

LAW¹

A well-attested feature of Jewish religion in Paul's time was the manner in which the Jewish way of life was being defined in both oral and written form. The foundation of this material was the covenant which God communicated to Moses and made with the people of Israel at Sinai as it is preserved in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Jews of Paul's time, following biblical usage, frequently referred to these foundational writings as the "Law" (Heb *tôrâ*, Gk *nomos*). After Paul's call to preach Christ to the Gentiles (Gal 1:15–16; Rom 1:5, 13–14; 15:18; cf. Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17) he thought extensively about the relationship between the Jewish Law and faith in Christ. We find the results of that thinking primarily in the Thessalonian and Corinthian correspondence, in Galatians, Philippians and Romans, and to a lesser extent in Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastorals.

No area of Pauline studies has undergone more sweeping revision in the last half century than the apostle's view of the Law. Compelling evidence has required a reassessment of Christian, and especially Protestant, assumptions about the Law in Judaism and therefore about Paul's relationship to this single most important aspect of his ancestral faith. Some understanding of the nature of this revolution in Pauline studies is, therefore, an important prerequisite to a fresh reading of Paul's own comments about the Jewish Law (*see Paul and His Interpreters*).

1. The Struggle to Understand Paul's View of the Law
2. The Jewish Law in the Second Temple Period
3. The Jewish Law in the Context of Paul's Letters
4. Conclusion

1. The Struggle to Understand Paul's View of the Law.

During the period of the Renaissance and Reformation the Roman Catholic Church understood Paul's claim that "by works of the Law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal 2:16) to mean that no one could attain eternal life without divine help. To the Catholic Church in the several centuries before and after Luther, this dictum did not seem to exclude good deeds from some role in salvation, and other passages in Paul's letters seemed to indicate that such works were necessary (Gal 5:6; Rom 6:13, 19; cf. Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, 6.10–11). Thomas Aquinas, therefore, believed that since human nature in itself required the transforming power of God's grace in order to inherit eternal life, humanity could not have been saved by its own merits even prior to the Fall. After the Fall God's grace was even more necessary for salvation since humanity was now two removes from God (*Summa Theologica*, I-II.109.2). The OT Law, likewise, operated at a human level and, as good as it might have been, was lacking the requisite grace of God that enabled people to keep its precepts (I-II.98.1–2). The new law of the NT contained this grace, however, and so Christians were able, by means of this grace, to do the works

¹Gerald F. Hawthorne et al., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 529.

which merited for them eternal life (I-II.108.1; 111.2; 112.1; 114.1–9). Likewise, the Council of Trent claimed that justification was a process of cooperation with divine grace which began with repentance and continued in the form of obedience to the commandments of God and the church (Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, 6.10–11).

It was chiefly against this principle of cooperation between grace and works as it was expressed in the doctrine of the merits of the saints, that the Reformers raised the banner of dissent. Prior to his protest against the Roman Catholic Church, Luther feared that neither his own good works, even if done out of love for Christ, nor the merits of his order could save him from God's terrible righteousness. Finally, after reaching a point of near despair, Luther began meditating on such texts as Psalm 31:1–2 and Romans 1:17 and discovered through them that the purpose of God's righteousness was not to condemn but to save the sinner. Rather than his angry accuser, God, as it turned out, was his rock of refuge and mighty fortress.

This experience informed Luther's reading of Paul's letters, especially Galatians. There he found ample evidence that no human activity, or "active righteousness," no matter how sincere or vigorous, could save people from God's wrath. Such salvation could come only through "passive righteousness"—a righteousness provided in its entirety by God himself and appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ. Luther took Paul's use of the word *law* in such passages as Galatians 2:16–21 as a cipher for God's righteous demands and all human attempts to be saved by them. These, he believed, could not save but only condemn and inspire terror: "no matter how wise and righteous men may be according to reason and the divine Law," he says, "yet with all their works, merits, Masses, righteousness, and acts of worship they are not justified" (*LW*, 26:140, commenting on Gal 2:16). The role of the Law is not to justify but to condemn and terrify (*LW*, 26:148–51). Salvation comes by another, entirely separate "law," the Law of grace which gives righteousness to the believer apart from any effort and insulates him or her from the Law's accusations. In the sphere of justification, therefore, the Law has no place. By putting his or her faith in Christ, the Christian has climbed up into heaven and left the Law far away on the earth below (*LW*, 26:156–57).

It is easy, when reading Luther, to concentrate on the theological argument with the Roman Catholic Church in which he is so energetically engaged and to miss a subtle hermeneutical impropriety in which the great Reformer and theologian has indulged. Especially in his lectures on Galatians, but elsewhere as well, Luther assumes that the Jews, against whose view of the Law Paul was arguing, held the same theology of justification as the medieval Roman Catholic Church. This hermeneutical error would be perpetuated over the next four centuries and eventually serve as the organizing principle for mountains of Protestant scholarship on the OT and ancient Judaism.

It was frequently assumed among OT scholars, for example, that at least from the period of the restoration of the Jews to Israel under Ezra, the history of Judaism was a story of spiralling degeneracy into legalism, hypocrisy and lack of compassion. Similarly, when Protestant scholars discussed rabbinic Judaism they tended to assume that Paul's polemic against Judaism, interpreted through the lens of Luther's reaction against Roman Catholicism, provided a sound basis for systematizing the religion of the Mishnah,

Talmud and related Jewish writings of a later era. F. Weber's "popular" description of Talmudic theology (1880) is typical. Keeping the many and peculiar commands of the Law, said Weber, was the means by which the rabbis believed salvation was earned. The ordinary rabbi, therefore, believed that the goal of rabbinic religion was the search for reward on the basis of merit, that God was a stern judge, and that approaching death brought with it the fear of losing salvation due to a lack of merit.

A large part of this portrait of ancient Judaism found its way into interpretations of the NT generally, and especially into expositions of Paul's writings. Widely used commentaries, such as that of W. Sanday and A. Headlam on Romans (reprinted seventeen times from 1895 to 1952) and influential books about the NT, such as R. Bultmann's popular description of *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (1949; ET 1956) used this picture of Judaism as the backdrop for their explanations of NT theology. In Sanday and Headlam's commentary, for example, Paul's struggle with the Law in Romans 7:7–25, which they take to be a self-portrait of his preconversion existence, is interpreted as the natural consequence of the "stern" rabbinic view of the Law, which, they claim, "was fatal to peace of mind" (Sanday and Headlam, 189). Similarly, Bultmann, in a section of *Primitive Christianity* titled "Jewish legalism," claimed that the Jewish view of the Law in the first century made "radical obedience" to God impossible because it held that once a certain list of commandments had been kept, one was in the clear and was free to do anything (Bultmann, 69). In addition, said Bultmann, it taught that God would punish sins strictly according to the law of retribution, that salvation was never a certainty, and that even repentance and faith could be transformed into meritorious works (Bultmann, 69–71).

The Lutheran picture of ancient Judaism, now clad in the impressive robes of scholarship, did not go unchallenged among Jewish scholars. As early as 1894 the distinguished Jewish reformer C. G. Montefiore objected forcefully to what he viewed as the tendency of Christian theologians to paint rabbinic Judaism as a dark shadow against which Paul's theology could brightly shine. The rabbinic literature, pleaded Montefiore, reveals a compassionate and forgiving God, ready to lay aside even grievous infractions of the Law at the slightest movement toward repentance by the offending party. It portrays rabbis, moreover, as those who regarded the Law as a gift and delight, who placed a value on faith in God as high as Paul's, and whose daily prayer was "Sovereign of all worlds! not because of our righteous acts do we lay our supplications before thee, but because of thine abundant mercies" (*b. Yoma* 87b). "I wonder," Montefiore asked in an address before England's St. Paul Association in 1900, "if there is the smallest chance that you, unlike the theologians, will believe me when I say that all this business of the severe Judge and the stern Law giver is a figment and a bugbear?"

