

WHEN PAUL'S DESIRE AND GOD'S WILL COLLIDE (ROMANS 9:1–18)

WHEN PAUL'S DESIRE AND GOD'S WILL COLLIDE:
A READING OF ROMANS 9:1-18

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a new reading of Romans 9:1–18. The history of biblical interpretation of the passage is explored with the purpose of mapping out the diversity of interpretations and noting points of agreement between these interpretations and that which is proposed. The main objective is the proposed reading of Rom 9:1–18. It is argued that when full weight is given to Rom 9:1–5 as Paul's fleshly desire, what follows in 9:6–18 is correctly understood as Paul's appropriation of Israel's Scripture to address his own desire and grief. This brings to the fore a recurrent theme in the pentateuchal passages that Paul evokes: the conflicting desire of significant figures in Israel's history – Abraham, Isaac, and Moses – with God's will. As Paul applies Scripture to his own situation, Paul's desire for the salvation of his fellow Israelites based on ethnic descent conflicts with God's will to harden Israel and call Gentiles. But in the end Paul's desire for Israel's salvation is granted (11:26).

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INTRODUCTION

In Romans 9–11 Paul raises a sharp and disturbing problem that threatens to undermine the faithfulness of God, and so ultimately the very gospel that Paul preaches. The dilemma is profoundly personal for Paul and causes him “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (Rom 9:3). If the God of Israel has acted decisively in Jesus, and if Jesus is the long awaited Messiah who fulfills God's promises to Israel, then how is it that the vast majority of Israelites have not believed in Jesus as the resurrected Christ? If Israel's promised and long awaited salvation is taking place in Jesus, then why are most Jews not saved while the majority of those being saved are Gentiles? Have God's promises to Israel failed?

Readers of Romans have understood Paul's solution to this problem in wildly different ways. In this thesis I propose a new reading of Rom 9:1–18. The proposal of a new reading of such a long-studied passage will likely raise skeptical eyebrows and furrow disapproving ones. But my reading of Rom 9:1–18 does not *radically* diverge from readings of past interpreters of Paul.¹ (And even if it does at certain points, the originality of a reading ought not disqualify it from being considered viable, although its unfamiliarity appropriately invites careful scrutiny and cross-examination.) Rather, my reading modifies antecedent interpreters of Paul by paying particular attention to Paul's use of Scripture.

In the first part I selectively survey the history of interpretation of Rom 9:1–18

¹ I will let the reader decide for him – or her – self whether or not my reading is a wild outlier. My point is simply to say that at a number of significant points, though not all, my reading is attested to by some of the most significant interpreters of Paul throughout history.

including interpreters both ancient and modern. I focus specifically on Rom 9:1–18 as this will reveal how readers throughout history have understood Paul's use of the pentateuchal narratives. As for ancient interpreters, I examine Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. With respect to modern interpreters, I discuss the significance of the explosive interest in a close examination of Paul's use of Scripture, which is appropriate considering Rom 9–11 is one of the most scripturally saturated New Testament texts. This leads me to Richard Hays and Francis Watson to better understand Paul's hermeneutical posture towards Scripture. Other modern readers of Romans who approach Rom 9:1–18 with intertextual sensitivity include Ross Wagner and Brian Abasciano whose readings of Rom 9:1–18 will be examined.

The second part consists of my proposed reading of Rom 9:1–18. I suggest that we need to *seriously* consider Rom 9:1–5 as Paul's agony and dilemma. What then follows in 9:6–18 is Paul's appropriation of Scripture as a divine response to *himself* – to *his own* vexation. This positions the reader to understand Paul as evoking the figures of Moses, Abraham, and Isaac such that Paul identifies himself with them in sharing a similar quandary and receiving a response from God. When the pentateuchal narratives are rightly apprehended by the reader, Paul's inappropriate(?) desire and his scripturally saturated solution come into sharper focus. In the end I seek to show that fundamental to Rom 9:1–18 is that Paul's desire for the salvation of Israel conflicts with God's will. Paul's desire for Israel is based on ethnic descent. The basis for God's election is neither flesh or works, but his own will. Here we have a contest of wills: God vs. Paul. And unsurprisingly, God wins. Or does he?

Finally, in part three I address two implications that my reading has for Rom 9–11 and Pauline theology: 1) the meaning of Rom 11:26, “And so all Israel will be saved”; and 2) the influential claim of E. P. Sanders that Paul's dispute with some strands of first century Jewish Christianity is one merely over Jewish nationalism.

PART 1: THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 9:1–18

Interpreters Old

The multiplicity and diversity of interpretations of Romans 9–11 is in all likelihood a product of the difficulty and complexity of Paul's argument(s) in these chapters. Of course, it is not possible to discuss the various interpretations of every word and phrase throughout Rom 9–11. It will be most useful to address how different interpreters understand Rom 9:1–18 which includes the problem that Paul raises in 9:1-5 as well as Paul's use of Scripture and his appeal to the pentateuchal figures of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Esau, Moses, and Pharaoh. In what follows I discuss both ancient interpreters of Paul as well as more recent interpreters. Since Paul has been read and interpreted for almost two millennia, it makes little sense to focus all of my ink on merely the latter half of the previous century and the present one. After all, what Stephen Westerholm has said regarding the benefit of reading Luther to understand Paul is rightly applied to a host of other ancient interpreters of Paul:

There is more of Paul in Luther than many twentieth-century scholars are inclined to allow. ...Students who want to know how a rabbinic Jew perceived humanity's place in God's world will read Paul with caution and Luther not at all. On the other hand, students who want to understand Paul but feel they have nothing to learn from a Martin Luther should consider a career in metallurgy. Exegesis is learned from the masters.²

Since I am not particularly interested in a career in metallurgy, in what follows I examine what may be learned about Paul from the masters: Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. This section will also show that my proposed

² Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 173.

reading of Rom 9:1–18 (part 2) is not *entirely* unique. Certain features of my reading have notable witnesses in the history of biblical interpretation and I point these out along the way.

Origen

Romans 9:1-5: Paul is Greater than Moses

Origen discusses Paul's seemingly astonishing request to be cut off for the sake of his kinsmen. After all, what benefit would accrue to Paul if he was accursed and his kinsmen were saved?³ Paul has learned this from Jesus who said that the one who would save his life must lose it (Mt 10:39, 16:25; Mk 8:35).⁴ What is more astonishing is that Jesus, the Lord, gave his life up for slaves. That is much more unusual than a slave (Paul) giving himself for his brothers.⁵

Origen understands Paul's wish to be accursed for his kinsmen as similar to Moses' words to God after the golden calf incident: “But now, if you will only forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written” (Ex 32:32).⁶ This shows that Paul was not less than Moses. Not only was Paul no less than Moses. Origen goes further. He asks if it is not the case that “Paul was heard more than Moses.”⁷ Those who were led by Moses fell in the wilderness, and their descendants even in the days of

³ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Books 6–10* (trans. T. Scheck; Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2002), 106.

⁴ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:106.

⁵ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:106.

⁶ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:106.

⁷ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:107.

Origen were still exiles. Paul's plea, on the other hand, was more effective than Moses' intercession since Paul “merited salvation for his brothers.”⁸ Evidence for Paul's success is found in Romans 11:25-26, where the temporary blindness of Israel is brought to an end and Israel is saved.⁹

In Romans 9:4-5 Paul lists a number of the privileges of his kinsmen according to the flesh. The final – and climactic – privilege of his kinsmen is that “from them, according to the flesh, comes the Christ, who is over all” (9:5). Origen says concerning this that there is a “Woe to them ... because he was rejected by those from whom his flesh was [descended], and he was received by the Gentiles, by whom he was not known”.¹⁰ So, this great privilege highlights the severity of Israel's rejection of Jesus as her Christ. She has rejected the Christ who is from her very own flesh.

Romans 9:6-9: Abraham and Isaac

That God's word did not fail (9:6) means that “the promise that was made to them was not in vain.”¹¹ The promise was not in vain because it was made to true Israel and not merely to the one “tracing his lineage from Abraham out of a fleshly lineage.”¹² Rather, the true Israelite is Abraham's descendant “according to the promise of faith” and it is this true Israelite who “indeed attains the promises of God.”¹³ Jacob was renamed Israel after he saw God face to face (Gen 32:30).¹⁴ Likewise, those who have seen God receive the

⁸ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:107.

⁹ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:107.

¹⁰ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:108.

¹¹ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:110.

¹² Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:110.

¹³ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:110.

¹⁴ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:111.

name Israel whereas those who have not seen God “cannot be called Israel.”¹⁵ We see from the example of Abraham that Abraham himself had many sons but only Isaac “was the son of promise.”¹⁶

Origen interprets “the word of promise” (ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος, Rom 9:8-9) in light of Rom 4 where Paul discusses God's promise and Abraham's faith. There, Paul said that Abraham believed in “God who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do” (Rom 4:17).¹⁷ God's word is powerful and effective. Isaac was born according to such a powerful word.¹⁸

Romans 9:10-13: Jacob and Esau

What was said above in the case of Isaac applies also to the case of Jacob.¹⁹ God's choice of Jacob over Esau likewise shows that God's promises are “not fulfilled in the sons of the flesh but in the sons of God, that is, in those who are, like him, chosen by the purpose of God and are adopted as sons.”²⁰ He further expands on God's choice of Jacob by referring to Romans 8:29: “those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”.²¹ In his earlier comments on that passage, Origen understands God's *foreknowledge* as consistent with its sense elsewhere in Scripture (Gen. 4:1; 24:16; Dt. 33:9) where it means love and affection. Origen grounds God's foreknowledge (i.e.

¹⁵ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:111.

¹⁶ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:111.

¹⁷ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:112.

¹⁸ “[I]t is not by the course of a fleshly birth that Isaac is born, since Abraham was already considered to have a dead body and Sarah's womb was dead But it is through the power of him who said, 'At this time I will come and Sarah will have a son.' Therefore, he is called a son by merit, not of the flesh, but of God, who is born out of the arrival and discourse of God,” Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:112.

¹⁹ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:113.

²⁰ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:113.

