological manifestation of God’s righteousness—or, inextricably, God’s *hesed*—that will make people righteous,<sup>15</sup> as prophesied in Isaiah 45:22–25 LXX:

Turn to me, and you will be saved, those from the ends of the earth! I am God, and there is no other. By myself I swear, most certainly, righteousness will proceed from my mouth; my word will not be diverted: that to me every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess to God, saying, righteousness and glory will come to him, and all who exclude themselves will be put to shame. By the Lord they will be made righteous, and in God all the offspring of the children of Israel will be glorified.<sup>16</sup>

This righteousness is necessarily then “apart from the Torah” but “testified to by the Torah and prophets”. It is the ultimate expression of God’s sovereign grace and mercy through which is found liberation from and atonement for sin for all people groups without discrimination, Jewish and gentile alike (cf. Rom 2:11; 10:12). In the eschatological age,

righteous status is secured then only by the “faithfulness realized in Jesus Christ, to all demonstrating faithfulness”.<sup>17</sup>

From here, in 3:27–31, Paul draws vital implications for these subgroups within the Christ community. In v. 27, Paul explicitly asserts that public claims of honor (καύχησις) for either subgroup over against the other are disallowed by the gospel.<sup>18</sup> Such honor claims would represent the antithesis of Paul’s vision of a unified eschatological people.

The supportive reasoning that he employs in v. 29 is predicated upon the Shema. It is precisely because there is only one God for both Jews and gentiles—for all humanity—that entrance into God’s people is determined solely by the Christ event. But the question of how gentiles can be made righteous—brought into a covenant relationship with God—without full Torah submission and taking on traditional Jewish identity<sup>19</sup> still requires further explanation. Paul demonstrates that his gospel is fully consistent with the teaching of the Torah, and to do this, he appeals to the figure of Abraham.

## 6. The Argument of Romans 4

Romans 4 continues the diatribe style that began in 2:17, in which Paul utilizes a fictitious Jewish interlocutor to raise potential objections to his argument (Stowers 1994, pp. 232–34). In Rom 4:1, the interlocutor asks, *Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν εὐρηκέναι Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα;*<sup>20</sup> There has been much debate surrounding the proper translation of this verse. However, what seems to me to be the most obvious rendering has, outside of my work and to my knowledge, been nowhere else proposed. I suggest the verse should read: “What then will we say we have found<sup>21</sup> Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, to be?”<sup>22</sup> The expression to find (εὐρίσκω) someone to be a certain way is a fairly common one in the Pauline corpus (1 Cor 4:2; 15:15; 2 Cor 5:3; 9:4; 11:12; 12:20; Gal 2:17; Phil 2:8; 3:9). This would also reflect the typical portrayal of Abraham in the Jewish literature:

You found his heart faithful before you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous. (Neh 9:8)

He kept the laws of the Most High, and he entered into a covenant with him. He established a covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested, he was found faithful. (Sir 44:20)

And in everything wherein He had tried him, he was found faithful, and his soul was not impatient, and he was not slow to act; for he was faithful and a lover of the Lord. (Jub 17:18)

Wasn’t Abraham found faithful when he was tested, and it was considered righteousness? (1 Macc 2:52)

The answer to this question seems clear enough. From the Torah, we find that Abraham was reckoned righteous by God. Abraham is unsurprisingly referred to here by Paul’s Jewish interlocutor as “our forefather according to the flesh”.<sup>23</sup> Late Second Temple period Jewish thought clearly understood Abraham to be the ancestor of the Jewish people in terms of a myth of common biological descent (cf. Rom 9:5). Integral to this perception, his fidelity and righteousness were viewed as inextricable from his submission to the rite of circumcision, and by extension, to the entirety of God’s instruction to Israel.<sup>24</sup> However, v. 2a hints that the simple equation of fidelity and righteousness with full Torah submission is misleading and would indeed result in the sort of Jewish honor claim that Paul says is prohibited by his gospel.<sup>25</sup> The question of vv. 1–2a could be therefore reiterated: “What then will we say that we have found Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, to be if not accepted by God precisely because of his submission to the ordinances of Torah, thus confirming that covenant membership is dependent upon this, and thereby giving him (and by extension all Jews) a claim of honor over against the non-Jewish world?”

Paul then objects to the interlocutor's line of reasoning in v. 2b: "Not as far as God is concerned!" He cites Gen 15:6 in v. 3, which portrays God's reckoning of Abraham as righteous in response to Abraham's offering of faithfulness to God. The assumption commonly made from v. 4, that Paul's metaphor of a paid laborer who earns a wage is intended to portray a false, merit-based approach to righteousness, significantly distorts Paul's main point, which is to associate "reckoning" (λογίζομαι) strictly with an act of God's freedom (cf. v. 8).<sup>26</sup>

God is not compelled to make humans righteous but chooses to do so as a matter of sheer grace and mercy (cf. Rom 5:20–21; 11:5–6, 30–32). There is here no attack on full Torah submission and thus Jewish identity as traditionally defined (cf. Rom 2:25; 3:1–2; 14:1–23; 1 Cor 7:18). Nor is Paul contrasting general obedience to God with mere "belief" (ostensibly understood as an internal disposition in relation to God), which is inherently nonsensical and utterly foreign to Paul's thought.<sup>27</sup> Rather, for Paul, Abraham's πίστις was clearly manifest in his actions. Stanley K. Stowers offers the following remarks:

God's approach required Abraham's trust in the divine promises in a way that ensured Abraham's faithfulness to the hopes embodied in the promises. Specifically, in spite of his being too old to procreate, Abraham was circumcised, and Abraham and Sarah had sexual intercourse because of God's promise. This was Abraham's faithfulness: Not lawkeeping but acting as circumstances required in light of God's promise . . . Abraham's initial trust upon hearing God's promises should not be separated from his continuing faithfulness, which allowed him and Sarah to conceive and bear Isaac. The faith has no independent status in isolation from the faithful acts. (Stowers 1994, p. 228)

Thus, in v. 4, Paul is simply affirming God's sovereign grace and mercy as being the basis for covenant relationship with God. Abraham's righteous status, while conferred by God upon Abraham offering faithfulness to him (cf. Rom 10:10–13), is not then fundamentally predicated upon this allegiance. Rather, the "reward" (v. 4; cf. Gen 15:1) of God's covenant relationship with Abraham (Wright 2013, p. 215) and the entailed promise of God are ultimately secured by God's *hesed* rather than by the content or quality of Abraham's (or any person's) faithfulness (v. 5).