Montefiore's critique of the Lutheran caricature of Judaism at first fell on deaf ears; but through the work of several influential scholars over the next seventy years, it gradually began to gain the ascendancy not only in Jewish circles but among nearly everyone working in the field. In 1927 G. F. Moore published a two-volume study of rabbinic theology which, in contrast to Weber's work, emphasized the role of grace,

ET English translation

b. Babylonian Talmud

Yoma Yoma (= *Kippurim*)

forgiveness and repentance in the earliest literature of rabbinic religion. This was followed in 1948 by W. D. Davies's detailed study of *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* in which Davies argued that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith apart from the Law was only one metaphor among many, probably developed first in the heat of argument (Davies, 221–23), and that the apostle's letters revealed simply a Pharisee for whom the messianic age had dawned (Davies, 71–73; *see Jew, Paul the*).

Without question, however, the pivotal event in bringing Montefiore's complaint from the backwater to main stream was the publication in 1977 of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Sanders's book was so powerful not because its approach was original but because Sanders addressed pointedly and exhaustively the distorted view of Judaism which Lutheran scholarship, and those under its influence, had produced. Sanders made his way step by step through the most influential works of modern NT scholarship in order to show that they disparaged ancient Judaism as a religion in which salvation was accomplished by meritorious achievement. He then embarked on a lengthy journey through not only the rabbinic literature of the first 200 years after Christ but through the Qumran literature, the apocrypha and the pseudepigrapha as well to determine how those documents answer the question, What must one do to be saved?

His conclusion was that in all of this ancient Jewish literature, with the exception of the atypical document 4 Ezra, salvation came not through achieving a certain number of meritorious works but through belonging to the covenant people of God. The proper response to the covenant was, of course, obedience; but means of atonement were readily available for those who did not obey fully. This "pattern of religion" Sanders called "covenantal nomism" (Sanders 1977, 75; 1992, 262–78), and, he claimed, it bears little resemblance to the descriptions of Jewish "soteriology" in most handbooks of Protestant biblical scholarship.

Largely as a result of this important work, most students of Pauline theology now believe that Montefiore, Sanders and other dissenters from the classic Protestant perspective have proven their case. The problem has now become what to do with Paul, who after all *does* seem to argue loudly against Jews who espouse justification by "works of the Law." Montefiore's answer to this question in 1894 has become popular among some. He believed that Paul was an aberration whose neglect of the Jewish doctrine of repentance for infractions against the Law was puzzling and whose Judaism, if Judaism at all, must have been heavily influenced by Hellenism. S. Sandmel claims similarly that "Paul's attitude toward the Law is exactly the reverse of the views in all other surviving Jewish writings" (Sandmel 1978, 320) and that the origin of Paul's negative evaluation of the Law lies to a large extent in ideas about the Law which flourished in the fertile soil of Hellenistic Judaism. This brand of Judaism, Sandmel argues, often saw value in the Law only as a guide to other religious ideals and so played down the importance of its literal observance. Paul, therefore, was predisposed to devalue the Law because of his roots in a Judaism heavily influenced by Greek thought (Sandmel 1979, 48–53). This view reaches its extreme in the work of H. Maccoby who, largely on the basis of Galatians 3:19 and 4:9–10, claims that Paul's view of the Law was derived from Gnosticism (Maccoby, 40–48).

This reading of Paul, as W. D. Davies observed long ago, blunders methodologically and historically by assuming neat divisions between the "orthodox" Judaism of Palestine and a supposedly deviant variety in the Diaspora. Such neat divisions apparently did not

exist. Sanders, then, both in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* and in two subsequent books on Paul, takes the view articulated by Moore (Moore, II.94) half a century before but not carefully worked out: Paul always began with the premise, which his own experience had made certain to him, that Jesus was the savior of the world, and worked backward from this premise to the conclusion that all the world, Jews included, needed to be saved through Jesus. In Sanders's view, therefore, Paul's theology represents a leap out of Jewish covenantal nomism into a different religion.

Sanders contends that Paul had no "theology of the law" but responded in various ways to various circumstances which threatened his mission of announcing to both Jew and Gentile the necessity of participation in Christ for salvation. For practical reasons he considered those parts of the Law which Gentiles viewed as particularly Jewish (circumcision, Sabbath keeping and dietary observance) to be annulled. They would hinder the Gentile mission and would make it seem to Gentiles that the key to salvation was Judaism when in fact it was participation in Christ. When he felt compelled to give reasons for setting aside the Law, he answered in various ways, some of them incompatible with others. His central explanation, however, seems to be that the Law was given to condemn everyone so that everyone could be saved through Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, Paul was still enough of a Jew psychologically to be uncomfortable with saying in every situation that the Law was no longer valid. He had firm convictions about right and wrong, propriety and impropriety, derived from his Jewish upbringing. When asked to adjudicate on such matters, as he was for example by the Corinthians, the origin of his answers was often, ironically, the Jewish Law (Sanders 1991, 84–100).

J. D. G. Dunn likewise has accepted the new consensus which Sanders's work represents but criticizes Sanders for not providing a plausible explanation of the fundamental Jewishness of Paul's letters. Sanders, Dunn charges, has so divorced Paul from Judaism that Paul's anguish over his unbelieving Jewish brothers and sisters in Romans 9:1–3 and his concern that Gentile Christians understand their spiritual indebtedness to Israel in Romans 11:17–24 are enigmas (Dunn, 188; *see* Romans).

The account of Paul which Dunn proposes as a substitute claims that Paul worked through the details of his view of the Law in the heat of controversy with Jewish Christians who believed that Gentile Christians, in order to maintain a place in the covenant people of God, had to adopt the three "works of the Law" which served as badges of national Israel: circumcision, Sabbath keeping (*see* Holy Days) and dietary observance (*see* Food). Paul's polemic against "works of the Law," then, is not directed against gaining salvation by doing good works but against believing that salvation was, at least in part, contingent upon belonging to national Israel and observing the Law as a badge of that status (Dunn, 191–96). As a result, Paul's positive statements about the Law are not inconsistent with his more negative statements, for the negative statements are directed against a nationalistic misuse of the Law rather than against the Law itself (Dunn, 200).

This reading of Paul, says Dunn, has numerous advantages. It acknowledges the legitimacy of Sanders's complaint against the Lutheran paradigm for understanding Judaism, but it gives a picture of Paul more plausible than Sanders's own picture. Paul is now firmly rooted within first-century Judaism and his statements about the Law, both positive and negative, are held together by a consistent underlying conviction that the Law, while good, can be misused as an instrument of national pride (Dunn, 200–203).

Another highly influential response to the new consensus comes from the pen of H. Räisänen. Like Dunn, Räisänen accepts Sanders's portrait of ancient Judaism and, like others, attempts to explain Paul's polemic against works of the Law in light of this new perspective. He claims that Paul first developed his postconversion attitudes toward the Law under the influence of the Hellenistic Christian community, a group which played down the necessity of the Law's particularly Jewish aspects in the interest of winning Gentiles to Christianity. Later, in the heat of his own Gentile mission, and as a matter of convenience, Paul dropped the Law entirely from his evangelistic agenda without clearly thinking through the reasons why (Räisänen 1986, 300–301; cf. 1983, 256–63)

Räisänen suggests that Paul produced his first attempts to explain the relationship between the Law and faith in Christ when the Judaizers invaded his churches in Galatia. This group was antagonistic to Paul and produced a powerful case, based on straightforward arguments from the Hebrew Scriptures that Gentile Christians should adhere to the Law and so become Jewish. Paul, convinced on the basis of his own experience that such additions to the requirement of faith in Christ were unnecessary hindrances, then began to cast around for arguments to prove his conviction (Räisänen 1983, 256–63). In Räisänen's view he was less than successful. Instead of producing a convincing counterargument, he constructed a series of ad hoc statements, some mutually contradictory and others clear distortions of the Jewish view of the Law.