²¹ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:113.

love) for certain people in his knowledge of what they would be and do prior to their existence. So, in Rom 8:29, Paul's point “is to show that those who are foreknown by God are those upon whom God had placed his own love and affection because he knew what sort of persons they were.”²²

Origen revisits Jacob and Esau in his discussion of the “object for special use” and the one for “ordinary use” that are both made from “the same lump of clay” (Rom 9:21). He interprets this in light of 2 Tim 2:20-21 where Paul discusses vessels made of various materials and then says that “all who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work.” It is worth quoting Origen at length:

For, in order for Jacob to have been a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful to the Lord, prepared for every good work, his soul had cleansed itself; and God, seeing its purity, having the authority to make from the same mass one vessel for honor, another for reproach, he made Jacob, who, as we have said, had indeed cleansed himself, into a vessel for honor. But from the same mass he made Esau into a vessel for reproach, whose soul he saw was neither so pure nor so simple. But in order that you might know that Jacob was made into a vessel for honor because of the purity and simplicity of his soul, listen to how Holy Scripture bears testimony to his simplicity. It says, “Jacob was a simple man, dwelling in a house.” On this account, then, the Apostle says about these men that before they were born it is said of them, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”²³

Here, two features of Origen's interpretation are particularly noteworthy: 1) Origen grounds God's choice of Jacob and rejection of Esau in the state of their soul; 2) Origen brings together Mal 1:2-3, and Gen 25:27:

“When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents” (Gen 25:27).

²² Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:89.

²³ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:121.

“Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau” (Mal 1:2-3).²⁴

Romans 9:14-18: Moses and Pharaoh

With the exception of the words “By no means” (Rom 9:14), Origen understands the whole of Romans 9:14-19 to be the words, not of Paul, but of an objector.²⁵ Paul's response essentially begins in 9:20, “But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?” In 9:14-19 Paul has placed himself “under the *persona* of the one contradicting him” and as the first objection is met with “By no means” so also are all that follow met with these words implicitly.²⁶ In Origen's reading, God's words to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy ...” are scriptural expressions used by the *contradictor* and not by Paul. This is not Paul's use of scripture. Such is also the case with the conclusion drawn from God's address to Moses, that “it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy” (9:16). Again, it is also the point of God's words to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (9:17). These uses of scripture are the ammunition of the objector.²⁷ The objector uses these scriptural examples to show that: 1) neither salvation nor destruction are up to man's power; 2) “there is no freedom of will in man”;²⁸ 3) “God finds fault and condemns men without reason.”²⁹ Paul's response to all of these objections is, “By no means!”

²⁴ Origen's desire to connect Mal 1:2-3 to the Genesis narrative is commendable. However, as I will argue below, it is more appropriate to read Mal 1:2-3 with Gen 25:28 and not, as Origen suggests, with Gen 25:27.

²⁵ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:114.

²⁶ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:114.

²⁷ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:114-115.

²⁸ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:115.

²⁹ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:115.

According to Origen, man *does* contribute to his own salvation. This is evident from his rebuttal to the interlocutor's, “So, it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy” (9:16). It is not that God does everything and man does nothing. Rather, when the two are compared God is responsible for “the chief part of the work”.³⁰ Such an understanding is corroborated by 1 Cor 3:6-7, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” So, the objector is wrong. It is not the case that the one who runs and the one who wills does nothing. Rather, God “gives the increase to the work or its completion.”³¹ Humans are intimately involved in their salvation but in comparison God accomplishes the greater part. Furthermore, God did not arbitrarily harden pharaoh. Pharaoh “was a man of consummate malice” and God did not actively harden Pharaoh.³² Rather, God was patient with him and progressively escalated the punishments.³³ Origen concludes that God does not harden whoever he wants, “but the one who is unwilling to comply with patience is hardened.”³⁴

John Chrysostom

Romans 9:1-5: Paul's Disdain for Blasphemy and Desire for Christ's Glory

Paul's wish to be “accursed and cut off from Christ” for the sake of his “kindred according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3) shows that Christ's glory is at stake and that Paul does

³⁰ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:116.

³¹ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:116.

³² Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:118.

³³ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:118.

³⁴ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:118.

not want his Lord to be blasphemed. Paul's zeal for Christ's glory is most clearly evident in that he expresses his desire to be accursed for the Jews specifically without mention of the Gentiles.³⁵ Since Paul prayed “for the Jews only, it is a clear proof that it is only for Christ's glory that he is thus earnest.”³⁶

Paul's exclusive prayer for the Jews is proof of his zeal for Christ's glory because, according to Chrysostom, Paul is hearing people demean the glory of God by uttering blasphemous words. Such people bring accusations against God and claim that the Jews “are now cast out and disgraced; and in their place are introduced men who had never known Him, of the Gentiles.”³⁷ Such words make God out to be one who does not keep his promises and even a liar. These utterances cause such pain to the apostle that he would go to great lengths to see the salvation of the Jews so that the blasphemy would be brought to an end.³⁸ He would “be made an alien ... from all that enjoyment and glory.”³⁹ He would even bear to “lose even the kingdom and that glory unutterable, and any sufferings would I undergo, as considering it the greatest possible consolation possible no longer to hear Him Whom I so long for, so blasphemed.”⁴⁰

Romans 9:6-9: God's Promise Has Not Failed

Since Paul's request to be accursed would not be answered the apostle proceeds to show

³⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 460).

³⁶ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 460).

³⁷ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 460). The blasphemous words are of the variety, “He promises to one, and gives to another. He was sprung from one race, He saved another.” Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 461).

³⁸ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 460).

³⁹ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 460).

⁴⁰ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 460).

that God's promise, “In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:7, 3), did not fail.⁴¹ Chrysostom gives at least two defenses to show that God's word did not fail and that God did fulfill his promises. First, since the promise was given to the seed, if we understand “what kind the seed of Abraham is” then we will “know that the word hath not fallen to the ground.”⁴² Not all of Abraham's children are his seed. Isaac was the seed and not Ishmael. So, those born in a manner similar to Isaac are the seed. Such seed are born

[n]ot according to the law of nature, not according to the power of the flesh, but according to the power of the promise. ... This promise then and word of God it was that fashioned Isaac, and begat him. For what if a womb was its instrument and the belly of a woman? Since it was not the power of the belly, but the might of the promise that begat the child. Thus are we also gendered by the words of God.⁴³

Baptism figures prominently in Chrysostom's understanding of being “children of promise” because it is there where God's promise and words bring about such a birth.⁴⁴

Second, if we understand “what the Israel is to whom He made the promise” it will be apparent that God's word did not fail.⁴⁵ Chrysostom appears to take the second *Israel*, in Paul's phrase “For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel,” as a spiritual or true Israel. Chrysostom understands the true Israel in a similar manner to Origen. Here, “Israel” indicates “a sign of the virtue of that just man, and of a gift from above, and of having seen God” (Gen 32:28).⁴⁶

⁴¹ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 462).

⁴² Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 462).

⁴³ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 463).

⁴⁴ “[I]n the pool of water it is the words of God which generate and fashion us. For it is by being baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost that we are gendered. And this birth is not of nature, but of the promise of God.” Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF 11: 463).

⁴⁵ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 464).

⁴⁶ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 464).

Romans 9:10-13: God's Foreknowledge According to Deeds and Disposition

It ought not be a surprise that there are unsaved Jews. After all, of Abraham's children, Isaac is called the seed and not Ishmael. One may respond that it is not surprising that Isaac was the seed and Ishmael was not. Isaac's mother was a free woman, Sarah, whereas Ishmael's mother was Hagar the slave. So, Paul gives an even better example in Jacob and Esau, the twins, who were born of the same mother. Chrysostom grounds God's choice of Jacob over Esau in God's *foreknowledge* of Esau's wickedness and Jacob's good deeds.⁴⁷ In fact, Chrysostom understands the following words by Paul as proof of God's foreknowledge of Jacob being good and Esau being evil: “before they had been born or had done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose in election might continue, not by works but by his call she was told, 'The elder shall serve the younger’” (Rom. 9:11-12). Chrysostom understands the phrase, “The elder shall serve the younger” (Rom. 9:12) as evidence that God's election was made according to his foreknowledge since the twins had not yet done any good or bad deeds at the time when God declared this statement to Rebecca.⁴⁸ To be fair to Chrysostom's reading of Paul, he does add that “it is not a mere exhibition of works that God searcheth after, but a nobleness of choice and an obedient temper.”⁴⁹ If such a man would fall into sin, he would “speedily recover himself.”⁵⁰ Thus, God chooses not only on the basis of foreknown deeds, but also based on the individual's internal disposition or attitude.

⁴⁷ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 464-465).

⁴⁸ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 466).

⁴⁹ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 466).

⁵⁰ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 466).

Romans 9:14-21: Moses and Pharaoh

When Paul cites God's words to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (Rom 9:15), Chrysostom applies this to God's choice not to destroy *all* of the Israelites after they fashioned and worshipped the golden calf. God's statement shows that Moses does not have the right to know “which are deserving of My love toward man.”⁵¹ Moses should not question God. Paul asks the rhetorical question, “But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?” in order to put man in his place before God and to put before man “how incomprehensible His foreknowledge is, and how far above our reason”.⁵² It is not that such questions are unanswerable but rather that “it is presumptuous to raise them”.⁵³

According to Chrysostom, Paul's discussion of the potter and clay (Rom 9:20-21) does not negate free will.⁵⁴ Rather, Paul's point is to show that “one should not contravene God, but yield to His incomprehensible Wisdom.”⁵⁵ People are to “become like that lifeless matter, which followeth the potter's hands, and lets itself be drawn about anywhere he may please.”⁵⁶ Chrysostom goes to pains to preserve man's free will and seems to vehemently oppose a “Calvinistic” understanding of salvation. So, even in the case of Pharaoh God showed him mercy and “if he was not saved, it was quite owing to his own will: since, as for what concerneth God, he had as much done for him as they who were saved.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 466).

⁵² Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 462).

⁵³ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 467).

⁵⁴ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 467).

⁵⁵ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 468).

⁵⁶ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 467).

⁵⁷ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.*, 16 (NPNF¹ 11: 469).

Saint Augustine

Augustine's interpretation of Romans 9, especially as it relates to the question of God's sovereignty and human freedom was not static but changed. Here I first read Romans 9:1-18 with the early Augustine and then note some of his later retractions.