Similarly, the priority and indispensability of God's *hesed* in relation to his covenant people is a crucial premise for Paul's entire argument in Romans 9–11. The reluctance of many Jews to embrace Paul's gospel does not mean the word of God has failed (9:6), because in the first place God's people have always ultimately been demarcated by God's *hesed* rather than by mere ethnic affiliation. As pointed out above (n. 24), in the Jewish tradition from which Paul draws here, the patriarchs were already obeying the Torah prior to it being revealed through Moses; the patriarchs are thus "Jews" par excellence. Yet, Paul demonstrates the primacy of God's *hesed* in vv. 6–13 by tracing the special election of the Jewish patriarchs that was a matter of God's sovereign grace and mercy rather than human activity (vv. 7–12). And it is because God's *hesed* has ultimately been manifested in the Christ event that Paul can say in Rom 11:5–6: "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (cf. n. 13 and 18 above).

Indeed, as the Scriptural grounds for his argument that Israel's covenant has reached its intended τέλος in Christ (10:4), Paul cites several texts, including Exod 33:19 (9:15); Hos 1:10; 2:23 (9:25–26); Isa 1:9; 10:22 (9:27–29); and 65:1–2 (10:20–21), which all likewise point to the priority and indispensability of God's *hesed* in relation to Israel. The Scriptural story of Abraham's descendants "according to the flesh" testifies to the notion that God ultimately remains faithful to his people, securing their relationship with God's self even in the absence of keeping the works of the Torah, as Paul suggests in Rom 3:3–4. This is clearly illustrated in Exodus 32–34.<sup>28</sup> In the aftermath of the golden calf incident, at which time Israel violates the first commandment, God ultimately decides to renew the covenant (cf. Exod 32:11–14; 34), with forgiveness for sin then asserted as an explicit attribute of God in

relation to his covenant people (cf. esp. Exod. 20:4–7 with 34:6–10). Similarly, the prophetic promises of covenant renewal that follow in the wake of Israel's failure to abide by the works of the Torah, which lead them into exile, are predicated upon God's abiding grace and mercy towards God's people. Importantly, the substance of this renewal is understood foremost in terms of cleansing from sin and enabling obedience by a special act of God (see further here below).

The critical point of vv. 5–8 is, therefore, that God brings into existence or re-establishes a relationship with those who are ungodly on the fundamental grounds of his own *hesed*, in keeping with God's freedom to do as God chooses, as confirmed by the Torah: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom 9:15, citing Exod 33:19).<sup>29</sup> In light of the universality of human sinfulness that Paul thoroughly explicates in chapters 1–3 (cf. esp. Rom 3:23; see also 5:12, 20–21; 11:32a; Gal 3:22; 1 Cor 15:56), all expressions of human fidelity to God, including the works of the Torah, are at their core an appeal or response to the revelation of God's prior grace and mercy that culminate, for Paul, in what God has done in Christ (cf. Rom 2:4; 3:3–4, 25–26; 6:15–22; 8:28–30; 9:11–16; 11:22, 30–32; 12:1–2; Col 1:15–23). Again, it is God's *hesed* and not primarily one's submission to the Torah that is and has always been the basis of covenant identity, as Psalm 32, which Paul cites in vv. 7–8, explicitly affirms: "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered . . . The woes of the wicked are many, but God's *hesed* surrounds the one who trusts in him" (Ps 32:1, 11).

Paul's rhetorical question in v. 9, "Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcision, or also on the uncircumcised?", implies that what he asserts in vv. 1–8, while perhaps a challenge to traditional Second Temple Jewish views about righteous status, does not contradict them. In v. 10, he explicitly points out that God's reckoning of Abraham as righteous was prior to his submission to the ordinance of circumcision. The role of circumcision, claims Paul in v. 11a, was a seal of this righteous status, that is, of the newly formed covenant relationship between Abraham and God.<sup>30</sup>

It is not until we arrive at v. 11b that the conclusion drawn necessarily requires a reading of the Abraham narrative that is informed by Paul's particular eschatological convictions. In effect, he argues that because Abraham's covenant membership was established prior to his submission to the Torah ordinance that comes to define Jewish identity, God's plan all along was that non-Jews would likewise be brought into the covenant. For Paul, this plan has (only) now been fulfilled in God's act in Christ. He continues in v. 12 by affirming Abrahamic ancestry over Jews generally, and then to Jewish Christ allegiants specifically.<sup>31</sup> However, what Paul goes on to suggest in the remainder of the passage (and the letter as a whole) points to the necessity of "in Christ" identity for one to remain in the family of Abraham.<sup>32</sup>

Verses 13–16 are especially dense, with several overlapping notions presupposed in what is explicitly asserted. Yet, this is where Paul reveals the underlying logic by which he makes the claims found in vv. 9–12. First, the twin promises of the Abrahamic covenant, offspring and homeland, are here both conflated and universalized into the inheritance of the entire world (cf. Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 3:21–23).<sup>33</sup>

Paul clearly understands this promise, which he connects to the (re-)new(-ed) heavens and earth of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 65:17–25),<sup>34</sup> to have been inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ.<sup>35</sup> He thus alludes in Rom 8:18–25 to a "new exodus" presently taking place for all creation (Keesmaat 1994, pp. 29–56; 1999, pp. 15–133), in which the "children of God"—or, synonymously, the "children of Abraham" (cf. Gal 3:26, 29)—will be revealed for who they are. It should be observed that, as found in Isaiah 40–66 and likewise understood by the author of Jubilees (1:23–29; 4:26; 19:21–25; 22), inextricably linked for Paul are the fulfilment of the original promise(s) to Abraham, the renewal of all creation, and the renewal of Israel's covenant.