The Paul of Räisänen's description provides an appropriate summarizing metaphor for the state of current scholarship on Paul's view of the Law. The re-examination of Judaism which began with Montefiore and culminated in Sanders has shifted the ground beneath interpreters' feet so dramatically that no consensus on Paul's theology of the Law has been able to emerge. Is this disarray ultimately the product of the disharmony between Paul's distorted picture of Judaism and Judaism as it really existed? Could it be the result of internal disharmonies within Paul himself, and hence within his letters? An honest answer to these questions will require a fresh reading both of Paul and of the Jewish literature of his era.

2. The Jewish Law in the Second Temple Period.

After the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, burned the Temple and took many in Israel captive in 586 B.C., most Israelites in exile seem to have adopted the perspective of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and considered the experience as punishment for breaking the covenant God had made with them at Sinai. To the exiles, the Pentateuch's curses for disobedience to the covenant must have appeared to be a breathtakingly accurate prediction of the Babylonian invasion and subsequent exile (Lev 26:14–46; Deut 28:43–52, 64–67; 29:22–28; 31:14–29). Thus when the Persians overran the Babylonians and subsequently allowed expatriate Israelites to return to their native land the leaders of the return understandably resolved to adhere strictly to the Law and so to avoid future punishment for disobedience. Their Achilles heel prior to the exile, they believed, was their seduction into idolatry by foreign influences. The road to a restored covenant relationship with God, they reasoned, was a renewed determination to fence themselves off from harmful foreign influences by strictly obeying the Law.

We can see these convictions clearly in Ezra-Nehemiah, where both Ezra and Nehemiah express grave concern over Jewish intermarriage with the Gentile population of Palestine precisely because such actions could lead Israel once again into national

apostasy and punishment (Ezra 9:10–15; cf. Neh 10:30). These convictions were still in place two and a half centuries later, as the book of Tobit reveals. There we read of Tobit's awareness that defeat and exile came to Israel as just punishment for breaking the Mosaic covenant (Tob 3:2–6) and of Tobit's determination, while living among Gentiles, to observe the Jewish marriage and dietary customs strictly (Tob 1:9–12; cf. 4:12–13).

The belief that the Law was the distinguishing mark of Israel as God's chosen people intensified in subsequent years as Hellenistic challenges to Israel's ancestral religion became more frequent and violent, especially under the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV. The Maccabean books show that Antiochus attempted to force Israel into cultural conformity with the rest of his realm by forbidding the Jews to practice precisely those parts of their Law which distinguished them from other peoples. He outlawed circumcision (1 Macc 1:48), made martyrs of those who refused to eat unclean food (2 Macc 6:18–31) and, most horrific of all, tried to force Jews to worship pagan gods (1 Macc 2:15–28; *see* Idolatry).

Some Jews folded under such pressure, and a few even welcomed compromise as an opportunity for personal advancement; but many became more resolute than ever in their conviction that they would not again ignore God's Law and consort with Gentile ways. They believed that if Israel were faithful to the Mosaic covenant, God would protect them no matter how overwhelming the foe, but that if, on the other hand, they disobeyed the Law, the Gentiles would defeat them in battle and they would cease to be, in any meaningful sense, God's covenant people (Jdt 5:17–21; 8:18–23; Pr Azar 6–14). So, like Daniel (Dan 1:1–21; 3:1–30) they determined not to break the Law, especially observance of circumcision (*Jub.* 15:11–34), dietary restrictions (Jdt 10:5; cf. 12:2) and Sabbath keeping (*Jub.* 2:17–33), for these aspects of the Law separated them most clearly from the surrounding nations.

The politically minded among these strict adherents to the covenant of Moses turned to open rebellion against a succession of Seleucid rulers and eventually obtained political independence. Others, however, were content to wait upon God to establish the new covenant with his people which Jeremiah (Jer 31:31–34) and Ezekiel (Ezek 36:24–37:28) had predicted, a covenant in which God himself would give them a “new heart” and a “new spirit,” removing their “heart of stone” and giving them a “heart of flesh” in its stead (Ezek 36:26). Thus the authors of *Jubilees* and of the Qumran documents frequently echo these passages (*Jub.* 1:22–25; 1QS 4, 5; 1QH 4, 5, 18; 4QShirShabb 2) and witness to a belief that these prophecies were being fulfilled within their communities.

Once the Maccabean family succeeded in throwing off Seleucid rule, observing the Jewish Law was required of all who lived in the land, whether Jewish or not. Under John Hyrcanus I the Idumeans were forced to submit to circumcision and other legal requirements (Josephus *Ant.* 13.9.1 §§257–58), and Hyrcanus' successor, Aristobulus I, forced the Itureans to do the same (Josephus *Ant.* 13.11.3 §318). M. Hengel concludes

Jub. Jubilees

1QS *Serek hayyahad* or *Rule of the Community, Manual of Discipline* from Qumran Cave 1

1QH *Hôdāyôt* or *Thanksgiving Hymns* from Qumran Cave 1

4QShirShabb *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* or *Angelic Liturgy* from Qumran Cave 4
Ant. Antiquities of the Jews

appropriately that Hyrcanus and Aristobulus took these steps because they regarded all of ancient Israel as God's possession and viewed it as part of their mandate to purge the land of Gentiles, either by forcing them out or by forcing them to become Jews (Hengel, 197). Although written much earlier, Psalm 125:3 must have struck a resonant cord with them: "For the scepter of the wicked shall not stay upon the land apportioned to the righteous so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to act wickedly." The evil influences of Gentiles in years past had led Israel into exile. That mistake would not be repeated.

By the first century A.D., the last of the Hasmoneans had nevertheless capitulated to Rome, and many Jews were happy within the limits of religious freedom that Rome allowed. Some radical groups arose, however, who claimed to be heirs to the zeal of the Hasmonean family and whose goal was to free Israel from the polluting presence of Gentiles. During the formative years of the early church these groups gained strength until, prompted by the blunders and corruption of a quick succession of Roman procurators, their zeal burst into open rebellion against Rome in A.D. 66 (*see* Revolutionary Movements). Many of those involved in the revolt were concerned, like the Hasmoneans of old, to force conformity to the particularly Jewish aspects of the Law upon everyone who lived on the sacred land of Israel (see, e.g., Josephus *J.W.* 2.17.10 §454; *Life* 12 §§65, 67; 23 §§112–13).

Not all Jews during the five centuries from Ezra to the time of Paul, of course, took an approach this radical, and many sought to achieve some level of compromise with the Gentile world around them. In such writings as the Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira and Baruch, for example, the Law was closely identified with "wisdom," and was found to encompass the insight which Gentile philosophers and theologians on occasion undeniably possessed. In the Wisdom of Solomon the Jewish Law is said to be given to the world through Israel (Wis 18:4), and in Ben Sira and Baruch true wisdom and understanding are repeatedly coupled with observance of the commandments (Sir 1:26; 6:37; 9:15; 15:1; 16:4; 19:20; 21:11; 23:27–24:1; 24:23–29; 33:2–3; 34:8; 39:1–5; Bar 3:12; 3:36–4:1, 12). Despite these efforts to take Gentile thought seriously, however, there is no doubt that if a choice must be made, the Law, not wisdom, should take priority (cf. Sir 19:20 with 19:24). This literature, moreover, continues to express a profound sense of grief at the plight of oppression into which disobedience to the Law has landed Israel (Sir 49:4–7; Bar 2:27–3:13; 4:12–13).