The Early Augustine

Romans 9:11-13: Jacob, Esau, and God's Foreknowledge of Faith

In his *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* Augustine expounds God's love for Jacob and hatred for Esau (Rom 9:11-13). That God loved Jacob and hated Esau before the twins were born does not negate free will but demonstrates God's foreknowledge. But unlike Chrysostom and Origen, for Augustine it is not God's foreknowledge of works that is in view. After all, good works are the fruit of the Holy Spirit and as such cannot be the grounds of election since God is the source of good works, not people.⁵⁸ Augustine then asks, “how does he choose the Spirit's recipient?”⁵⁹ God gives the Spirit to those who believe. So, Augustine concludes that God chooses those he foreknows will have faith:

But since he gives the Holy Spirit only to believers, God indeed does not choose works, which he himself bestows, for he gives the Spirit freely so that through love we might do good, but rather he chooses faith. . . . Therefore God did not elect anyone's works (which God himself will grant) by foreknowledge, but rather by foreknowledge he chose faith, so that he chooses precisely him whom he foreknew would believe in him; and to him he gives the Holy Spirit, so that by doing good

⁵⁸ Augustine, “Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans” in *Augustine on Romans* (ed. P. F. Landes; Chico, CA: 1982), 60.5: 31.

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Propositions*, 60.7: 31.

works he will as well attain eternal life.⁶⁰

The one who of his own free will believes will receive the Holy Spirit and then do good works and so gain eternal life.⁶¹

Romans 9:14-16: Two Mercies

For Augustine, the phrase “I will have mercy on whom I will have had mercy” (9:15) speaks of two instances of God's mercy. The latter mercy refers to “the first time when he called us while were still sinners.”⁶² The former mercy refers to God giving the Holy Spirit to the believer.⁶³

The earlier Augustine could not allow the freedom of the will to be nullified. So, that “it does not depend on human will or exertion” (9:16) does not mean that Paul negates the freedom of the will. Rather, “our will does not suffice unless God helps us.”⁶⁴

Romans 9:17-18: Hardening Based on Foreseen Unbelief

Just as God gives mercy on the basis of foreseen faith, he hardens on the basis of foreseen unbelief. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not arbitrary. It is the punishment that Pharaoh earned by his unbelief.⁶⁵ God is also related to man's good works and his evil in an asymmetric fashion. It seems that for the early Augustine, God is directly involved in good works as their source. However, he leaves man to work his own

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Propositions*, 60.8-10: 33.

⁶¹ Augustine, *Propositions*, 60.11: 33.

⁶² Augustine, *Propositions*, 61.2: 33.

⁶³ Augustine, *Propositions*, 61.3: 33.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Propositions*, 62.1: 35.

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Propositions*, 62.7: 35.

evil deeds:

On whom he has mercy, he causes him to do good, and whom he hardens, he leaves to doing evil. But that mercy was given to the preceding merit of faith, and that hardening to preceding impiety, so that we work both good deeds through the gift of God and evil through his chastisement. Nevertheless, man's free will remains, whether for belief in God so that mercy follows, or for impiety followed by punishment. ... God in his foreknowledge elects those who will believe and condemns the unbelieving, neither electing nor condemning because of works, but granting to the faith of the one group the ability to do good works, and hardening the impiety of the other by deserting them, so that they do evil.⁶⁶

The Later Augustine

In his later *Revisions*, Augustine repudiated his prior interpretation of Rom 9:1–18 at a number of points. Augustine explicitly repudiates his prior understanding of God's choice of Jacob where he said that God elects those whom he foreknew would believe.

Augustine's prior view, according to his own admission, did not rightly understand grace.

After all, if God gives grace in response to faith, then God is simply giving what is owed and this is not grace. He says,

I had not yet carefully examined, nor up to that point had I found, what sort of thing grace's choosing might be It is not grace, to be sure, if any merits precede it, so that what is given is paid back on account of merits, not in accordance with grace but as something owed, rather than as a gift.⁶⁷

Furthermore, foreknown faith cannot be the grounds of God's election since faith itself is one of the gifts given by God.⁶⁸ Augustine also retracts his understanding of Rom 9:16,

“So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.” He

confesses that he had previously “discussed inadequately the calling itself”.⁶⁹ While

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Propositions*, 62.12–16: 35.

⁶⁷ Saint Augustine, *Revisions* (WA 1.2; trans. Boniface Ramsey; ed. R. J. Teske; Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2010), I.22.2: 93.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Revisions*, I.22.2: 94.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Revisions*, I.22.3: 94.

previously he had said that in the elect “faith ... initiates merit, so that it is by God's gift that they do what is good”, he did not properly consider “that the merit of faith was itself a gift of God”.⁷⁰

Elsewhere, Augustine also repudiated his initial view of God's election based on foreknown faith. Augustine admits that he too vehemently defended free will and that this led him into error. He says,

I in fact strove on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God's grace conquered, and otherwise I would have been unable to arrive at understanding what the Apostle said with the most evident truthfulness, *For who sets you apart? What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received, why do you boast as though you had not received?* (1 Cor. 4:7).⁷¹

According to Augustine, in his previous view one could arrogantly respond to Paul, “I have faith that I have not received.”⁷² Rather, faith is engendered by God's special call. Augustine sees two kinds of call in operation. There is a general call which people can and do refuse and there is “a special calling.”⁷³ With regard to the special calling Augustine invokes Rom 9:12-13, “Not on the basis of works, but because of the one who calls, it was said to him, 'The older will serve the younger.’” This call produced faith. In Augustine's words,

Did he say, 'Not on the basis of works, but because of the one who believes'? He, of course, took this too away from human beings in order that he might ascribe everything to God. He, therefore, said, *But because of the one who calls, not by just any calling, but by that calling by which one becomes a believer.*⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Augustine, *Revisions*, I.22.2: 94-95.

⁷¹ Saint Augustine, “Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician” in *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions* (WSA 1.12; trans. B. Ramsey; ed. R. Canning; Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008), 4.8: 172.

⁷² Augustine, “Questions,” 4.8: 172.

⁷³ Saint Augustine, “The Predestination of the Saints” in *Answer to the Pelagians, IV* (WSA 1.26; trans. R. J. Teske; ed. J. E. Rotelle; Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 16.32: 175.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Predestination*, 16.32: 175-176.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas begins his discussion of Romans 9 by suggesting a reason for why Paul tackles whether God's grace “is conferred solely by God's choice or from the merits of previous works.”⁷⁵ Paul addresses this issue because “the Jews, seemingly called to God's special protection, had fallen from grace; whereas the Gentiles, previously alienated from God, had been admitted to it.”⁷⁶ Paul's “great sorrow” (Rom 9:2) shows “the pain he suffered from their fall.”⁷⁷ At this point Aquinas quotes Chrysostom and says that Paul wished himself accursed “either absolutely or temporarily from Christ's honor, which would be enhanced by the conversion of the Jews.”⁷⁸

Aquinas seems to think that the benefits Paul lists of the Jews are not in reference “to those who descended according to the flesh from the ancient patriarchs but to the spiritual progeny chosen by God.”⁷⁹ This move allows him to explain that God's word has not fallen (Rom 9:6) because though the word “found no place in those who had fallen” though they had all of the benefits, “it has a place in others.”⁸⁰ This leads into Aquinas' comments on Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob and Esau.

Romans 9:7-9: Sonship via Faith Not Physical Descent

With regards to Paul's words, “for not all who are out of Israel, these are Israel,” Aquinas reads the first Israel, not as the nation of Israel, but as Jacob the patriarch whose name

⁷⁵ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (WSTA 37; trans. F.R. Larcher; ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012), §735.

⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §735.

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §737.

⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §740.

⁷⁹ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §748.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §749.

was changed to Israel. Not all of the physical descendants of Jacob are “true Israelites, to whom God's promises belong, but those who are upright and see God by faith.”⁸¹ Similarly, Paul says of Abraham that “not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants” (Rom 9:7). This shows that God's promises were not made to all of Abraham's children, “but only those who imitate his faith and works.”⁸² In the course of his commentary on Paul's interpretation of the expulsion of Ishmael, Aquinas appeals to Gal 4:23 where Abraham is said to have had one son “according to the flesh” and the other “through the promise”. Aquinas concludes that people are “adopted into the sonship of God . . . not because they are the bodily descendants of Abraham,” rather they “are made sons of Abraham because they imitate his faith.”⁸³

Paul marshals the examples of Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Esau to counter the tendency of the Jews who thought “that they would obtain justice through the merits of their forefathers.”⁸⁴ Such a presumption is contrary to scripture. For example, in Ezekiel the LORD says that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job – three righteous men – were in the land of Israel they would only save themselves and not their children: “they will deliver neither sons nor daughters but they alone will be delivered” (Ezek 14:18). Aquinas also appeals to the example of John the Baptist who said to the Jews, “do not presume to say: we have Abraham as our father” (Matt 3:9).⁸⁵

⁸¹ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §750.

⁸² Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §750.

⁸³ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §753.

⁸⁴ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §756.

⁸⁵ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §756.

Romans 9:10-13: God's Election of Jacob not According to Foreknown Good Works

In similar fashion to Chrysostom, Aquinas thinks that Paul invokes the example of Jacob and Esau because the example of Isaac and Ishmael is open to attack. One could easily reason that Isaac was chosen because he was born of a free woman and circumcised Abraham whereas Ishmael was born of a slave woman and uncircumcised Abraham.⁸⁶ Since Jacob and Esau are twins and of the same father and mother Paul is able “to exclude any such subterfuge.”⁸⁷

Paul's interpretation of God's election of Jacob over Esau being “before they ... had done anything good or bad” (Rom 9:11) refutes Pelagianism “which says that grace is given according to one's preceding merits.”⁸⁸ God's choice was prior to any activity from either of the twin brothers.⁸⁹ Aquinas repeatedly emphasizes that God's choice was not based on any works. God's purpose would “be made firm not by reason of merits but according to election” (Rom 9:11).⁹⁰ He appeals to Ephesians 1:4 to show that God's election of Jacob was not *on the basis* of good works but *for the purpose of producing* good works.⁹¹

Origen's and Chrysostom's readings of Rom 9:12 ground God's election of Jacob in God's foreknowledge of the good of Jacob and the evil of Esau. Aquinas rejects this reading.⁹² Good works cannot be the basis of election since God is their source, not

⁸⁶ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §756.

⁸⁷ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §756.

⁸⁸ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §758.

⁸⁹ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §758.

⁹⁰ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §759.