This leads to a second notion presupposed here. The inheritance of the world comes not through a righteous status expressed in full Torah submission, as per the previous dispensation, but through πίστις (cf. Rom 9:30–10:4; 11:5–6), which, once again, points

to the intersection of divine and human faithfulness found in the gospel and ultimately serves as a synecdoche for “in Christ” identity (cf. Rom 1:16–17; Gal 3:21–29). This idea is elaborated upon in vv. 14–15. For Paul, the Torah was never intended to be the final means through which righteousness could be secured for God’s people. Rather, the Torah itself points to a fresh act of divine initiative, whereby God would reconcile the wayward members of the covenant to God’s self (cf. Deut 30:1–6). Paul’s entire theological program rests on the conviction that such prophecies of covenant renewal, in which God via the agency of the Spirit would write the Torah on the hearts of God’s people,<sup>36</sup> is presently taking place in Christ.<sup>37</sup>

As affirmed in Romans 7, the Torah and its commandments, while “holy and just and good” (v. 12), could never compel obedience. Therefore, the Torah, in the absence of Christ, can only ultimately function as a means of explication and conviction of sin (cf. Rom 3:20; 5:20; 7:7, 12–13; Gal 3:19; 1 Cor 15:56). It thus becomes the vehicle for God’s eschatological “wrath” (4:15), which has now been inaugurated and will culminate in the final judgment.<sup>38</sup>

The third layer of understanding in these verses concerns what would take place consequent to Israel’s restoration. In my view, Paul is unquestionably influenced by the eschatological pilgrimage motif found throughout the prophetic texts and likewise expressed in much of the relevant extrabiblical Jewish literature.<sup>39</sup> The very conclusion to the main theological discourse of the letter in 15:8–12 suggests that the ingathering of nations to join a restored Israel in worship of their God, anticipated in Isaiah and elsewhere, is itself predicated upon God’s *hesed* and is, in turn, fundamental to Paul’s gospel: “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised for the truthfulness of God in order to confirm the promises to the fathers, and as a result the gentiles may glorify God for (God’s) ἐλέους” (15:8–9; cf. Rom 9:14–26; Gal 3:22; 2 Cor 4:1; 5:17–21). Uniquely for Paul, the ingathered nations are brought into Israel’s covenant on equal terms.<sup>40</sup>

He draws then a natural correlation between the eschatological pilgrimage tradition and the Abrahamic promise. As such, the participants in this eschatological phenomenon are precisely the members of the multiethnic family promised to Abraham, with such righteous gentiles already anticipated in the person of the righteous and yet uncircumcised Abraham (cf. vv. 9–11).

Further support for this reading is found in vv. 24–25. As is widely recognized, Paul echoes here the Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah Isa 52:13–53:12,<sup>41</sup> a passage that, along with the other servant songs, resonates with the eschatological pilgrimage tradition (Ware 2011, pp. 79–86). The servant’s vicarious suffering and death provide for expiation of sin and the restoration of Israel as God’s righteous ones. However, throughout the servant songs of Isaiah, the servant is also portrayed as having a unique role to fulfill on behalf of the other nations (cf. Isa 49:6), and is, moreover, explicitly identified as Israel (cf. Isa 44:1; 45:4; 49:3; 42:18–43:1).<sup>42</sup> It is almost certainly the case that Paul conceives of Jesus Christ in precisely these terms. Namely, both the agent responsible for Israel’s own redemption (cf. Rom 9:5; 11:26–27; 1 Cor 11:23–25) and also the very embodiment of Israel, who self-sacrificially fulfills Israel’s vocation to bring blessing to the other nations, as per the original promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3 (cf. Gal 3:8)<sup>43</sup> as well as anticipation of the nations’ conversion to the God of Israel as prophesied throughout Isaiah (cf. esp. Isa 2:1–4). Both groups—the redeemed in Christ from Israel and the other nations—thus represent for Paul the one renewed humanity of God who will inherit the renewed creation.<sup>44</sup>

Verse 16 reaffirms that the inheritance of this promise is received on the basis of God’s grace through πίστις (cf. Rom 3:24). Once more, πίστις is not an abstract disposition that is the antithesis of one’s efforts. It represents, rather, the same faithfulness to God that Abraham demonstrates and that historical Israel was also called to exhibit (cf. Exod 19:5–6). All such fidelity requires action (to the extent possible) in light of divine promise (cf. Rom 4:19–21). This meant full Torah submission in the era beginning with “Moses” (cf. Rom 5:13–14), but with the coming of Israel’s Christ and the dawn of the eschatological age, this πίστις requires first and foremost allegiance to him, in confession of his death and

resurrection (Rom 10:11–13). This is typified by Abraham, who “hoped beyond hope” (v. 18; cf. Rom 5:5; 8:24) and did not “weaken in fidelity” (v. 19) or “waver into distrust” (v. 20) in the God who “gives life to the dead”, “calling things into existence that do not exist” (vv. 17b, 20).