In other writings of the period the particularly Jewish aspects of the Law were ignored (e.g., *Pseudo-Phocylides*), allegorized (e.g., *Letter of Aristeas* 139–69) or otherwise rationalized (see, e.g., Josephus *Ag. Ap.* §§2.173–74, 234; Aristobulus as quoted in Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 13.12.9–16; 13.13.8) in an effort to emphasize to Gentile readers aspects of Judaism which would be most intelligible and attractive to them. Some Jews even spiritualized the distinctively Jewish aspects of the Law to the extent that they felt literal observance was not necessary. According to Philo (who did not approve of

their activity) this group focused its spiritualizing efforts on the laws of Sabbath observance, festival participation and circumcision (Philo *Migr. Abr.* 450).

In sum, from at least the period of the exile in Babylon, most Jews realized that their subjugation to foreign powers was a direct result of their violation of the Law given at Sinai. Many Jews believed, therefore, that the answer to their oppression was renewed commitment to separate themselves from the Gentiles around them by adhering to the Law, especially to those aspects of the Law which marked Israel as a separate people with a distinct way of life. Some within this group sought to cast off Gentile overlords and even to purge Gentiles from the land within the borders of Davidic Israel. Others, believing that God had begun to establish his new covenant within their communities, waited upon God to intervene eschatologically as he had promised in the prophets (*see* Restoration of Israel).

Another group, although probably no less committed to the Law as the distinguishing mark of Israel, believed that contact with Gentile peoples and ideas was not only permitted, but revealed that the best aspects of Gentile life were anticipated in the Mosaic Law. Some Jews were willing to go still further and to become outwardly indistinguishable from monotheistic and morally upright Gentiles by spiritualizing at least the laws governing Sabbath observance, festival keeping and circumcision. The scanty evidence for this last group probably indicates that their numbers were small and their influence insignificant. For most Jews of Paul's era, then, the Law was the distinguishing mark of the Jewish people, to be kept at all costs in order to escape the curse which the Law itself pronounced upon the disobedient, and for some Jews the period in which this happened would mark the fulfillment of the prophetic promise of the new covenant.

3. The Jewish Law in the Context of Paul's Letters.

When we turn to Paul's letters we find a large measure of discontinuity, but also a surprising amount of continuity, between Paul and second Temple Judaism on the place of the Law in God's dealings with his people.

3.1. 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul's Thessalonian correspondence is widely neglected in the study of the apostle's view of the Law. The word *nomos* ("law") does not, after all, occur in these letters, and they were written before Paul's heated disputes with the Judaizers over the Law had taken place. It has in the past, therefore, seemed safe to move immediately beyond them to the more fertile ground of 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians and Romans. The absence of the word *nomos* from the Thessalonian letters, however, does not mean that we cannot glean some information from them about Paul's view of the Law at this early stage in his letter-writing career. What we can glean turns out to be helpful in understanding Paul's view of the Law in his later, more Law-oriented correspondence.

As T. J. Deidun has pointed out (Deidun, 10–12), Paul's use of the phrase "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 (cf. 2 Thess 1:1), and his description of the Judean Christians as "the churches of God" in

1 Thessalonians 2:14 come from the OT conception of “the church of God,” a status which became Israel’s on the day that they assembled to receive the Law from Moses at Sinai (Deut 4:9–14; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). Israel was to observe this Law, according to Leviticus, both because it gave them a holiness corresponding to the holiness of God who was present among them and because it distinguished them from the surrounding Gentile nations (Lev 11:45; 18:1–5, 24–30; 19:1; 20:7–8, 23–26). Presumably the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36–37 would have a similar effect for God’s people: it would serve to distinguish his people from the rest of the world.

This is precisely what we find in 1 Thessalonians where the distinguishing mark of the Thessalonians is adherence to the “specific precepts” (*tinis parangelias*, 1 Thess 4:2) which Paul gave to them and which would mark them off from “the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess 4:5; Deidun, 18–28). They are to be “set apart” (*hagiasmos*), for God’s Holy Spirit dwells among them and they are taught by God himself (1 Thess 4:7–9; cf. Jer 31:34). The wicked figure who will arise in the eschaton can, therefore, be described as “the man of lawlessness” (*anomia*, 2 Thess 2:3, 7–8). Paul could hardly be unaware of the echoes which his description of the Thessalonian community contains both of Leviticus and of Jeremiah.

Thus Paul views the Thessalonian congregation as a fulfillment of God’s promise to establish a new covenant with his people, one in which the Law would be written on hearts and obeyed. Although the congregation is predominantly Gentile (1 Thess 1:9), Paul regards it as parallel to the Israel of the Mosaic covenant, whose status as “the church of God” originated with the giving of precepts to mark them off as a distinct people. We cannot at this point discern the details of the relationship between the old covenant and the new in Paul’s thinking; but that there are parallels between the patterns of the two covenants and that there are differences is clear. Both old covenant and new emphasize sanctity through behavior and for identical reasons; but the new covenant, unlike the old, is not ethnically determined.

3.2. 1 Corinthians. Paul’s attitude toward the Jewish Law comes into sharper focus when we move to 1 Corinthians. Although Paul uses the word *nomos* only eight times in this letter (nine if 14:34 is original), like the Thessalonian correspondence, a stance toward the Law is presupposed in much of what Paul says in the letter about sanctity and ethics. Moreover, the few times that Paul explicitly speaks of the Law provide excellent evidence for his attitude toward the Law when the Law itself is not a bone of contention between himself and his opponents, as it is in several of his later letters. For these reasons, 1 Corinthians provides a ripe field for gleaning information about Paul’s view of the Law.

The first two verses of the letter demonstrate that Paul’s emphasis on the continuity between the people of God in the OT and the newly constituted people of God has not weakened since writing to the Thessalonians. Paul addresses the Corinthian believers as “the church of God . . . set apart in Christ Jesus, called to be separate” (1 Cor 1:2), once again echoing the Pentateuch’s description of Israel’s constitution as the people of God at Sinai. The theme is filled out in 1 Corinthians 3:10–17 where Paul describes the Corinthian church as God’s temple, subject to the most careful maintenance, “for the temple of God, which you (pl.) are, is sacred” (1 Cor 3:17). Because they are God’s

congregation and God's temple, moreover, the Corinthians should distinguish themselves from "the Gentiles" by abstaining from sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1; cf. 1 Thess 4:5) and separating themselves from those who claim to be part of God's congregation but refuse to shun immorality (1 Cor 5:10–13). Paul supports his argument for excommunicating those within the church who refuse to separate themselves from Gentile sexual misconduct (*see* Sexuality) by citing a saying which recurs many times in Deuteronomy and makes the same point with respect to Israel: "cast out the evil person from among you" (1 Cor 5:13; cf. Deut 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7). He is also concerned that they not taint themselves with idolatry and, as N. T. Wright (120–136) has shown, Paul approaches the subject of eating meat offered to idols from the standpoint of the great Jewish confession, drawn from the Torah, that there is but one God (1 Cor 8:4; cf. Deut 4:35, 39; 6:4).

Paul also demonstrates in 1 Corinthians that he is aware of the whole story of God's covenant with Israel at Sinai, Israel's failure to keep that covenant, and of the promise of an eschatological covenant (*see* Eschatology). In 1 Corinthians, just as in 1 Thessalonians, he shows that he believes the churches coming into existence through his missionary work and on the basis of faith in Christ are the inheritors of this new covenant. These convictions come most clearly to the surface in 1 Corinthians 10 where, in the course of warning the Corinthian believers against idolatry, Paul reminds them of the story of Israel's failure and its miserable consequences and then makes the telling statement, "But these things happened to them as a pattern and were written in order to admonish us, upon whom the climax of the ages has arrived" (1 Cor 10:11). The Corinthian believers, then, appear in Paul's thinking to be eschatological Israel, the new "congregation of God" who stand in contrast both to the Gentiles on one side and to "Israel according to the flesh" on the other (1 Cor 10:18, 32; cf. 12:2).