⁹¹ “He chose us in himself before the foundation of the world that we should be holy” (Eph 1:4). Aquinas comments that God “spontaneously forechose one over the other, not because he was holy but in order that he be holy” (Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §759).

⁹² Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §762.

man.⁹³ God's love precedes man's love (1 John 4:20) and therefore “we must say that Jacob was loved by God before he loved God. Nor can it be said that God began to love him at a fixed point in time; otherwise his love would be changeable. Consequently, one must say that God loved Jacob from all eternity.”⁹⁴

Furthermore, while “foreknown merits” cannot ground God's predestination, foreknown sins do ground God's rejection. How can this be? Predestination is God's moving people to do good works. And since God is the source of good works, this does not allow them to ground predestination.⁹⁵ On the other hand, foreknown sins, unlike foreknown merits, do not have God as their source but the people who commit them and can therefore stand as the ground for God's rejection.⁹⁶

Aquinas defines and elucidates the relationships between love, election, and predestination. God's love is that he “will[s] good to a person absolutely.”⁹⁷ Election is God's choice of one person over another. Predestination is when God “directs a person to the good he wills for him by loving and choosing him.”⁹⁸ Aquinas goes on to compare and contrast the way in which humans love and elect with the way God does:

Election and love, however, are ordered differently in God than in man. For in men, election precedes love, for a man's will is inclined to love a thing on account

⁹³ “Hence, any good that man possesses is due to God's goodness as its basic source” (Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §790).

⁹⁴ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §762.

⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §763.

⁹⁶ “It is different in that predestination implies preparation of the merits by which glory is reached, but rejection implies preparation of the sins by which punishment is reached. Consequently, a foreknowledge of merits cannot be the reason for predestination, because the foreknown merits fall under predestination; but the foreknowledge of sins can be a reason for rejection on the part of the punishment prepared for the rejected, inasmuch as God proposes to punish the wicked for the sins they have from themselves, not from God; the just he proposes to reward on account of the merits they do not have from themselves” (Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §764).

⁹⁷ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §763.

⁹⁸ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §763.

of the good perceived in it, this good also being the reason why he prefers one thing to another and why he fixed his love on the thing he preferred. But God's love is the cause of every good found in a creature; consequently, the good in virtue of which one is preferred to another through election follows upon God's willing it – which pertains to his love. Consequently, it is not in virtue of some good which he selects in a man that God loves him; rather, it is because he loved him that he prefers him to someone by election.⁹⁹

While Aquinas does not suggest that this *comparison* between God and humans is spelled out by Paul in Rom 9, my reading (see part 2 below) suggests that such a comparison is integral to Paul's argument.

Romans 9:14-18: God's Selective Mercy is Just

Concerning God's words to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy ...” (Rom 9:15), Aquinas rules out an interpretation in which God has mercy “on account of merits *preceding* grace”.¹⁰⁰ He opposes this interpretation in the same way as above: God is the source of good works. A second interpretation, also opposed by Aquinas, is that God gave grace “on account of merits *subsequent* to grace” or those who he foresaw would respond appropriately to his grace.¹⁰¹ Aquinas counters this as he did above.¹⁰² The only appropriate ground for God's mercy is his own will.¹⁰³ He is not unjust for showing mercy to some and not all. All people are deserving of damnation and justice does not require that God show mercy to all:

⁹⁹ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §763.

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §772. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁰¹ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §772. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁰² “[N]othing which is an effect of predestination can be taken as a reason for a predestination, even if it be taken as existing in God's foreknowledge, because the reason for a predestination is presupposed to the predestination, whereas the effect is included in it. But every benefit God bestows on a man for his salvation is an effect of predestination. Furthermore, God's benefits extend not only to the infusion of grace, by which a man is made righteous, but also to its use” (Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §772).

¹⁰³ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §773.

For it is clear that distributive justice has its field in things given as due; for example, if some persons have earned wages, more should be given to those who have done more work. But it has no place in things given spontaneously and out of mercy; for example, if a person meets two beggars and gives one an alms, he is not unjust but merciful. Similarly, if a person has been offended equally by two people and he forgives one but not the other, he is merciful to the one, just to the other, but unjust to neither. For since all men are born subject to damnation on account of the sin of the first parent, those whom God delivers by his grace he delivers by his mercy alone; and so he is merciful to those whom he delivers, just to those whom he does not deliver, but unjust to none.¹⁰⁴

Aquinas maintains the freedom of the will.¹⁰⁵ However, he does so differently than Origen and Chrysostom who appeal to God's foreknowledge. Aquinas posits a distinction between the way God moves people to good and to evil. With respect to good deeds, since God is the author of them, “he inclines men's wills to good directly”,¹⁰⁶ As for evil deeds, “God puts before a person, either in him or outside of him something which of itself is conducive to good but which through his own malice he uses for evil.”¹⁰⁷

Martin Luther

Romans 9:1-5: “we offer ourselves to hell”

Paul's wish to be accursed from Christ for the sake of the Jews shows his love for both the Jews and for Christ.¹⁰⁸ Paul's love for Christ is evident in that he would go to such great lengths so that Christ would get “great glory from the Jews.”¹⁰⁹ His love for the Jews is seen in his desire for their salvation. Here Paul demonstrates “the strongest and

¹⁰⁴ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §773.

¹⁰⁵ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §778.

¹⁰⁶ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §781.

¹⁰⁷ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §781,

¹⁰⁸ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans* (LW 25; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1972), 380.

¹⁰⁹ Luther, *Rom.*, 380.

highest love, where the highest sign of hatred for oneself shows the great love for someone else.”¹¹⁰ Luther sees Paul's willingness to be accursed as an example to Christians. Those who love God simply because they have been delivered from hell, “and not for the sake of God Himself, but for their own sakes ... do not know what it is to be blessed and saved.”¹¹¹ Rather, like Paul, one ought to be completely resigned to God's will “even to hell and eternal death, if that is what God wills,” and this will result in salvation.¹¹²

Romans 9:6-9: Sonship by Neither Descent Nor Works but by Election

Paul summons God's election of Isaac and not Ishmael in order to undermine “the presumptuousness of the Jews” and to humble “all haughty trust in righteousness and good works.”¹¹³ Paul excludes both the argument of physical descent and good works from being legitimate determinants of the children of God. Merely being a descendant of Abraham will not do as the example of Ishmael clearly demonstrates.¹¹⁴ One could rebut that Isaac was a purebred whereas Ishmael was a mixed breed; Isaac had Abraham and Sarah as parents whereas Ishmael's mother was Hagar the slave. The example of Jacob and Esau more clearly refutes the argument from physical descent. The twins had the

¹¹⁰ Luther, *Rom.*, 380.

¹¹¹ Luther, *Rom.*, 380-381.

¹¹² Luther, *Rom.*, 381. Luther explains why such a resignation to God's will results in one's salvation. “For he wills what God wills; therefore he pleases God. And if he pleases God, he is loved by Him; and if loved, then saved. ... Indeed they have no need to fear being damned, for they willingly and happily submit to damnation for the sake of God. Rather it is they who are damned who try to escape damnation” (Luther, *Rom.*, 381-382). Luther goes on to add, “we must confess and wish that we might be damned and destroyed. ... Therefore if we so sincerely want to destroy ourselves that we offer ourselves to hell for the sake of God and His righteousness, we have already made true satisfaction to His righteousness, and He will be merciful and free us” (Luther, *Rom.*, 384).

¹¹³ Luther, *Rom.*, 384.

¹¹⁴ Luther, *Rom.*, 384.

same mother and father and this did not help Esau.¹¹⁵

Not only is physical descent excluded from consideration of adoption, but so are good and evil works. Neither of the twins had done any good or evil works at the time of their election.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, both Jacob and Esau “were evil because of the disease of original sin” and “by their own merit they were the same and equal and belonged to the same mass of perdition.” Humility is the only appropriate response as only “the goodness of God, makes us good and our works good.”¹¹⁷ Luther concludes, from the example of Jacob and Esau, that “flesh does not make sons of God and the heirs of the promise, but only the gracious election of God.”¹¹⁸

Romans 9:15-16: Grace, Mercy, Running, and Willing

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy” (Rom 9:15) means that God shows mercy on those whom he predestines.¹¹⁹ Again, Paul here summons scripture to humble the proud “and those who think they know everything”.¹²⁰ While these words humble the proud, they are “sweet and pleasing” to the humble.¹²¹ Luther understands the verse as it stands in the Hebrew Bible to carry “an indefinite sense . . . without reference to predestination.”¹²² The point here is to quell the distress or inquisitiveness over one's own

¹¹⁵ Luther, *Rom.*, 385. Both Isaac and Esau were born of the same “saintly woman” who “shared the bed of no other man but saintly Isaac” and this did not benefit Esau. “How much less will it benefit the unbelieving Jews, born long afterwards, that they are the sons of the patriarchs according to the flesh, if they are without faith, that is, if they have not been elected by God!” (Luther, *Rom.*, 385-386).

¹¹⁶ Luther, *Rom.*, 385.

¹¹⁷ Luther, *Rom.*, 385.

¹¹⁸ Luther, *Rom.*, 385.

¹¹⁹ Luther, *Rom.*, 386-387.

¹²⁰ Luther, *Rom.*, 386.

¹²¹ Luther, *Rom.*, 386.

¹²² Luther, *Rom.*, 387.

(or another's) predestination.¹²³ A person cannot know to whom God will be merciful. The expression has the sense, “to whom it comes it comes, and whom it hits it hits.”¹²⁴ One is not privy to knowing who are the recipients of God's mercy.

According to Luther, Paul is arguing with a coherent train of thought. That God will have mercy to whoever he wills (9:15) is consistent with his election of Jacob.¹²⁵ So, Luther can explain the election of Jacob in light of Rom 9:15. In this vein Luther says, “Jacob was loved by God because he had been elected, and he obtained mercy because it thus pleased God from eternity, just as also He said to Moses: 'I will show mercy, etc.' (Ex 33:19).” This does not mean that man's will is inoperative which would be an incorrect way to understand “it depends not on human will or exertion but on God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16). Rather, man's will is moved by God “who gives it and creates it.”¹²⁶ This phrase (9:16) refers to “the life of love and the righteousness of God.”¹²⁷

Romans 9:17-18: Pharaoh

God raised up Pharaoh for two reasons. First God raised up Pharaoh to prove that “everything depends on a merciful God and not on someone's will.”¹²⁸ Second, Pharaoh was God's instrument to afflict Israel with “extreme desperation so that they might understand that they could not escape Pharaoh by their own powers but only by the

¹²³ Luther, *Rom.*, 387.