In accordance then with God’s plan set in motion by Abraham’s faithful actions, all people groups can now be set right, fulfilling the promise and indeed the Torah itself (Rom. 8:1–4; 10:4; Gal 3:23–26). As the final expression of God’s *hesed*—God’s sovereign grace and mercy in answer to, and giving victory over, the problem of sin (1 Cor 15:57)—no room is left for honor claims of one subgroup over another (Rom 3:27–29; see also esp. 11:17–24) among those who have (only) in this way been made righteous (Rom 3:30; 8:29–30).

In Rom 4:16, Paul points to the Jewish subgroup within the Roman Christ community as τῶ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου (“those [born] from the Torah”). In doing so, he makes clear the continuing saliency of traditional Jewish identity in Christ. That is, full Torah submission continues to function for Jewish Christ allegiants as both an appropriate expression of ethnic identity (as is the case, for Paul, with all Jews prior to the final judgment) and faithfulness toward God, in as much as this submission is in view of one’s allegiance to Christ (cf. Rom 2:25; 3:1–2; 14:6–9; 1 Cor 7:18).

In vv. 17–18, the rightful presence of the gentile subgroup is affirmed on the explicit basis of Gen 17:5. As Paul is at pains to demonstrate in his letter to the Galatians, the righteous status obtained by gentiles in Christ excludes any attempts at Jewish proselytism. Given that Israel’s restoration has been inaugurated and thus that the nations qua nations are being gathered into the people of God, to seek covenant identity vis-à-vis Jewish proselyte status is to implicitly *deny* that anything has changed—that the new age has dawned and that God has now acted to once-and-for-all fulfill the promise (cf. Gal 2:21)—and would be, then, ipso facto re-subjecting oneself to slavery to sin and death (cf. Gal 4:8–31).<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the community of righteous ones necessarily consists of both Jews qua Jews and gentiles qua gentiles who share Abraham as father and exemplar of ingroup identity (cf. Rom 1:16; 3:30; 9:24; 11:11–32; 15:8–12; 1 Cor 1:23–24; 7:17–20). This superordinate group is referred to as τῶ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ (“those [born] from the faithfulness of Abraham”), that is, those who find their identity in Abraham’s πίστις by being “in Christ” (cf. Gal 3:16, 27–29). Paul draws a direct correspondence here between Abraham’s faithful response to God’s promise (vv. 19–20) and God’s faithful fulfillment of this promise found finally in the multiethnic Christ community (v. 21), who, like Abraham (v. 22), possess the status of righteousness (v. 24; Gal 3:7; see similarly [Johnson Hodge 2007](#), pp. 79–91).

## 7. Conclusions

As especially indicated in Romans 11 and 14, Paul is aware of existing tensions between the two primary subgroups within the Roman Christ community, which, as indicated in Romans 16, consist of a loose association of ἐκκλησίαι in the city. The groups in question, while very likely containing some persons who maintain a degree of association with both, consist predominately of (1) Jews and most probably those gentiles who possess some level of attachment to the synagogue; and (2) non-Jews, an ethnic conglomerate of persons generally bound by Hellenistic culture who do not (or no longer) possess any such connection with the greater Jewish community outside of their affiliation with the Christ movement.

Though Paul still views the Roman Christ community as a mature and grounded one—enough so to serve as a prospective missionary headquarters for this new phase of his apostolic mission (Rom 15:14)—a disjuncture such as this, if left unchecked, would almost certainly destabilize the community in time, and therefore ultimately fail to provide him with what is needed for his westward evangelization efforts. But Paul’s concern is surely more than a utilitarian one. The spiritual wellbeing of Christ allegiants in Rome is clearly understood by him as falling under his apostolic responsibility (Rom 1:8–15), and

nothing short of a fully unified community is consistent with the holy calling of God's people (Rom 1:7).

It is in this light that he seeks in Romans 4 (and in the letter as a whole) to increase the saliency of the community members' common superordinate identity in Abraham and in Christ, unifying them around the gospel as God's multiethnic covenant people—a renewed humanity—and thus co-heirs of the world with the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 8:17, 28–30). As Paul asserts in Rom 5:1–2, because of God's act in Christ to bring to completion the plan of redemption that began with the call of and promise to Abraham, Jewish qua Jewish and gentile qua gentile members of the community "have peace with God", "access to [God's] grace", and, indeed, reason to "claim honor in [the] hope of sharing the glory of God". It is certainly Paul's hope that in light of what God has done for them, they will live at peace with and extend grace to one another (cf. Rom 12:3–21), demonstrating that they too are faithful like their father and exemplar Abraham.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In referring to a "theological substructure", I basically assume the definition provided by (Scroggs 1991, p. 212): "Paul's theology is what he thinks about the transcendent and its intervention into immanent reality". From this substructure arises a series of convictions informing Paul's claims.
- <sup>2</sup> The following is a significantly revised version of (Zoccali 2014, pp. 253–71), with permission from the publisher. For methodological studies in social identity and other analyses of the texts of the New Testament from this perspective, please see the entire volume, as well as the entire companion volume in which is (Zoccali 2020, pp. 257–91).
- <sup>3</sup> The view taken here is that, for Paul, God's conferral of "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) indicates that one has been brought into a positive relationship with God, numbered among God's covenant people, i.e., the community of God's loved, called, and holy ones (Rom 1:7), and who receives then the covenant blessings. The status of righteousness is therefore central to "in Christ" identity; cf. on this point (Esler 2003, pp. 167–68). See further here the discussion of "righteousness" language in Paul in (Zoccali 2017, pp. 108–16).
- <sup>4</sup> In addition to Wright, see, e.g., (Dunn 1988, pp. 127–28).
- <sup>5</sup> Donaldson affirms for Paul a continuing role for the Torah in distinguishing Jews from gentiles within the Christ community, which is integral to the approach that I take below. However, for Donaldson, this is evidence of an irresolvable "category confusion" on Paul's part regarding how Abraham's descendants are finally demarcated, and it compromises Paul's main argument regarding covenant inclusivity through Christ in place of the Torah. Thus, rather than a fully coherent and reasoned position grounded in Scripture, Donaldson's Paul comes to such seemingly disparate conclusions "by sheer force of will" due to competing fundamental convictions (Donaldson 1997, pp. 103–104, 127, 157–61).
- <sup>6</sup> This is also the general approach of (Gaston 1987; Stowers 1994; Gager 2000).
- <sup>7</sup> The term ἔλεος is the normal translation in the LXX of the familiar Hebrew term רַחֵם, and petitions for divine mercy predicated on God's *hesed* are otherwise ubiquitous. In both Romans and Galatians, letters that especially concern the relationship of Jews and gentiles, we find Paul explicitly predicating membership among God's people on God's mercy (cf., e.g., Rom 9:11–16; 11:28–32; 15:9; Gal 6:15–16). The parallel concept of God's grace (χάρις) functions similarly for him (see esp. Rom 11:5–6).
- <sup>8</sup> For the meaning of God's *hesed* in terms of God's loving and faithful commitment to God's people, and thereby the fundamental basis by which the covenant will continue, see (Routledge 1995, pp. 179–96). Commenting on Psalm 89, Routledge states, "*Hesed* precedes, and indeed gives rise to the *bērit*, which then provides additional assurance that God's promise will not fail (vv. 34–37) . . . [W]e may conclude that when God entered into a covenant with Israel he bound himself to show *hesed* to them. It was because of his covenant with Abraham that God demonstrated his *hesed* in delivering Israel from Egypt (Exod 2:24) and, in the light of the special relationship established through the Sinaitic and Davidic covenants, God's people could expect God to go on showing *hesed* to them. It was this unflinching and enduring divine love [he notes here: 1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; 20:21; Pss 107:1; 118:1–4, 29; 136; Jer 33:11] [on which] God's servants based their confidence and their appeal for deliverance in times of trouble [he notes here: Pss 6:4; 44:26; 86:5–7; 89; 107; 119:88, 159; 143:12; Mic 7:20]" (pp. 187–88).