Most of the points in the letter at which Paul specifically refers to the Law tally well with this picture of believers as the new Israel. In 1 Corinthians 7:19 Paul claims that what really matters in the busy era before Christ's return is not whether one is married or unmarried, slave or free, circumcised or uncircumcised, but whether one "keeps the commands of God," a phrase frequently used in the literature of Paul's era for "observing the Jewish Law" (Ezra 9:4 LXX; Sir 32:23; Mt 19:17–19). In 1 Corinthians 9:8–9 he calls upon "the Mosaic Law" as an authority for his contention that he, like other preachers of the gospel, has the right to be supported by the community in which he works (*see* Financial Support). In 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 he claims that he seeks to accommodate everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, whether "under the Law" or not, although he is not himself "outside the Law but within the Law of Christ" (1 Cor 9:21). In 1 Corinthians 14:21 he calls upon "the Law" to prove a point about the role of speaking in tongues in the church's worship (1 Cor 14:23). Clearly, for Paul, "the Law" was valid in some form for members of the new covenant.

Already in these few references, however, we find clues that Paul's view of the Law is complex. How could Paul claim that what mattered was keeping God's commands but then say that circumcision, one of the Law's most prominent commands, did not matter? What provoked him to say that he could observe or not observe the dietary scruples of "weak" (*see* Strong and Weak) Jewish Christians because he was not "under Law" but

that he was subject to “the Law of Christ”? In what meaningful sense could Paul claim that the Law was authoritative for believers when he ignored these central commands?

1 Corinthians does not provide an explicit answer to this question; but if we add Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 7:19 to those in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 we can see a pattern that may help us to understand Paul’s thinking about the Law. In 1 Corinthians 7:19 the part of the Law with which Paul is willing to dispense is circumcision; in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 it is dietary observance (cf. 1 Cor 8:1–13 and 10:1–11:1). Both of these aspects of the Law, as we saw above in our study of the Law in Judaism, were prized by many Jews as particularly Jewish laws, laws which marked the Jews off from the rest of the world as God’s special people. It is precisely these highly prized, and ethnically specific, aspects of the Law that Paul considers no longer valid.

If we pause to think about Paul’s calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles we can see clearly the reason for his rejection of these laws: they served to limit membership in the people of God to ethnic Jews and those willing to convert to Judaism. As we have seen, Paul affirmed the Law’s commitment to separation of the people of God from the rest of the world; but the crucial areas of separation were now no longer the observance of dietary rules and circumcision, but moral behavior motivated by God’s sanctifying Spirit.

Paul’s view of the Law, however, is more complex still. Another element of its complex structure breaks through the surface in 1 Corinthians 15:56, his final reference to the Law in this letter. Paul has been discussing the necessity of the bodily resurrection of believers and of Christ from the dead, and has been trying to explain to Greeks unfamiliar with Jewish eschatology the eternal value of the body and what a bodily resurrection will be like. The climax of his argument comes in 1 Corinthians 15:54–55 with a paraphrase of Isaiah 25:8 and a quotation of Hosea 14:4: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?” Paul’s next statement comes, like a bolt from the blue, with no warning: “the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56). Sin has not figured prominently in Paul’s argument to this point, and Law not at all. Why does Paul suddenly mention them here?

The surprise which the reader feels at encountering 1 Corinthians 15:56 demonstrates how firmly the Law was connected with sin and death in Paul’s mind. Like a runner unable to stop at the finish line, Paul is unable to stop his argument at its most rhetorically effective finish and runs ahead into other subjects which he associates with the Law. This comes as a surprise not only because it raises a new subject within chapter fifteen, but also because what Paul says about the Law in this verse does not immediately appear to be compatible with what he has said about it elsewhere in the letter. Elsewhere it appears as an authority; here it is connected with sin and death (*see* Life and Death), aspects of the present world which are evil and will pass away. How can Paul hold both positions?

1 Corinthians does not answer this question for us. In Paul’s next letter, however, we find some information which helps us to move toward an answer.

3.3. 2 Corinthians. By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians he had entered a period of stormy relations with the Corinthian believers, apparently aggravated by the arrival in Corinth of a group of Jewish Christians who opposed him. Despite this changed situation, Paul’s attitude toward the Jewish Law in 2 Corinthians meshes well with our discoveries in the Thessalonian correspondence and in 1 Corinthians. We still find Paul, for example,

appealing to the Law as an authority when discussing how believers should conduct the practical affairs of everyday life (2 Cor 8:15, quoting Ex 16:18; 2 Cor 13:1, quoting Deut 19:15). In 2 Corinthians, as in 1 Corinthians, moreover, one passage does not seem to square with this picture of continuity between the Jewish Law and the new Israel.

The topic under discussion in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18 is the contrast between Paul’s style of ministry and that of his opponents. Specifically, Paul is concerned to refute the notion that letters of recommendation, such as his opponents carry, are necessary credentials for true apostleship (2 Cor 3:1; *see* Apostle). Paul claims to have letters of recommendation, but not ones written with ink or on tablets of stone. His letters were written instead with the Spirit of the living God on the tablets of the human heart (2 Cor 3:2–3). Letters were not, of course, written with ink on stone in Paul’s time, but with ink on papyrus. Paul has, however, purposely mixed his metaphors in order to echo the prophetic passages dealing with the new covenant, in which God would replace his people’s “heart of stone” with a “heart of flesh,” put his Spirit in them (Ezek 36:26–27), and write his Law “on [their] hearts” (Jer 31:33; *see* Prophet, Paul as). Thus, in 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul claims to be a minister of a new covenant, not like the old, written covenant which “killed” by properly bringing the covenant’s curses down upon disobedient Israel, but like the covenant which Jeremiah predicted would at some future time bring forgiveness for sin and a renewed ability to know and to obey God.

Paul’s implied conclusion to this argument is that written letters, such as his opponents carry (2 Cor 3:1–2), provide insignificant proof of apostleship when compared to the eschatologically significant “letters” which Paul can bring forward in the form of the Corinthian believers themselves, for the Corinthians joined the eschatological people of God through Paul’s ministry and represent the long-awaited fulfillment of the prophetic promise.

In order to drive the point home even more forcefully, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3:7–11 comments on the superiority of the new covenant, of which he is minister and the Corinthians are proof, to the old. The old covenant, he says, was glorious, so glorious in fact that when Moses received the covenant stipulations from God, his face was “glorified” to the extent that the Israelites were not able to look at it (2 Cor 3:7; cf. Ex 34:29–30 LXX; *Tg. Onq.* Ex 34:29–30). If such glory attaches to “the ministry of death” (2 Cor 3:7) and “condemnation” (2 Cor 3:9), Paul says, how much more glorious must be “the ministry of the Spirit” and “righteousness” (2 Cor 3:8–9). In 2 Corinthians 3:12–18 Paul goes on to describe how Moses veiled his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing that its glory was fading, and comments that the old covenant’s obsolescence is still veiled from the unbelieving Jews of Paul’s day (2 Cor 3:14).

When we compare 2 Corinthians 3:1–18 with Paul’s appeal to the Law as a guide to conduct in 2 Corinthians 8:5 and 13:1 we face the same problem we discovered in 1 Corinthians. Paul at times appears to say that the Law is no longer valid since it is aligned with sin, death and condemnation (1 Cor 15:56; 2 Cor 3:7, 9) and at times seems to regard it, at least in some form, as authoritative. Are these two sides of a complex view of the Law or are they, as Räsänen and others believe, indications that Paul’s view of the Law is confused and contradictory?