¹²⁴ Luther, *Rom.*, 387.

¹²⁵ Luther, *Rom.*, 391.

¹²⁶ Luther, *Rom.*, 388. Luther puts forward a number of examples to illustrate how God is ultimately behind man's will. “So the cutting of wood is not of the ax but of the cutter and beating the dog is not of the stick but of the man who uses the stick” (Luther, *Rom.*, 389).

¹²⁷ Luther, *Rom.*, 389.

¹²⁸ Luther, *Rom.*, 25:391.

power of a merciful God.”¹²⁹

John Calvin

Romans 9:1-5: Was Paul's Love Unlawful? By No Means!

According to John Calvin, the Jewish people, by their unbelief had knotted a “twofold knot” and Romans 9 is the place where the “twofold knot Paul fully unties.”¹³⁰ The two knots, or objections, are: 1) “there was no truth in the Divine promise”; 2) Jesus was not the promised Messiah.¹³¹ This knotty dilemma could hinder the progress of Paul's Gentile mission. After all, Paul proclaimed Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures. If the Israelites themselves did not agree with Paul then their unbelief could become a stumbling block to the Gentiles and so impede the reception of the gospel among the Gentiles.¹³²

Similarly to Luther, Calvin understands Paul's desire to be accursed for his fellow Jews as an excellent demonstration of love. Paul displays a “surely perfect love which refuses not to die for the salvation of a friend.”¹³³ His desire for *eternal* separation so that the Jews might be saved is “a proof of the most ardent love.”¹³⁴

While discussing the phrase “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ” (Rom 9:3), Calvin notes that “[m]any indeed doubt whether this was a

¹²⁹ Luther, *Rom.*, 25:391-392.

¹³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (CC 19; ed. Joseph Haroutunian; Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1979), 332.

¹³¹ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 332.

¹³² Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 333.

¹³³ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 335.

¹³⁴ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 335.

lawful desire.”¹³⁵ There are two ways interpreters may have considered Paul's wish “unlawful.” First, Paul did not actually wish to be accursed. So, Ambrosiaster said, “He says: *I could wish*, not *I wish*, because he knows that it is impossible for such an honorable member as he was to be cut off from the body of Christ without having done anything wrong.”¹³⁶ In other words, it is a wish that Paul did not actually wish but *could* have the wish was permissible.. The second interpretative option that Calvin may have in mind here – and rejects – is that Paul really did wish something that was unlawful.¹³⁷ That this is the interpretation that Calvin had in mind is supported by his response in which he states that love is not inordinate when it is “in God and not without God's authority.”¹³⁸ This implies that the interpretation that Calvin rebuts claims that Paul's love is inordinate. Calvin brings this interpretation up in order to dismantle it. My interpretation (as described below in part 2) sees Paul putting forward his desire as, in some sense, inappropriate. At this point, my interpretation resembles that of Calvin's opponents more closely than Calvin.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 335.

¹³⁶ Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians* (trans. & ed. Gerald Bray; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 73.

¹³⁷ For example, Pelagius considers it Paul's wish prior to his conversion. He comments on Rom 9:3-4, “At one time I wished. Had I been a follower of Christ, I would not have wished. Indeed, I knew that all these things were for them, but after I recognized the truth I forsook those I used to love in this way, and they do not repent” (Pelagius, *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [trans. Theodore De Bruyn; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], 115).

¹³⁸ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 336.

¹³⁹ Ambrosiaster most closely resembles my own reading. Concerning the privileges of the Jews that Paul lists (9:4-5) he says, “These things are said of the Jews, who defend their privilege of being the children of Abraham. The apostle consoles himself, for he had said that he was constantly grief-stricken in his heart because of the unbelief of those who possessed the adoption of children and the constitution of the law, and from whom Christ the Savior had come, just as he himself had said: *Salvation is of the Jews*. However, on reading the law, he discovered that not all who are called children of Abraham deserve to be so called, as I have already pointed out. Therefore Paul restricts his grief to the fact that he discovered that it was long ago predicted that not all would believe, and he only grieves for them because they refused to believe out of jealousy” (Ambrosiaster, *Comm. Rom.* 76). Note especially how for Ambrosiaster Paul's reading of Scripture addresses Paul's “constantly grief-stricken” state.

The privileges of the Israelites that Paul lists (Rom 9:4-5) explain, according to Calvin, why Paul had such a great love and desire for his people.

And such was the love of Paul; for seeing his own nation endued with so many of God's benefits, he loved God's gifts in them, and them on account of God's gifts; and he deemed it a great evil that those gifts should perish, hence it was that his mind being overwhelmed, he burst forth into this extreme wish.¹⁴⁰

Calvin compares Paul and his “extreme wish” with Moses who asked God to blot him out of the book of life instead of destroying the people of Israel (Ex 32:32).¹⁴¹

Romans 9:6: Paul Qualifies His Angst

The transition between vs. 5 and 6 of Romans 9 warrants some reflection from Calvin.

That which follows 9:1-5 modulates Paul's great angst:

Paul had been carried away by the ardour of his wish, as it were, into an excess of feeling, (*in ecstasin*,) but now, returning to discharge his office as a teacher, he adds what may be viewed as somewhat qualifying what he had said, as though he would restrain immoderate grief. And inasmuch as by deploring the ruin of his own nation, this inconsistency seems to follow, that the covenant made by God with the seed of Abraham had failed, (for the favour of God could not have been wanting to the Israelites without the covenant being abolished,) he reasonably anticipates this inconsistency, and shows, that notwithstanding the great blindness of the Jews, the favour of God continued still to that people, so that the truth of the covenant remained firm.¹⁴²

Here Paul qualifies and guards his articulated grief (9:1-5) against misunderstanding.

Paul grieves over his fellow Jews not because he thinks that God's promise to Abraham has failed.¹⁴³ After all, the promised inheritance “did not belong to every seed without distinction; it hence follows that the defection of some does not prove that the covenant

¹⁴⁰ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 336.

¹⁴¹ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 338.

¹⁴² Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 343.

¹⁴³ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 344.

does not remain firm and valid.”¹⁴⁴

Romans 9:7-9: Special Election Fulfills General Election

According to Calvin, Scripture teaches that there are two elections. There is the “general election” of Israel. Then there is a special election within the general election. Those of the special election are those whom God placed his “hidden favour” upon, and in whom the promise is fulfilled.¹⁴⁵ Many Jews were excluded from “the true election of God.”¹⁴⁶ It is a mistake to think that God's special election overrides or negates the general election. Rather, the hidden election fulfills the general election.¹⁴⁷ Calvin brings together Gen 21:12, “In Isaac shall they seed be called”, with Gen 17:21. In Gen 17, Abraham pleads to God that Ishmael would live before God (17:18). God responds to Abraham that he would establish his covenant with Isaac (17:21). Calvin reasons from the example of Isaac and Ishmael that natural descent does not determine election. However, this does not mean that God did not choose from those who were by nature descendants of Abraham. Calvin concludes from the example of Isaac and Ishmael that “some men are by special privilege elected out of the chosen people, in whom the common adoption becomes efficacious and valid.”¹⁴⁸ The “children of the flesh” (9:8) are those who have merely a “natural descent”, whereas the “children of the promise” are those “peculiarly selected by the Lord.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 344.

¹⁴⁵ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 345.

¹⁴⁶ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 345.

¹⁴⁷ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 345.

¹⁴⁸ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 346.

¹⁴⁹ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 346.

Romans 9:10-13: Jacob and Esau

Jacob and Esau provide “a much more evident example” than Isaac and Ishmael. One could reply that Isaac was the son of Sarah whereas Ishmael was the son of Hagar the slave. Jacob and Esau are twins from the same mother and father.¹⁵⁰ And so nothing in them can ground why God especially chose Jacob and not Esau, neither a difference in descent nor in any good or evil works since none had yet been done.¹⁵¹ The “cause of this difference” between the twins “is nowhere else to be found except in the election of God.”¹⁵² Salvation is entirely dependent on “the goodness of God” and damnation is based on “his just severity.”¹⁵³

The special election of God cannot be based on God's foreknowledge of future works. Election according to foreknowledge misses, for Calvin, “a principle in theology, which ought to be well known to all Christians”.¹⁵⁴ In themselves, Jacob and Esau “were both the children of Adam, by nature sinful, and endued with no particle of righteousness.”¹⁵⁵ Sin is all that God could see in the twins because sin is all that there was to see in the twins. So, there were no good works for God to foresee. There were only bad ones. As Calvin said, “merits avail nothing, ... no worthiness is regarded, for there is none; but the goodness of God reigns alone. False then is the dogma, and contrary to God's word, - that God elects or rejects, as he foresees each to be worthy or unworthy

¹⁵⁰ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 347.

¹⁵¹ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 349.

¹⁵² Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 348.

¹⁵³ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 349.

¹⁵⁴ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 349.

¹⁵⁵ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 349.

of his favour.”¹⁵⁶ Rather, election is based only on God's purpose.¹⁵⁷

Paul quotes Mal 3:1, “Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the LORD. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau.” When God raises the fact that the two are brothers he does so to show that Jacob had no inherent advantage over Esau. In fact, Jacob, being the younger brother, should have served Esau. Works had nothing to do with God's choice of Jacob. God could then say, “I was thus led by my mercy alone, and by no worthiness as to works.”¹⁵⁸

Romans 9:14-18: God's Free Will

The doctrine of predestination can be a difficult one to stomach. As such, people may respond to it by charging God with unrighteousness. How could God “pass by one and show regard to another” apart from any works and only on the basis of his will?¹⁵⁹ That Paul addresses the one who would charge God with unrighteousness proves that this doctrine has been correctly understood.¹⁶⁰

Paul responds to the two facets of this objection – God's choice to show mercy to some and his choice to reject others. First, Paul cites God's reply to Moses when Moses prayed that God would not consume the people but go up with them to the promised land, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (Ex 32:19; Rom 9:15). Here God's purpose is shown to be ultimate:

And thus he assigns the highest reason for imparting grace, even his own

¹⁵⁶ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 351.

¹⁵⁷ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 351.

¹⁵⁸ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 352.