- <sup>9</sup> For a discussion on the close connection between *hesed* and *rahamim* (mercy) and *hen* (grace) in the MT, see (Routledge 1995, pp. 190–93).
- <sup>10</sup> Importantly, and as will be explicated further below, God’s *hesed* is inextricable from the notion of God’s own righteousness and is what ultimately secures one’s righteous status among God’s people (cf. e.g., Pss 33:4–5; 36:5–10; 40:4–13; 85:4–13; 89:14–37; 98:1–3; 103; 1 Kgs 8:23; Jer 9:23–24; Hos 10:12; see also the LXX’s translation of *hesed* as *δικαιοσύνη* in Gen 24:27; 32:11; Exod 15:13; 34:7) (Routledge 1995, pp. 188–95). It is, accordingly, the basis for redemption and reconciliation (Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–19; 2 Tim 2:13; Exod 15:13; 34:6–7; Num 14:18–19; Pss 25:7–10; 89; 107; 136; 143; Isa 54:8–10; Jer 31:3; 33:11; Lam 3:22–32; Dan 9:4–19; Hos 2:19–23; Joel 2:12–13; Mic 7:18–20; Jonah 4:2).
- <sup>11</sup> As widely recognized in contemporary scholarship, first-century Judaism represented what would best be described as an ethnicity, defined by various cultural indicia, including a shared myth of ancestry, geographic origins, history, beliefs, customs, etc., which thus functioned to demarcate Jews from other social groups of the period. Despite the ambiguities it presented for women, the primary marker of Jewish identity by this time was circumcision, either on the eighth day for native-born Jews, or, for those communities who accepted the legitimacy of it, as the culmination of the course of proselyte conversion to Judaism.
- <sup>12</sup> The phrase “demonstrating faithfulness” or, alternatively, “offering allegiance”, is in my view a more accurate rendering of *πιστεύοντι* here (as well as *πιστεύοντας* in 3:22), particularly in a first-century Roman context. Paul’s gospel demands not merely intellectual assent, as is the connotation of the contemporary English term “believe” (which is in keeping with James’s usage of *πίστις*; cf. Jas 2:19), but allegiance to Israel’s Christ rather than Caesar (cf. Rom 1:1–6; see also esp. Rom 2:1–16). I will assume this sense for the term *πίστις* throughout Romans 4, in which Paul will thus refer to Abraham’s fidelity or allegiance to God. Cf. the analysis of the semantic range of *πίστις* and its cognates in (Campbell 2005, pp. 178–88). On Paul’s general call for faithfulness/obedience as the necessary corollary to membership in the Christ community, see the discussion in (Zoccali 2010, pp. 55–170; 2015, pp. 377–415; 2017, pp. 49–52; 2020, pp. 257–91).
- <sup>13</sup> The Pauline phrase *ἔργων νόμου* functions as a synecdoche for Jewish identity and thus covenant identity in the dispensation before Christ (Rom 3:20; 3:27; 4:2; 9:12; 11:5; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10; see further n. 17 below). (Note that my use of the term “dispensation” here and throughout is *not* intended to evoke the theological system known as “Dispensationalism”.)
- <sup>14</sup> Interpreters frequently miss the full force and implications of *νυνί* in Rom 3:21 and thus the crucial salvation-historical distinction that this language demands in this section of the letter. In stating in v. 20 that no flesh will be made righteous by the Torah, Paul is making an *eschatological pronouncement*, as also indicated by reference to the final judgment in v. 19. Paul is not speaking for all time but specifically to the state of affairs brought to bear by virtue of God’s act in Christ.
- <sup>15</sup> In other words, it is God’s faithfulness that calls for and enables human faithfulness, as Paul, in my view, declares in Rom 1:17: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed *from (God’s) faithfulness to (human) faithfulness* (*ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*)” (cf. Rom 3:2–5 for the close association of “faithfulness” with “righteousness”). This intersection of faithfulness is also suggested by Paul’s modified citation of Hab 2:4. Paul’s ambiguity regarding whose faithfulness is in view is because, in such contexts, *πίστις* functions as a synecdoche for the gospel of Jesus Christ/“in Christ” identity. All possible readings of the Hebrew text—God, the righteous one, or the vision itself as the subject of this faithfulness—are thus simultaneously fulfilled by the gospel (Zoccali 2015, pp. 402–3; 2020, p. 263; see further on this point below).
- <sup>16</sup> Paul cites this passage in Rom 14:11 and Phil 2:10–11, demonstrating, along with his extensive references to the surrounding context of Isaiah 40–66 in Romans, Galatians, and Philippians, its likely influence on his thinking. For the integral nature of the prophecy of Isa 40–66 in Paul’s theology, see (Beale 1999, pp. 204–23; Wagner 2002, pp. 342–56; Ware 2011, pp. 59–86). Ware importantly observes that “[t]hroughout Isaiah 40–55, the obligation of exclusive devotion to Yahweh incumbent Israel on the basis of the Mosaic covenant (e.g., 43:10–13; 48:4–5; cf. Isa 2:6–11; 17:4–11; 30:22; 57:3–13; 65:2–12; Ex 20:3–6; Jer 2:2–13; Hos 13:4) is expressly applied to the gentiles as well, as a consequence of Yahweh’s unique identity as the only true God (e.g., Isa 41:24; 44:9–11; 45:16; cf. Isa 2:12–21; 16:12; 21:9; 37:15–20; 66:22–24; Ps 33:8–9). Previously in Isaiah 40–55, the outcome of this universal claim is judgment upon the nations (cf. 41:24; 44:9–11; 45:16). However, in Isaiah 45:20–22, the claim expressed in 45:21 that Yahweh alone is God leads in 45:22, remarkably, to an invitation to conversion” (Ware 2011, pp. 75–76).
- <sup>17</sup> I translate *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* such that it is essentially synonymous with the gospel, which is, as similarly explained in n. 15 above, God’s faithful eschatological act of redemption/reconciliation/restoration through Jesus Christ, which calls for and enables the human response of fidelity to God. For an analysis of *πίστις Χριστοῦ* as an “eschatological event” (a so-called “third view” that moves beyond the subjective or objective genitive debate), see (Schliesser 2016, pp. 277–300). For a similar understanding, see also (Martyn 1997, p. 314; Bockmuehl 1998, p. 211; Fowl 2005, p. 154).
- <sup>18</sup> I understand Paul’s contrasting notions in v. 27, Torah of works and “Torah of faithfulness”, to refer in the first place to the Torah understood from the respective vantages of the dispensations before after Christ, particularly in terms of how covenant identity was demarcated—that is, what was required by God on the part of God’s people. “Torah of works” thus points to the demarcations of covenant identity as being coextensive with that of Jewish identity, which Paul understood to be rightly the case in the prior dispensation (cf. Gal 5:11; Phil 3:6b). “Torah of faithfulness” refers to the fulfillment of the Torah in the Christ event, which has become, for Paul, the new basis of covenant identity. Thus, neither Jews nor gentiles in Christ are under the dispensation of the Torah (Gal 5:18; cf. Rom 6:14; Gal 5:18; 1 Cor 9:20), which means they are free from the Torah’s sentence of death (Rom 7:4–6; Gal 5:1). But that also precisely means that they are enabled to actually *do* the Torah via the Spirit in the