One hint that these two approaches to the Law form part of a complex but coherent position lies in the consistent presence of the two approaches in different letters. That 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians contain both attitudes, although the letters address different situations, shows at least that Paul did not simply make one type of statement when convenient in one situation and another type of statement when convenient in a different situation.

A second indication that Paul's view of the Law is complex and coherent rather than *ad hoc* and contradictory lies in the nature of the negative statements. The most natural background for Paul's statements that the Law is aligned with sin, death and condemnation is the widespread conviction among first-century Jews that the Law had justly condemned Israel to Gentile domination for transgressing its commands. When Paul speaks of the "old covenant" as "made obsolete in Christ" (2 Cor 3:14), he may have in focus not everything the Law contained but the Law's sentence of condemnation upon Israel's transgression of the covenant. This reading gains some support from Paul's description of the Sinaitic covenant as "the ministry of death" (2 Cor 3:7), recalling precisely the penalty for breaking the covenant according to Leviticus 26:25 (LXX) and Deuteronomy 30:15, 19, and his further description, so appropriate in this context, of the Mosaic code as the "ministry of condemnation" (2 Cor 3:9). If this perspective is correct, then Paul does not say in these passages that every aspect of the Mosaic legislation was abolished, but that God himself had abolished the Law's just sentence of condemnation upon his people for their transgressions. As Paul puts it, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself by not counting their transgressions against them" (2 Cor 5:19).

In sum, we have discovered so far that Paul clearly believed that the promise of the new covenant had been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, that the people of God which this new covenant constituted included Gentiles as Gentiles, not Gentiles as converts to Judaism, and that this newly constituted people was, like the old people of God, separated from the world around it by their conduct. We have also found that the specific rules of this separation coincide in many cases with the rules in the Mosaic legislation, and sometimes are quoted from that legislation word for word. Nevertheless, the Mosaic code viewed from the standpoint of its historical role in justly condemning God's people for their sin, Paul says, has been abolished. For Paul, therefore, it is impossible to say that the Mosaic Law, minus a few cultic and ethnic regulations, is still in force. To the contrary, since the Mosaic Law was inextricably bound to a period of time in which the boundaries of God's people were virtually identical with the boundaries of the Jewish people and to a time in which God's people labored under a justly pronounced sentence of condemnation, it has come to its divinely appointed end (see esp. 2 Cor 3:13).

With these discoveries in mind we are now in a better position to understand the statements which Paul makes about the Jewish Law in the letters where the Law is a specific topic of debate. Hopefully our discoveries in the Thessalonian and Corinthian correspondence will help us to understand the more difficult passages in Galatians, Philippians and Romans.

3.4. Galatians. Paul's letter to the Galatians records the apostle's angry response to a group of fledgling churches which had come under the influence of Jewish Christians preaching "another gospel" (Gal 1:8–9). This group, evidently under pressure from

zealous and violent Jews in Palestine (Gal 6:12; *see* Revolutionary Movements), taught that it was necessary to become a full proselyte to Judaism in order to stand justified (*see* Justification) before God at the final day of reckoning. At issue in particular were the requirements that the Gentile Galatians observe circumcision (Gal 2:3; 5:2–6, 11–12; 6:12–13), Jewish holy days (Gal 4:10) and dietary restrictions (Gal 2:11–14).

The details of Paul's response are compressed and frequently difficult to understand; but it is clear that they flow out of the central convictions that a new era in God's dealings with his creation has dawned and that in this new era God has established a new covenant with a newly constituted people (Gal 1:4; 4:4; 4:24, 28; cf. 3:17). Viewed from this perspective, the reintroduction of precisely those barriers which divided Jew from Gentile was nothing short of a defection from the new covenant and a return to the days of the old covenant with its divisions between people (Gal 2:15–21) and its legitimate curse upon Israel's miserable failure to keep the Law (Gal 3:10–14). It was to nullify the effect of Christ's timely coming and death (Gal 4:4; 2:21; 5:4; cf. 3:13–14), to deny the work of the eschatologically supplied Spirit (Gal 3:1–5) and to fall away from the graciously fulfilled promise of God (Gal 5:4). It was, in short, a prodigious error of timekeeping.

From this hermeneutical origin, Paul's discussion of the Law takes two directions. The first, which not surprisingly consumes most of his energy, is that the national markers of circumcision, Sabbath keeping and dietary observances, or "works of the Law" as Paul calls them (Gal 2:11–16), cannot make one righteous before God. The reason for this is twofold. For one thing, Paul says, no one can keep the whole Law. Paul's opponents themselves demonstrate this by their own inability to do the Law (Gal 6:13); the Galatians will discover it too if they undertake its yoke (Gal 5:3); and the historical experience of Israel with the curse of the Law for disobedience proves it to be true (Gal 3:10–12, cf. Col 2:14). Why is it impossible to keep the Law? Paul hints at what he thinks on this important issue in Galatians 2:16, when he says that "by works of the Law no *flesh* shall be justified." The term *flesh* was probably suggested to Paul not only by the physical nature of the circumcisions which his opponents wished to perform on the Galatians but by the use of the word to indicate human weakness in such biblical passages as Genesis 6:3 and 12, Jeremiah 17:5 and Isaiah 40:6. Thus, the term appears to be Paul's shorthand for humanity's vulnerability to sin (Gal 5:19, 24; 6:8). To elevate "works of the Law" to the level of a requirement for living in a harmonious covenant relationship with God, Paul says, is to place such a relationship outside anyone's reach, whether Jew or Gentile, because the human inclination to disobey God prevents "any flesh" from obeying the Law completely (Gal 2:16).

The second reason that "works of the Law" cannot place one within this harmonious covenant relationship with God is that the covenant of which these works are part was temporary. Unlike the promise made to Abraham, which constituted a permanent covenant fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:15–18), the Sinaitic covenant was established "on account of transgressions." By this last phrase Paul probably means that God gave the Law at Sinai in order to reveal clearly Israel's sin, to transform it from something ill defined and inchoate into specific transgressions against God's will. Paul is probably alluding here to a well-known irony: at the very moment God gave the Law to Moses on

Sinai, Israel was on the plain below already violating its first stipulation (Ex 32:7–8; cf. *Bib. Ant.* 12.4, c. first century A.D.).

Paul's meaning becomes even clearer when he describes the Sinaitic covenant as a "pedagogue" (*paidagōgos*), the family slave in the Greco-Roman world who served as guardian, disciplinarian and teacher of children until they reached maturity (Gal 3:23–25). Those under the pedagogue's charge sometimes remembered their caretaker fondly; but frequently in satire and in art work he is depicted as a harsh figure, rod in hand, ready to punish any disobedience. As Galatians 3:23 shows, Paul's purpose for comparing the Sinaitic covenant to a pedagogue in this passage is twofold: to emphasize its purpose of identifying and punishing sin and, at the same time, to highlight its temporary nature.

From Galatians 4:1–5:1 Paul uses a series of metaphors to argue that those who want to live under the yoke of the covenant at Sinai are turning the clock back to an era in which both Gentile and Jew were enslaved to sin. The concept which allows these various metaphors to hang together is that of slavery. First Paul compares the Gentile Galatians' former existence under "the elemental things of the world" (*stoicheia tou kosmou*; see Elements/Elemental Spirits of the World), a phrase reminiscent of their former idolatrous practices, to the life of the young heir to a wealthy estate who, for the time being, is no different from a slave. For the Galatians to accept the yoke of the Sinai covenant was to return from the era of the eschatological Spirit to that former era in which sin dominated their lives (Gal 4:1–11). Next, Paul compares life under the Sinaitic covenant to Hagar, Abraham's female slave who gave birth to Abraham's first son, Ishmael (Gal 4:21–31). Hagar, he says, stands for the present Jerusalem (Gal 4:25), and to accept the Sinaitic covenant as binding is to turn away from the eschatological new Jerusalem, with its new covenant of freedom from the Law's curse (Gal 4:24, 26), and to return to the "present" Jerusalem where the curse remains in force (Gal 4:25; cf. 4 Ezra 9:38–10:28; 2 Bar. 4). It is, therefore, to accept Hagar the slave as one's mother and to live in slavery with her other children (Gal 4:25).