¹⁵⁹ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 354.

¹⁶⁰ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 354.

voluntary purpose, and also intimates that he has designed his mercy peculiarly for some; for it is a way of speaking which excludes all outward causes, as when we claim to ourselves the free power of acting, we say, “I will do what I mean to do.”¹⁶¹

No works – that is, no “human will or exertion” (Rom 9:16) – can secure God's mercy or compassion. God's mercy “being gratuitous, is under no restraint, but turns wherever it pleases.”¹⁶² On Rom 9:13, “So it depends not on human will or exertion,” Calvin would disagree with Luther and Origen. Luther held that it is not the case that man's will does nothing, but is moved by God. For Calvin it is “mere sophistry to say that *we* will and run.”¹⁶³ Paul “meant nothing else than that neither will nor running can do anything.”¹⁶⁴ Also, contra Origen, the use of God's words to Moses and Pharaoh are not the words of an ungodly objector!¹⁶⁵

Second, with regards to God's predestination of some to ruin Paul recalls God's words to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17).

According to Calvin, it is inappropriate to charge God with unrighteousness since God's hardening of Pharaoh resulted in displaying God's name and power.¹⁶⁶ That God raised up Pharaoh, means not only that God foresaw Pharaoh's anger, “but that he had also thus designedly ordained it God not only knew what Pharaoh would do, but he also designedly ordained him for this purpose.”¹⁶⁷ The sovereign will of God is, for Calvin, the

¹⁶¹ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 356.

¹⁶² Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 357.

¹⁶³ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 357. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁶⁴ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 357.

¹⁶⁵ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 359.

¹⁶⁶ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 360.

¹⁶⁷ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 361-362.

ultimate cause for God showing mercy to some and hardening others.¹⁶⁸

John Wesley

At the outset of his comments on Rom 9, Wesley insists that Paul is not concerned about the election of individuals. Wesley makes three observations, that he claims, oppose any hint of “personal election or reprobation” in Paul's thought.¹⁶⁹ First, a discussion of “personal election and reprobation” does not cohere with Paul's aim. After all, Paul's purpose in Rom 9 is to show that “the rejection of the Jews and the reception of the Gentiles” is not “contrary to the word of God”.¹⁷⁰ So, a discussion of individual election does not help Paul's argument regarding these ethnic and national categories. Second, Paul would not have argued for individual election since “such a doctrine would not only have had no tendency to convince, but would have evidently tended to harden the Jews.”¹⁷¹ Third, when Paul summarizes “his argument in the close of the chapter he has not one word or the least intimation about it.”¹⁷²

Romans 9:6-9: Scripture Foretold Paul's Situation

The Jews of Paul's day believed that “all who were born Israelites, and they only, were the people of God.”¹⁷³ So, for them, Paul's situation in which Gentiles believe and Jews

¹⁶⁸ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 361. So, Calvin says, “it seems good to God to illuminate some that they may be saved, and to blind others that they may perish: for we ought particularly to notice these words, *to whom he wills*, and, *whom he wills*: beyond this he allows us not to proceed.”

¹⁶⁹ John Wesley, *Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1987; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 504.

¹⁷⁰ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁷¹ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504. Here Wesley seems to assert that Paul's Jewish contemporaries could not have stomached a doctrine of individual election.

¹⁷² Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁷³ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

disbelieve is not attested to by scripture.¹⁷⁴ Paul appeals to scripture to show that ethnic descent does not join one into the people of God. Paul employs Scripture to affirm his proposition that “not all Israelites truly belong to Israel” (Rom 9:6). In fact, speaking of the Jews, Scripture “foretold their falling away.”¹⁷⁵

Romans 9:6-13: Faith Demands Divine Acceptance; Unbelief Grounds God's Rejection

Scripture did not only foretell of the disbelief of the Jews, but according to Wesley, Isaac and Ishmael reveal that *belief* and *unbelief* are the grounds on which acceptance or rejection are received from God. And this is consistent with the word of God:

The sum is, God accepts all believers, and them only; and this is no way contrary to his word. No, he has declared in his word, both by types, and by express testimonies, that believers are accepted as the “children of the promise,” while unbelievers are rejected, though they are “children of the flesh.”¹⁷⁶

Whereas for Origen and Chrysostom God's election is based on his foreknowledge of good works and godly attitude, for Wesley, like the early Augustine, faith is *the* thing that secures acceptance. The example of Jacob and Esau demonstrates that merits do not secure God's favour since God's choice preceded any good or evil action (Rom 9:11).¹⁷⁷

Just as above, where Wesley considered Isaac a “type” for believers, Wesley also understands Jacob as representative of believers.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁷⁵ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁷⁶ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁷⁷ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁷⁸ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504. Wesley freely moves from discussing God's choice of Jacob to God's receiving believers. He asks, “Is it unrighteous, or unjust, of God to give Jacob the blessing rather than Esau? Or to accept believers, and them only?”

Romans 9:14-21: God's Right to Set the Terms of Acceptance and Rejection

God is not unjust in his choice of believers and rejection of unbelievers. He has the “right to fix the terms on which” he will accept and reject people.¹⁷⁹ When God said to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy ...”, he means that he will have mercy “on those only who submit to my terms, who accept of it in the way that I have appointed.”¹⁸⁰

The condition that God has set and that must be met is faith. So, the one whom God will have mercy upon is the *believer* and the one whom God hardens is the *unbeliever*.¹⁸¹

While Rom 9:1-18 does not mention faith, Wesley liberally and repeatedly weaves faith into his explanation of this passage. Even the vessels that God appoints to honour and dishonour are believers and unbelievers respectively.¹⁸² God is just and therefore not arbitrary. This means, for Wesley, that God's mercy comes “to none but true believers”; he only hardens those who “obstinately refuse his mercy” and he has wrath on those in “obstinate unbelief.”¹⁸³

Interpreters New

At this point I would like to examine a few recent Pauline interpreters. Of course, one could easily compile a very long list of discussions of Rom 9-11, but here I would like note some recent scholars who have paid particular attention to Paul's use of scripture: Richard Hays, Francis Watson, Ross Wagner, and Brian Abasciano. The first two scholars provide the methodological scaffolding and hermeneutical framework that undergird my

¹⁷⁹ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁸⁰ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 504.

¹⁸¹ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 505.

¹⁸² Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 505.

¹⁸³ Wesley, *Comm. Bible*, 505.

proposed reading. The latter two show what an “intertextual” reading of Rom 9:1-18 may look like.¹⁸⁴ I am not suggesting that other scholars and past interpreters have not paid any attention to the scriptural texts that Paul evokes in Rom 9–11. But these scholars have alerted us to features of Paul's exegesis that we may be prone to overlook.

Richard B. Hays

To say that Richard Hays' *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* made a splash in New Testament scholarship would be a massive understatement. In that work, Hays' strategy was to read “the letters as literary texts shaped by complex intertextual relations with Scripture.”¹⁸⁵ By intertextuality, Hays means “the imbedding of fragments of an earlier text within a later one”.¹⁸⁶ Of course, Israel's Scripture is not the only set of texts imbedded in Paul's epistles. But as an authoritative text that repeatedly surfaces via quotations and allusions, Hays considers special attention to the intertextual link between Paul and the “single great textual precursor: Israel's Scripture”¹⁸⁷ especially helpful. Paul's epistles may be legitimately described as “hermeneutical events”¹⁸⁸ that reveal Paul's reading of Israel's Scripture in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and vice versa.

Paul uses scripture with a variety of volumes. Citations are the loudest shouts; echoes are the faintest whispers; and allusions lie somewhere in between.¹⁸⁹ Volume of

¹⁸⁴ Hays and Watson do touch on Romans 9:1–18, but I call on them here for their methodological and hermeneutical acuity. See Hays, *Echoes*, 63-68; Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 301-308.

¹⁸⁵ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1989), xi.

¹⁸⁶ Hays, *Echoes*, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Hays, *Echoes*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ Hays, *Echoes*, 9. Hays acknowledges that he has borrowed this phrase from Leander Keck.

¹⁸⁹ Hays, *Echoes*, 23.

Scripture aside, Paul's appropriation frequently goes beyond proof-texting. There are often elements of an appropriated scriptural text that, while remaining unstated explicitly, subtly and/or violently reconfigure the meaning of Paul's discourse. This is a poetic reconfiguration of one text in light of the other.¹⁹⁰ Here Hays takes his cues from the literary critic John Hollander:

Allusive echo can often function as a diachronic trope to which Hollander applies the name of *transumption*, or *metalepsis*. When a literary echo links the text in which it occurs to an earlier text, the figurative effect of the echo can lie in the unstated or suppressed (transumed) points of resonance between the two texts. ... Allusive echo functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed.... Metalepsis ... places the reader within a field of whispered or unstated correspondences. In the pages that follow, we will see that Paul's echoes of Scripture repeatedly bring the trope of metalepsis into play.¹⁹¹

Hays is surely right when he says that “[t]o identify allusions is only the beginning of the interpretive process. ... The critical task, then, would be to see what poetic effects and larger meanings are produced by the poet's device of echoing predecessors.”¹⁹² In other words, what are the “rhetorical and semantic effects” of metalepsis?¹⁹³ We must ask this question because the rhetorical and semantic effects of metalepsis are such that they are articulated not by the text itself, but pieced together by the imagination of the reader.¹⁹⁴

Francis Watson

Like Richard Hays, Francis Watson's *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* is a study of

¹⁹⁰ Hays, *Echoes*, 18-19.

¹⁹¹ Hays, *Echoes*, 20.

¹⁹² Hays, *Echoes*, 18.

¹⁹³ Hays, *Echoes*, 19.

¹⁹⁴ Hays, *Echoes*, 24. Hays says that Paul's use of Scripture suggests “new meanings by linking the earlier text (Scripture) to the later (Paul's discourse) in such a way as to produce unexpected correspondences, correspondences that *suggest more than they assert*.” (Emphasis is mine).