dispensation of Christ (cf. Romans 6:1–23; 8:1–11; Gal 3:12; 5:13–26; 2 Cor 3:1–18), with such Torah obedience being carried out different by Jews and gentiles, respectively (Rom 2:25–29; 4:11–12, 16; 14:1–23; 1 Cor 7:17–20).

19 “Full Torah submission” does *not* mean “perfect obedience”. Rather, in view is the full body of ordinances contained in the Torah, thereby including those laws that, for Paul, continue to distinguish Jewish identity from gentile identity, including preeminently circumcision and also, e.g., kashrut and Sabbath observance.

20 This form accords with the best manuscript evidence; cf. (Moo 1996, pp. 257–58).

21 Cf. BDF §396: “In classical Greek the complement of verbs of (perceiving), believing (showing), and saying which indicate the content of the conception or communication, is formed to a great extent by the infinitive. If the subject of the infinitive is the same as that of the governing verb, it is not expressed”.

22 (Zahn 1910, pp. 212–19) and (Hays 1985, pp. 76–98) come close to this translation, rightly positing Ἀβραάμ as the object of the infinitive εὐρηκέναι, rather than the subject, which represents the standard reading.

23 A frequent objection made by those who generally translate 4:1 “What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, found according to the flesh” is that Paul would not introduce Abraham as “forefather according to the flesh” because it conflicts with his later argument of Abrahamic ancestry according to “promise” rather than “flesh” (9:8; cf. 4:9–13); cf., e.g., (Jewett 2007, p. 307; Schliesser 2007, p. 322). However, this fails to consider Paul’s use of diatribe; it is not “Paul” but his interlocutor who refers to Abraham in this way, and Paul then sets out to reevaluate this traditional notion in 4:2b–25.

24 While the references in the relevant literature to Abraham being found faithful are in most cases pointing to the Aqedah, it seems nevertheless that all of Abraham’s faithful acts are implicit here. Schliesser comments: “The tradition regarding Abraham’s faith in the light of the sacrifice of Isaac became a common property. However, though Abraham’s readiness to sacrifice his son symbolizes the climax of his faithfulness, it is but one aspect of his general compliance to the νόμος ὑψίστου (Sir 44,20), it is one part of his ἔργα (1 Macc 2,51), one proof of his faithfulness—though the most significant one—(Jub 18,16), and ultimately one part of the “work of the law”, of keeping Yahweh’s precepts. Consequently, the underlying understanding is that in all that Abraham did, he observed and fulfilled the whole Torah without compromise; the Torah, consequently, becomes a trans-temporal pre-Mosaic entity” (Schliesser 2007, p. 213).