This extensive case against human ability to keep the Mosaic covenant and against that covenant's continuing validity does not, however, exhaust Paul's comments on the Law in Galatians. In a few other passages, Paul's comments take a different direction. In Galatians 5:14 he tells his readers that "the whole Law is fulfilled in one phrase, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,'" and in Galatians 6:2 he encourages them to bear each others' burdens "for thereby you will fulfill the law of Christ." These statements seem surprising until we remember (1) that the Corinthian correspondence showed a similar pattern of regarding the Mosaic legislation as obsolete but then referring to the Law in positive ways and (2) that in neither the Corinthian correspondence nor in Galatians does Paul say that each specific command in the Mosaic code is obsolete, but only the code viewed as a whole with its curses for disobedience and its barriers against Gentiles.

Paul's quarrel is with the imposition of old and temporary structures upon the new eschatological age of reconciliation—structures whose purpose was to condemn sin and to sequester the Jews from the Gentiles (cf. Eph 2:14–18). Some of the content of the Mosaic Law emerges unscathed from Paul's critique, therefore, because it is untainted by

the temporal nature of the curses and barriers. These aspects of the Mosaic law, Paul believes, are not only still valid but are fulfilled by believers when they walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; 6:2; cf. Eph 6:2).

3.5. *Philippians.* Although *Philippians*, unlike *Galatians*, was not written primarily to correct a mistaken notion of the role of the Law in salvation history, the Galatian controversy was nevertheless ringing in Paul's ears as he wrote this letter. In *Philippians* 3:2–11, therefore, we find a warning against the same Jewish Christians who were trying to turn the clock back to an era in which circumcision, dietary requirements and Sabbath keeping separated Israel from the Gentiles (Phil 3:2–3). Although the group did not yet pose an active threat to the *Philippians* (Phil 3:2 sounds more like a warning of possible rather than of present danger), Paul had seen enough of the damage they could do to warrant delivering a warning against them to one of his favorite churches (Phil 4:15–16).

Paul's warning, although brief, provides a helpful link between his compressed and forceful statements about the Law in *Galatians* and his more carefully nuanced comments in *Romans*. In articulating his case against his opponents, Paul argues, as he had in *Galatians*, that to demand the fulfillment of these obsolete requirements is to place confidence in "the flesh," humanity's fallen and inadequate ability to do what God requires (Phil 3:3–4; cf. Gal 2:16). In explaining what he means, however, he takes a step beyond *Galatians* toward his later argument in *Romans*. To place confidence in one's fleshly circumcision, Jewish lineage and punctilious legal observance, he says, is to rely on one's own inadequate righteousness rather than on the righteousness which comes from God (Phil 3:5–6, 9; cf. Rom 2:1–3:20).

This new twist to his case against the reintroduction of the Sinaitic covenant is grounded in two biblical images. The first is the image of Israel's own inadequate righteousness during the wilderness wanderings, in spite of which God led them into the promised land (Deut 9:1–10:11). As with Israel, Paul's *own* righteousness was based on the broken Sinaitic covenant and therefore was an inadequate means of attaining salvation (literally, "the resurrection from the dead," Phil 3:9; cf. Rom 10:2–3). The second biblical image Paul uses is of God's powerful and effective action to rescue his people from their plight as exiles and to restore them both to their land and to a peaceful relationship with himself. In Isaiah 46:13 and 51:5–8 God refers to this saving activity as "my righteousness." Paul takes up this notion in *Philippians* 3:9 to say that the biblical expectations of an eschatological display of God's righteousness have been at least partially fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and so to cling to the old, inadequate righteousness based on a broken Sinaitic covenant is to put one's trust in "refuse" (Phil 3:8). This brief comment in *Philippians* on the relationship between the Law, conceived as the Sinaitic covenant, and "the righteousness from God" will in *Romans* become a dominant theme.

3.6. *Romans.* Paul's view of the Law in *Romans*, like his comments in *Galatians*, come into sharper focus if we understand something about the situation that provoked the letter. When Paul wrote *Romans* he was on the verge of delivering his highly prized collection of relief funds from his predominantly Gentile churches to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25). He was concerned, however, that this offering, purchased at the price of considerable labor, would not be acceptable to the church there, and so he wrote to Rome, in part, to solicit that church's prayer support for his journey

(Rom 15:30–32). Acts shows us that Paul’s concern centered upon what some Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had heard about his view of the Law (Acts 21:20–21). Similar rumors had also reached the Roman church, a community which, as A. J. M. Wedderburn (44–65) argues, had close ties to Jerusalem (Rom 3:8; 6:1; 6:15; *see* Rome). Hence Paul’s purpose in Romans was probably at least in part to correct misunderstanding about his view of the Law.

As in Galatians, Paul makes both positive and negative statements about the Law. He maintains both that “works of the Law” cannot give righteousness and that the Law, no longer apparently conceived as the Sinaitic covenant, can be fulfilled by Christians. In Romans, however, Paul articulates his critique of the Sinaitic covenant in a slightly different way from what he had in Galatians. In Galatians Paul never mentioned boasting in the Law (although *see* Gal 6:13–14); but in Romans his argument receives a new twist from the case it makes against “boasting” or “glorying” in the Law as a special possession of the Jewish people (Rom 2:17, 23; 4:2; *cf.* Phil 3:3–6).

When Paul begins to describe the gospel which he wants “to preach to you who are in Rome also” (Rom 1:15), among his first points is that mere knowledge of what God requires does not provide one with a right standing before God. Only obedience to God’s requirements, Paul says, can do that. He begins by discussing the Gentile world where many people sin against God (Rom 1:21–31) although they know his awesomeness, power, divinity (Rom 1:20), creative activity (Rom 1:25) and moral standard (Rom 1:32). Nevertheless, their knowledge goes unaccompanied by obedience, and so in spite of their knowledge, God punishes them precisely as their sins deserve (Rom 1:24, 26, 28).

Paul then turns to the Jewish world where God’s impartiality (Rom 2:11) requires that the same standard of judgment hold true: “It is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous in God’s eyes, but the doers of the Law who will be declared righteous” (Rom 2:13). This standard is so firm, says Paul, that in God’s eyes it is appropriate for a Gentile who keeps the Law in spirit but violates its letter by remaining uncircumcised (Rom 2:26, 29) to sit in judgment upon a Jew who boasts (Rom 2:23) in the possession of the Law but does not obey it (Rom 2:14–29). Although this is a complex passage, its fundamental point is clear: it is no use for Jewish Christians to impose a standard upon Gentile Christians which the Jews themselves have historically not been able to keep (*cf.* Rom 2:24 and Acts 15:10–11). The reason for this is that doing the “just requirements of the Law” (Rom 2:26) and keeping it “inwardly” and “spiritually” (Rom 2:28–29) are what matters before God, not boasting in the possession of the Law (Rom 2:23) and in outward marks like circumcision (Rom 2:25–26).

In Romans 3:9–20 Paul takes the further step of pointing out that no one, whether Jew or Gentile, fully does what the Law requires. Instead, when measured against the standard which the Law demands, all apologetic speeches must cease (Rom 3:19; *cf.* Job 29:7–10), for everyone stands condemned. All, both Jew and Gentile, are “under sin” (Rom 3:9; *cf.* 8:7), and boasting in possession of the Law (Rom 3:27) or the careful observance of the Mosaic code’s stipulations (“works of Law,” Rom 3:28) are of no use. The Mosaic covenant has been broken both nationally and personally by both Jew and Gentile, and only eschatological help from the covenant-keeping God (“the righteousness of God,” Rom 3:21) can remedy the situation. This, of course, has happened in Jesus Christ, because of whom all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, stand assured of a favorable verdict at the day of reckoning (Rom 3:21–26).