Paul's hermeneutical grappling with Israel's Scripture. Watson adds and exploits another feature – other early Jewish interpreters of scripture. So, Watson's project listens to a “three-sided conversation” between 1) Paul; 2) non-Christian Jewish interpreters of Scripture; 3) scripture itself. Watson describes the purpose of his book as follows:¹⁹⁵

This book is a comparative study in the early reception of Jewish scripture, with a primary Pauline focus. The aim is to explore the relationship between three bodies of literature: the Pauline letters, the scriptural texts to which they appeal, and the non-Christian Jewish literature of the Second Temple period which appeals to the same scriptural texts. These three bodies of literature are often studied in relative isolation from one another, with only a superficial sense of their interconnectedness. In contrast, the intention here is to get these texts talking to each other – or rather, to show how they are as they are by virtue of an ongoing conversation in which they all already participate.¹⁹⁶

It is important to note the following concerning the second pole: simply setting up Paul and non-Christian Jews as conversation partners does not mean that Paul, in his scriptural interpretation, was actually countering a particular non-Christian Jewish interpretation of Scripture – or the particular non-Christian scriptural interpretation that Watson puts forward for comparative purposes. As Watson said,

Of actual dialogues between the historical Paul and fellow-Jews (Christian or otherwise), we can know very little. Even in the case of Galatians, we can never be sure whether, in citing a text, Paul is countering his opponents' use of the same text. (Indeed, the more important scripture is for Paul, the less likely it is that his selection of texts is determined by his opponents.) Rather, “dialogue” (or “conversation”) serves here as a metaphor for our own attempts to retrace the way between the scriptural text and its Pauline and non-Pauline interpretations, and to identify the resulting convergences and divergences.¹⁹⁷

Even if Paul and the highlighted non-Christian Jewish interpretations never debated, their comparison may still clarify the contours of Paul's hermeneutics and theology.

The third conversation partner is scripture itself. In order to understand the

¹⁹⁵ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 2.

¹⁹⁶ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 17.

interpretations of scripture it is necessary to understand the scriptural texts in and of themselves. This will enable us to see not only what Paul and his contemporaries do with these texts, but also how these texts lend themselves to different interpretations.¹⁹⁸

Scripture is not merely “a blank screen onto which readers project their various concerns”.¹⁹⁹ Interpreters are “*constrained* by the text.”²⁰⁰ This means that “it is essential to retrace the way from the scriptural text to its Pauline and non-Pauline realizations, in a manner that allows the scriptural text a voice of its own within a three-way conversation.”²⁰¹

J. Ross Wagner

In his *Heralds of the Good News*, Ross Wagner points particularly to Paul's use of Isaiah in Rom 9-11. This seems like a strange place to look if I am interested in Paul's use of the Pentateuch in Rom 9:1-18. But Wagner does not focus exclusively on Paul's use of Isaiah.

He seeks

to illuminate the artistry with which Paul interweaves explicit and allusive references to Isaiah into this thick web of scripture and interpretation. This will require a close reading of Romans 9-11 as a whole, with careful attention not only to Paul's invocations of Isaiah, but also to the apostle's appeals to other scriptural witnesses, for Paul frequently employs Isaiah as part of a larger exegetical argument comprising a number of different texts.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 4.

¹⁹⁹ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 4.

²⁰⁰ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 4.

²⁰¹ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 4.

²⁰² J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 43.

Romans 9:1-5: The Irony of Israel's Failure

If in Rom 8 we see the heights of Paul's joy in God's indestructible love for the Gentile churches, Rom 9:1-5 give us the depths of his agony over the unsaved state of Israel. Paul, by his desire to be accursed for his kinsmen, is “[i]nvo[ki]ng the example of Moses interceding for Israel.”²⁰³ Following Neil Elliott, Wagner notes that in Rom 8, a number of terms traditionally used to describe Israel are used to describe Paul's predominantly Gentile church.²⁰⁴ If this does not bring out the irony enough, for Wagner, Israel's privileges that Paul lists (9:4-5) function “to intensify the sense of irony and tragedy that God's people should fail to realize their inheritance at this climactic moment in God's redemption plan.”²⁰⁵

Romans 9:6-9: Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael

According to Wagner the two main themes of Romans 9:6-29 are sonship and election and this is born out in Paul's selection of scriptural texts.²⁰⁶ Paul's “burden ... is that the status of sonship, which qualifies one to inherit the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants, has always depended on God's gracious election rather than merely on physical descent from the patriarchs.”²⁰⁷ Paul opposes the presumption of physical descent in 9:6-7 by showing that “Abraham's children” are not equivalent to Abraham's “seed.”²⁰⁸ Again, the irony intensifies with Paul's interpretation of Gen 21:12. Paul

²⁰³ Wagner, *Heralds*, 45.

²⁰⁴ Wagner, *Heralds*, 45.

²⁰⁵ Wagner, *Heralds*, 46.

²⁰⁶ Wagner, *Heralds*, 48.

²⁰⁷ Wagner, *Heralds*, 49.

²⁰⁸ Wagner, *Heralds*, 49.

concludes from God's words to Abraham concerning Isaac and Ishmael that “it is not the children of the flesh (τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς) who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants” (Rom 9:8). Here is escalated irony: the adoption which Paul said belongs to his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα, Rom 9:4) is not their privilege but the privilege of the “children of promise.”²⁰⁹

Romans 9:10-13: Jacob and Esau

Paul furthers his argument that “membership in 'Israel' is due to God's election and not simply to physical descent” by appealing to the example of Jacob and Esau.²¹⁰ God's election of Jacob and rejection of Esau was not based on any human works, works of the law included.²¹¹ Rather, God's choice of Jacob was grounded in God's own will.

Paul appeals to Mal 1:2-3, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” Where Paul has redefined “Israel”, in Malachi there also seems to be a redefinition of “Jacob” who will “experience God's promised redemption” – “those who fear the Lord” (Mal 3:16-21).²¹² So, by appealing to Malachi, Paul is “extending the logic of a narrative pattern established in the stories of Israel's national origins, a pattern which continued to shape the prophetic understanding of the nature of God's election of Israel.”²¹³

Romans 9:14-18: Moses and Pharaoh

Paul then anticipates the objection against God's justice that finds questionable God's

²⁰⁹ Wagner, *Heralds*, 49.

²¹⁰ Wagner, *Heralds*, 50.

²¹¹ Wagner, *Heralds*, 50. See also Wagner's comments (note 22) on the meaning of “works” in Romans.

²¹² Wagner, *Heralds*, 51.

²¹³ Wagner, *Heralds*, 51.

election as not according to works. Paul responds to the objection by quoting God's words to Moses, "I will have mercy (ἐλεήσω) on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion (οἰκτιρήσω) on whom I have compassion" (Ex 33:19). This is Paul's second reference to the golden calf incident in Romans 9, the first being Rom 9:3 where Paul likened himself to Moses in his intercession.²¹⁴ Here Paul has tapped into a repeated theme of Israel's history where God is characterized as "compassionate" and "merciful" to show his "faithfulness by keeping his promises *to Israel*, even when his people are unfaithful to their God."²¹⁵ For Wagner, God's persistent faithfulness, mercy, and compassion to Israel in the face of her unfaithfulness is "lingering in the background of Romans 9" and comes to full expression in Rom 11:25-26 where "all Israel will be saved."²¹⁶

God is free not only to show mercy; he is also free to harden. The example of Pharaoh proves this point. God both "shows mercy to whomever he chooses, and he hardens (σκληρύνει) the heart whomever he chooses" (Rom 9:18). This is Paul's interpretation of God's words to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth (Ex 9:16, Rom 9:17). Wagner notes that the verb "harden" (σκληρύνει), which shows up in Paul's interpretation (9:18) is not present in the passage that he actually cites (Ex 9:16, Rom 9:17).²¹⁷ However, the term shows up repeatedly in the exodus story (Ex 9:7, 12, 34, 34).

²¹⁴ Wagner, *Heralds*, 52.

²¹⁵ Wagner, *Heralds*, 53. Wagner lists the following references as examples: "Ex. 33:19, 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 85:15 LXX, 102:8 LXX, 144:8 LXX; Joel 2:13; Hos. 2:19-20 LXX; Jonah 4:2; Nah. 1:3; Wis. 15:1; Sir. 5:3; 18:11; Pr. Man. 7."

²¹⁶ Wagner, *Heralds*, 53.

²¹⁷ Wagner, *Heralds*, 54.

This reveals something particularly significant about Paul's use of Scripture:

Here we have a clear case of Paul's awareness of the larger context of a quotation and his exegetical interest in elements of the narrative not explicitly cited. Significantly, Paul's highly abbreviated and allusive retelling of the story presupposes his audience's familiarity with the story of the exodus.

Paul's appeal to God hardening Pharaoh reveals the irony of Israel's situation yet again.

Israel is likened to Pharaoh! As Pharaoh refused to recognize God's redemption so also

Israel is “refusing to recognize the redemption offered them in Christ.”²¹⁸ As God

hardened Pharaoh so also has he hardened Israel.²¹⁹

Brian J. Abasciano

Brian Abasciano has written two volumes on Paul's use of Scripture in Romans 9:1-18.

The first tackles Rom 9:1-9 and the second deals with Rom 9:10-18. Abasciano

approaches Paul's use of Scripture by noting: 1) Paul's dialogue with Scripture; 2) the

scriptural texts with respect to their own context; 3) early Jewish interpretations of the

same scriptural passages. Abasciano's endeavour may be considered an application of the

theoretical model proposed by Watson, although he is never explicitly dependent upon

Watson's work in this way.

Romans 9:1-5: Paul's use of Ex 32:32

That Paul could wish himself “accursed and cut off from Christ” is striking especially

considering the prevalent “in Christ” motif throughout Paul's writings (e.g. 8:1, 2, 39).²²⁰

²¹⁸ Wagner, *Heralds*, 56.

²¹⁹ Wagner, *Heralds*, 56.

²²⁰ Brian J. Abasciano, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:1-9* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 97.