25 To the extent that Paul is primarily concerned with fallacious Jewish honor claims here, it should be observed that he soon turns the “polemical tables” on the gentiles in his audience, chiding them for any arrogant, presumptuous, and, ultimately, supersessionist assumptions among them (cf. Rom 11:11–32).

26 Though I come to largely different conclusions, for a discussion surround the implications of Rom 4:4–5, see (Das 2009, pp. 797–801).

27 Cf., e.g., Rom 2:5–16; 6:1–23; 8:1–8; 12:1–2; 13:12–14; Gal 5:13–25; 1 Cor 6:9–20; 2 Cor 5:10; 13:5; Phil 2:12–16; 1 Thess 4:1–8. Contrary to (Jipp 2009, pp. 223–24), Paul’s understanding of the Abraham story is fully consistent with that found in Jas 2:21–24, as the language of “faith” and “works” have different connotations for Paul than for James.

28 This passage is unquestionably significant to Paul given his notable reliance upon it in Romans 9 as well as his Corinthian correspondences (1 Corinthians 10; 2 Corinthians 3).

29 Further demonstrative of this notion, in Rom 10:6, Paul likely echoes the narrative of Deut 9:4–6, where, referring to the other nations that God will supplant in the land promised to Israel, Moses says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to occupy this land’ . . . It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land . . . Know, then, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to occupy because of your righteousness” (Hays 1989, p. 78).

30 Paul’s rewording of Gen 17:11 LXX here, replacing διαθήκη with δικαιοσύνη, speaks to the virtually synonymous nature of righteous status and covenant membership in his understanding (Wright 2002, pp. 494–95).

31 See the discussion in (Tucker 2018, pp. 69–80) concerning the scholarly debate of whether Paul points to one or two groups here. I understand Paul to be referring to two groups; but cf. n. 32 below.

32 Romans 4:12 (and v. 16) points to the eschatological tension inherent in Paul’s theologizing, in which, though inaugurated, the full advent of the renewed covenant and creation is temporarily suspended to give both Israel and the other nations time to repent. Thus, for Paul, in this interim period inaugurated by Christ’s resurrection, historical Israel, collectively, remain “children of Abraham”, but such status will be confirmed in the final judgment only for Jews in Christ. The total number of Jews in Christ are those who represent “all Israel” in Rom 11:26. See (Zoccali 2008, pp. 289–318; 2010, pp. 91–117).

33 Observing the similarities between Rom 4:13 and Sir 44:19–21, Johnson Hodge remarks that “both entail the fertility of Abraham, the inclusion of the gentiles in his progeny, and the ultimate inheritance of the earth for his descendants. This passage illustrates a point that is also true for Paul: the blessing and incorporation of the gentiles are necessary parts of this particular understanding of God’s promise. The author of the Wisdom of Sirach sees an implicit connection between the ancestor Abraham (the “father of many nations”), the incorporation of the gentiles, and universal inheritance” (Johnson Hodge 2007, p. 188). To be clear, the universalizing of the Abrahamic promise is not at the expense of the particularity of Israel’s land promise. I contend that, for Paul, the distinction between Israel and the nations (and indeed between the various nations themselves) continues eternally into

the resurrection age. Unity and equality do not require undifferentiation, as Paul indicates in Rom 14:1–15:12 and elsewhere. On this point, see (Zoccali 2017, pp. 121–36).

34 Cf. Isa 2:1–4; 9:6–7; 11:1–9; 25:6–10; 27:6; 40:3–5; 42:1, 6; 45:8; 49:6; 51:4–6; 54; 56:6–8; 60; 66:22–23; Zech 9:10; Sir 44:19–21; Pss 36:9, 11, 22, 29, 34 LXX; 72:8–11; Jub. 1:27–28; 4:26; 17:3; 19:21–25; 22:14–15, 27–30; 32:18–19; 1 QH 13.15–18; 17.15; 1 En. 5:6–7; 4 Ezra 6:55–59; 2 Bar. 14:13; 51.3; Philo, Moses 1.55; Somn. 1.175; and in the New Testament outside of Paul: Heb 1:2; Acts 3:17–21; Matt 5:5; 6:10; 2 Pet 3:10–14; Rev 21–22.

35 Cf. Rom 8:18–25; Gal 6:15; 1 Cor 6:2; 15:20–28; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 1:15–20; Eph 1:7–14.

36 Cf. Deut 30:1–6; Isa 32:15; 44:3; 59:21; Jer 31:31–40; 32:39–40; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:22–32; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Zech 12:10; see also Bar 2:30–35; Jub. 1:21–24; 22:15, 30; CD 3.10–20; 1QS 1.16–2.25; 1QH 5.11; 7.6–35; 9.32; 12.12; 13.23–25; 14.3, 8–13; 16.7–15; 1Q34 2.5–7; 4Q504 5.6–16. Paul’s description of the gospel in Rom 1:1–4 in terms of the messianic hope is an integral part of covenant renewal. While Davidic messianic expectations (derived from texts such as, e.g., Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–12; Jer 23:5–8; 33:14–26; Ezek 34:23–31; 37:24–28; Amos 9:11–15; Hos 3:4–5; Mic 5:2–3; Zech 3:8; 6:11–13) are by no means monolithic in the extrabiblical literature, Fuller points out that when such a figure is envisaged, “it is usually within the exilic model of restoration. For those Jews who sustained the hope for his coming, the messiah’s arrival was understood to be pivotal to Israel’s restoration” (Fuller cites: Pss. Sol. 17–18; 1 En. 37–71; 4 Ezra 7:25–44; 12:31–34; 13:25–50; 2 Bar. 26.1–30.5; 36.1–40.4; 53.1–76.5; 4Q252 5.1–6; 4Q161 3.11ff.; 4Q285 frg. 5; 4Q174 1) (Fuller 2006, p. 184).