By this point in the argument Paul has largely made his case. Two important threads, however, remain loose and need attention. First, Paul must address the significant objection that he has nullified the Law, which after all Paul himself believes to be God's Word (Rom 3:31). Paul answers this objection by appealing not to the Sinaitic covenant but to the narrative portion of the Law and specifically to God's covenant with Abraham, the first "Jew." Paul observes that God reckoned Abraham righteous (Gen 15:6) prior to circumcision (Gen 17:11–14, 23–27), and then claims that circumcision only served as a seal upon a covenant already made on the basis of Abraham's faith. Hence faith, not "works" prescribed by the Mosaic code, bring righteousness (Rom 4:1, 1–5, 13), and Abraham serves as the prototype not only of the believing (and circumcised) Jew but of the believing (and uncircumcised) Gentile as well (Rom 4:11–12). In this way Paul demonstrates that, far from nullifying the Law, "the righteousness of God" is consistent with the principle of faith found in the Law itself.

A second problem Paul must address is why, if it lends no advantage to the Jew, did God give the Law? Paul points out carefully that nothing he has said should lead to the conclusion that the Law and sin are identical (Rom 7:7). To the contrary, the Law is holy, righteous, good and spiritual (Rom 7:12, 14; cf. 7:22); it is only so closely allied with sin because it shows sin for the evil transgression that it is and condemns the transgressor. It accomplishes this, according to Paul, in three ways. First, it brings knowledge of sin by making God's will explicit so that people can know God's will and understand that they have not done it (Rom 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:7, 21–23). Second, the Law demonstrates how insidious sin is by suggesting to fallen humanity ways in which it can rebel against God (Rom 7:7–12; cf. 5:20). Finally, "the Law brings wrath" (Rom 4:15; cf. 1:18), for it contains a list of dire consequences which God ordains for those who disobey its commands. Not surprisingly, then, believers are "no longer under," have "died to" and have been "freed from" this "Law of sin and death" (Rom 6:14; 7:4; 7:6; 8:2).

By this point in our study it should come as no surprise that while Paul can unambiguously speak of the abrogation of the Mosaic code, he can at the same time speak of the Law's authority and of its fulfillment among believers. In Romans the tension between these two kinds of statements is at its sharpest, for along with comments about freedom from the Law we read that the Law is God's (Rom 7:22; 8:7), that it is "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2) and that believers fulfill its "just requirement" when they walk in the Spirit (Rom 8:4; cf. 13:8–10), something that unbelievers are not able to do (Rom 8:7).

Evidence from Paul's other letters has so far pointed toward a resolution to this tension in Paul's belief in two covenants, or two laws, one old and the other new. Romans 9:30–10:8 tends to confirm this view. Here Paul explains that most of Israel has failed to believe the gospel because they have pursued the Law "as if it were a matter of works" (Rom 9:32), believing that in spite of God's eschatological provision for rescue from the broken covenant in Jesus Christ ("the righteousness of God," Rom 10:3), they could continue to cling to the Law of Sinai as proof that they were God's people (Rom 10:3; cf. Phil 3:9). To demonstrate that clinging to the Law in this way could not lead to salvation, Paul quotes two passages from "the Law." The first, Leviticus 18:5, reminds the attentive reader that the Mosaic covenant promised life only to those who obeyed it (Rom 10:5), something which anyone who had read Leviticus 26:14–46 knew Israel had not done, and which Paul has just argued energetically that no individual has done either.

This Law, Paul says, has reached its climax (*telos*) in Christ (Rom 10:4; see Wright, 241) and has given way to a new covenant. The second passage features much of the vocabulary of Deuteronomy 9:4 and 30:12, passages which in their original context spoke of obedience to the Mosaic Law. In Paul's hands, however, they have been transposed into a different key and now speak of righteousness by faith in Christ (Rom 10:6–8; Hays, 73–83). The very Law which has come to its climactic end (*telos*) in Christ can be taken up and remolded to fit the shape of the new covenant.

4. Conclusion.

If the portrait of Paul's view of the Law painted here is correct, then at its heart was the conviction that the old covenant made with Israel at Sinai had passed away and the new covenant predicted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel had come. The change of covenants was necessary because no individual could keep the stipulations of the old covenant, a fact which Israel had demonstrated at the national level. The change was also necessary because after the covenant was broken, Israel used the Law to erect barriers between itself and the Gentile world, barriers which to some became a point of pride and false security. The new covenant maintained the formal structure of the old, including its barrier of separation between those within and those outside. This barrier ceased to be national in character, however, and assumed instead dimensions dictated by the Spirit, dimensions which in their practical outworking coincided in many particulars with the old covenant. This new covenant, moreover, as the prophets had predicted, was written on the heart and could be kept by those who walked in the Spirit.

All of this means, of course, that Paul's view of the Law was to a large measure discontinuous with the view of many Jews during his time. It is hard to imagine that the authors of Tobit and Judith, *Jubilees* and the Qumran Scrolls would have been comfortable in Paul's company. On the other hand, the undeniable element of discontinuity can be overstressed. The conceptual world within which Paul worked would have been familiar to Paul's Jewish contemporaries. They knew that Israel suffered under "the curse of the Law" in the form of Gentile domination because it had broken the covenant, and some of them at least looked for the answer to this plight in the promises of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36–37. The image of Paul, the aberration, as it appears in the work of Montefiore, Sanders and others is, therefore, hardly fair.

Neither, if our reading is correct, is Räsänen's image of Paul the muddle-head. Paul's conviction that his churches formed the community of the new covenant, with all of the ramifications which that conviction entailed, remains consistent from his earliest correspondence to his latest, from his most placid to his most polemical. Paul did not produce his view of the Law as an expedient in the heat of the moment. Rather it bears the marks of a complex and carefully considered position, worthy of the most painstaking study and of the deepest theological reflection.

See also COVENANT AND NEW COVENANT; CURSE, ACCURSED, ANATHEMA; ETHICS; ISRAEL; JUDAIZERS; JUSTIFICATION; LAW OF CHRIST; RESTORATION OF ISRAEL; RIGHTEOUSNESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD; WORKS OF THE LAW.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1956); W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (4th ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); T. J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality in Paul* (AnBib 89; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981); J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990); R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989); M. Hengel, *The Zealots* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989); H. Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984); H. Maccoby, *Paul and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991); C. G. Montefiore, "First Impressions of Paul," *JQR* 6 (1894) 428–75; idem, "Rabbinic Judaism and the Epistles of St. Paul," *JQR* 13 (1900–1901) 161–217; G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1927); H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (WUNT 29; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983); idem, *The Torah and Christ: Essays in German and English on the Problem of the Law in Early Christianity* (SESJ; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1986); W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; 5th ed; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902); E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63BCE-66CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992); idem, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); idem, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); idem, *Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); S. Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul: A Study in History* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); idem, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); F. Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul's View of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (NovTSup 61; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989); P. J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakah in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (CRINT 3.1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); F. Weber, *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften, gemeinfasslich dargestellt* (2d ed.; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1897; 1st ed., 1880); A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991).

F. Thielman

AnBib *Analecta Biblica*

WUNT *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*

SESJ *Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran Julkaisuja*

ICC *International Critical Commentary*

NovTSup *Supplement to Novum Testamentum*

CRINT *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, ed. S. Safrai et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974—)

F. Thielman Thielman, Frank, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, USA: **Law**.