37 Cf. Rom 2:14–16, 25–29; 7:6; 8:1–11; 11:27; 1 Cor 2:12; 11:23–26; 2 Cor 3:3–18; Gal 3:2–5; 4:6, 24–28; 5:5; Col 2:11.

38 Cf. Rom 1:18; 2:2–6, 16; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22–23, 28; 14:11; 16:17–20; 1 Cor 1:8; 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10; Phil 1:28; 3:18–19; 1 Thess 1:9–10; 5:9; Col 3:5–6; see also Acts 17:20–21. In Gal 3:19–25, the dispensation of the Torah is characterized as an interim period during which time all people remained captive to the power of sin (cf. Rom 3:9; 5:12–14, 18–21; 6:14; 7:8–11, 23). But because the Torah’s function, for Paul, lay in exposing acts of sin for what they are, namely, transgressions of God’s will, in this way, it provided guidance for obedience and thus served as a form of limited safety from the full brunt of sin’s enslaving power for God’s people, which differentiated them from the other nations (cf. Gal 2:15), provided them with a provisional status of righteousness, and preserved them until the time of God’s intervention in Christ, which Paul characterizes as the coming of *πίστις*. But when *πίστις* came (Gal. 3:23), the power of sin and death was broken, the promise to Abraham was confirmed, and this role for the Torah reached its intended conclusion. Thus, the Torah no longer functions in the same capacity. This is what Paul affirms in Rom 10:4: “Christ is the *τέλος* of the Torah”.

39 A more explicitly positive role for the nations in relation to Israel is seen in Isa 54:15 LXX; 56:6–8; 66:18–21; Amos 9:11–12 LXX. Texts where the status of the nations relative to Israel is ambiguous include, e.g., Isa 2:2–4; 25:6–10; 42:1–9; 49:6; 51:4–6; Jer 3:17; Mic 4:1–3; Zeph 3:9; Zech 2:11; 8:20–21; Tob 13:11–14; 14:5–7; 1 En. 10:21–11:2; 48:4–5; Sib. Or. 3:556–72, 710–23, 757–75; T. Levi 18:2–9; T. Naph. 8:3–4; T. Jud. 24:4–6; 25:5; T. Zeb. 9:8; T. Benj. 10:3–11; also possibly 4 Ezra 6:25–28. The subordination of the nations by virtue of such pilgrimages is suggested in, e.g., Isa 14:1–2; 18:7; 45:14; 60; Hag 2:6–7, 21–22; Pss. Sol. 17:29–35; Jub. 32:19; Sir 36:11–17; Tg. Isa. 25:6–10; 1 En. 90:30; 2 Bar. 72:2–6.

40 For a defense of this tradition’s import to Paul’s theology, see (Zoccali 2017, pp. 35–38).

41 As demonstrated by (Wagner 1998, pp. 193–222; Hofius 2004, pp. 175–83; Watson 2007), there is a great deal of evidence suggesting that Isaiah 53 had a significant influence on Paul. He directly quotes from the LXX passage in Rom 10:16 and 15:21 (cf. Gal 3:2). Further, textual echoes of it are found in Paul’s *ὁπὲρ ἡμῶν* formula (cf., e.g., 1 Thess 5:10; Rom 5:8; 8:32; Gal 3:13), his understanding of Christ’s vicarious death for “our sins” (*ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν*) (cf. Gal 1:4; 1 Cor 15:3; and similarly in Rom 4:25), as well as his language of Christ being “given up” (*παρέδωκεν*) (cf. Rom 4:25; 8:32; 1 Cor 11:23).

42 In this regard, the comments of Seitz on Isaiah 53 are instructive: “The dual mission of the servant—restoration of the survivors of Israel and as ‘Israel,’ a light to the nations (49:6)—is here confessed . . . as fully accomplished . . . [I]n this poem the servants come to acknowledge the life and death of the servant, as an individual, as expiatory for themselves. But because the servant, as an individual, has understood himself as the embodiment of ‘Israel, in whom I will be glorified’ (49:3), especially with a vocation to the nations, the poem functions at yet another level. The individual servant’s suffering and death are Israel’s on behalf of the other nations” (Seitz 2001, p. 462). See also (Clements 1998, p. 41). He is surely correct in his assertion that the “literary background to all four passages concerning the identity of the Servant would undoubtedly support the claim that we are faced here with a figure who fulfils some form of representational collective role”.

43 See also Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Exod 19:5–6; Deut 4:5–8; 10:19; Isa 2:2–4; 11:9–10; 42:1, 6; 49:6; Tob 13:11; 14:6; Sib. Or., 3.195; Wis 18:4; 1 En. 105.1; T. Levi 14:3–4; 1Q28b 4.27.

44 While Gal 3:28 states that “there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for all are one in Christ”, Paul does not intend here to negate difference wholesale. Ethnic differences are part of God’s good creation and in continuity then with the new creation inaugurated in Christ. Paul is calling, rather, for the unity and equality of the various groups who belong to the greater Christ community. This, in turn, argues against the need for gentiles to become Jews or for Jews to become gentiles. Indeed, as Paul likewise asserts, God shows no partiality or discrimination (Rom 2:11; 3:22; 10:12; Gal 6:15; 1 Cor 7:19).

45 For a more detailed analysis on the matter of Paul’s objection to Jewish proselytism in the Christ movement, see (Zoccali 2015, pp. 377–415; 2017, pp. 55–83; 2023, pp. 5–6).

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