To be “in Christ” is to be united to the covenant mediator and so a covenant member of God's people.²²¹ Paul's use of “according to the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα, Rom. 9:4)” for his kinsmen is, according to Abasciano, a neutral (and not a negative) term that prepares the reader for Christ's relationship to the Jews as (tragically) merely κατὰ σάρκα (Rom. 9:5) as well as for Paul's conclusion that being merely children τῆς σαρκὸς does not benefit them (9:8).²²²

For Abasciano, the most significant scriptural allusion in Rom 9:1-5 is the allusion to Moses' intercession for Israel after they worship the golden calf (Ex 32:32). Abasciano asserts that “this allusion is important for a full understanding of Rom. 9:1-5 and its context.”²²³ When the allusion to Moses is heard and mined for meaning, Paul's wish to be “accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people” (9:3) does not mean that he wishes to function as a *substitute* for Israel, suffering in her place. Rather,

He asks that the Lord curse him *if* he refuses to forgive Israel. That is, he asks to suffer the fate of the people with them if the Lord will not forgive, as an inducement to the Lord to restore them. This is what Paul posits of himself. He casts himself in a salvation-historical role on a par with Moses, and contemplates making his life, salvation, and service the price God must pay to release his wrath on Israel. Just as Moses' request threatened the Lord's covenant purposes (by insisting on the complete eradication of Abraham's seed), so does the prayer Paul contemplates, for he is the Apostle to the Gentiles who is primarily responsible for administering the decisive stage of the eschatological fulfillment of God's covenant promises to bless the whole world, calling Jews and Gentiles alike into the covenant seed of Abraham in a ministry to the Gentiles that Romans 11 reveals as central to God's plan to save Israel.²²⁴

Paul does not only allude to Ex 32:32. He taps into a number of themes in Ex 32–34. So, Abasciano claims that Ex 32–34 “contains Romans 9–11 *in nuce*.”²²⁵ The Israel of

²²¹ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 97-98.

²²² Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 99.

²²³ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 46.

²²⁴ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 100.

²²⁵ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 143.

Moses' day, by their idolatry, rejected the mediator of the covenant (Moses) and fashioned an alternative means of mediating YHWH's presence. So also in Paul's day, Israel rejected Jesus Christ who was both the mediator of the New Covenant and the embodiment of YHWH's presence.²²⁶ In Romans 9, Moses shapes the contours of Jesus as the inaugurator of the New Covenant. Moses also shapes how Paul's ministry is to be understood as one who “saw the very glory of God in Christ and now seeks to bring that election-bestowing glory back to Israel in his preaching of the gospel.”²²⁷

For Abasciano, Ex 32–34 also provides the background to the “hardening” motif found in Rom 9–11. He also points to the allusion to the golden calf incident in Rom 1:18–32 as descriptor of the sin of Jews and Gentiles in terms of idolatry. The thrust of the evoked theme is that hardening in Rom 9–11 “is a divine judgement resulting from her stubbornness, sin, and rebellion.”²²⁸ The hardening is not absolute, prohibiting all Jews from faith. Rather, it appears to be a general, corporate hardening that prevented the Jews as a whole from accepting the gospel, but barred no one in particular from believing so that many Jews did believe.²²⁹ Abasciano describes the relationship between self-hardening and divine hardening as follows:

But this self-hardening has brought the judgment of God upon Israel, contributing all the more to their sin and unbelief, and naturally leading them to the ultimate apostasy – the rejection of Christ – bringing upon them an even more severe hardening according to the cycle of judicial hardening, without absolutely preventing any from believing ...²³⁰

Paul's use of Ex 32–34 concerning this theme of hardening serves to emphasize “the guilt

²²⁶ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 102.

²²⁷ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 109.

²²⁸ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 103.

²²⁹ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 103.

²³⁰ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 104.

of Israel for their own sin and unbelief.”²³¹ In Ex 33:3-5 God declared to Moses his intent to withdraw his presence from the people so that he would not destroy them. So also in Rom 9–11, God's judicial hardening is actually a merciful act as it prevents God from completely destroying his people (e.g. Rom 11:32).

Romans 9:6-9: Paul's use of Abraham

Romans 9:6a, “It is not as though the word of God had failed” is the main statement of Rom 9–11.²³² This statement grows out of Rom 9:1-5 and is Paul's response to “[t]he apparent failure of these privileges to effect salvation” and hence the apparent failure of God's promises to Israel.²³³ Paul explains that God's word has not failed because “not all Israelites truly belong to Israel” (9:6). The second Israel is, for Abasciano, indeterminate. That is, at this point in Paul's argument it is not clear of whom this “Israel” is comprised. All that is certain is that the two “Israels” are not identical. This mysterious “Israel” is spelled out in the rest of ch. 9-11 as the Church made up of Gentile and Jewish believers.²³⁴

For me, the most intriguing aspect of Abasciano's reading of Romans 9:1–18 is his understanding of how God's words to a distressed Abraham – that he drive Ishmael away – function for Paul. This aspect of Abasciano's exegesis is the most relevant to my reading of Rom 9:1–18. Paul appropriates God's response to Abraham's distress as the divine response to his own grief:

²³¹ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 104.

²³² Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 177.

²³³ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 179.

²³⁴ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 181. See Rom. 2:17-29 where true circumcision is circumcision of the heart.

Paul now quotes it in response to his own great grief at the apparent rejection of ethnic Israel. This suggests that Paul's argument in 9.6ff. is meant to soothe the grief of his lament in 9.1-5 which introduces the argument. ... God reminds Abraham that Isaac is the heir and covenant identifier. So this word of comfort and encouragement is one which affirms the reliability of God's promise.²³⁵

Abasciano understands the “children of promise” (9:8) in accord with Gal 4:21-31 and Rom 4 where faith is a prominent theme. They are “those who believe in Christ and are consequently incorporated into Christ, made children of God and therefore heirs, and thus have received the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of adoption and heirship (Gal 3.1-14; 4.4-7).”²³⁶ For Abasciano, God calls, or reckons as his people, those who have faith.

Paul also quotes God's promise, “About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son” (Gen 18:10, 24; Rom 9:9). At this point, Abasciano also considers that Paul taps into Abraham's prophetic intercession for Sodom (Gen 18:16). As Abraham is depicted as a prophet who hears explicitly from God regarding God's dealings with Sodom, so Paul, by his use of Scripture, has cast himself in the light of Abraham. The rhetorical effect is that just as Abraham was privy to God's dealings with Sodom so also is Paul painted as a prophet who is cognizant of God's plans regarding Israel.²³⁷ So, with this move and his previous one of recalling Moses (Ex 32:32; Rom 9:3), Paul has aligned himself as a prophet like Moses and Abraham in his intercession for Israel (Moses) and concern for Gentiles (Abraham).²³⁸

²³⁵ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 192.

²³⁶ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 197.

²³⁷ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 209.

²³⁸ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 209.

Romans 9:10-13: Jacob and Esau: The Purpose, Condition, and Nature of Election.

God's election of Jacob and rejection of Esau shows the purpose of God's election (Rom 9:12). For Abasciano, the purpose of God's election is to bless the world via Abraham. This is evident from elsewhere in Romans (ch. 3-4) as well as from a Genesis text that is in close proximity to Paul's citation of Gen 18:10 – Gen 18:17, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?”²³⁹

God's purpose to bless the world is not based on works. So, the condition or grounds of God's election is not works. Neither works of the law nor any other works can secure God's election or promote God's purpose to bless the world.²⁴⁰ For Abasciano, here Paul essentially speaks of justification by faith (Rom 3–4) but emphasizes “how God's people are identified.”²⁴¹ In Abasciano's view, faith is the condition of God's election. God's call does not produce faith. Rather, God's call “is actually an effectual naming/declaration based on faith.”²⁴² Hear the voices of (early) Augustine and Wesley.

Another aspect of election that Abasciano deals with is whether Paul understands election as pertaining to individual persons or to a corporate entity. Abasciano argues that the corporate nature of election is primary.²⁴³ Paul quotes the latter part of Gen 25:23. The verse in its entirety highlights Jacob and Esau as corporate representatives: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger

²³⁹ Brian J. Abasciano, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:10–18* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 49.

²⁴⁰ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 52.

²⁴¹ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 52.

²⁴² Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 54.

²⁴³ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 59.

than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.” Abasciano further notes that it was common in early Jewish interpretation to understand Jacob and Esau as representative of corporate entities.²⁴⁴ Of course Jacob and Esau are individuals, but they function as corporate representatives and as such their “election is unique” and representative of each individual identified with them.²⁴⁵ The rhetorical function of Paul's use of Jacob and Esau is striking. Esau represents the rejected Jewish people of Paul's day whereas elected Jacob stands for the Gentiles.²⁴⁶ The parallel continues. As Esau despised his birthright, so also has the ethnic Israel of Paul's day “despised its inheritance of the Abrahamic promises, carelessly casting it aside by their rejection of Christ.”²⁴⁷ Furthermore, as God was sovereign to elect Jacob as the covenant head, he is also free, in Paul's day, to elect Christ as the covenant representative.²⁴⁸

Romans 9:14-18: Moses & Pharaoh

The objection to God's justice is raised in response to God setting the terms of election and the means of blessing the world – through faith, not works. So, God's words to Moses as quoted by Paul, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion,” (Rom 9:14) essentially means that “God has mercy on whomever he chooses based upon whatever conditions he establishes.”²⁴⁹ Even the revelation of God's name as “merciful” and “compassionate” (Ex 33:19) shows that it is

²⁴⁴ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 59. See Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 22-34.

²⁴⁵ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 60.

²⁴⁶ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 63.

²⁴⁷ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 64.

²⁴⁸ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 71.

²⁴⁹ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 220.

God's prerogative “to determine sovereignly the beneficiaries of his mercy, including any conditions for choosing them.”²⁵⁰ God has sovereignly decided to choose people who believe in Christ.²⁵¹ This is reminiscent of Wesley's interpretation.

The hardening of Pharaoh as described above shows God's judicial punishment upon Israel for her unbelief. Again, quite jarringly, Paul sets up Pharaoh as representative of unbelieving Israel. For Abasciano, by choosing to make faith in Christ the condition of covenant membership God was bringing judgment upon Israel for her “ethnocentrism, pride and self-reliance that would lead them to seek to establish their own righteousness.”²⁵² God had a purpose in hardening both Pharaoh and Israel – to bring salvation to the world and in Paul's case to the Gentiles.²⁵³

Summary

Before we turn to my proposed reading of Rom 9:1–18, I would like to recall and highlight five aspects of Rom 9:1–18 that we have just seen as they will be reflected in my reading of Rom 9:1–18:

- (1) In Rom 9:3 Paul evokes Moses' intercession for Israel.²⁵⁴
- (2) Ambrosiaster's suggestion that Paul tempers his grief by his reading of Scripture is highly significant.²⁵⁵ I will suggest that 9:6–18 is the Scriptural response to Paul's anguish in 9:1–5.

²⁵⁰ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 220.

²⁵¹ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 221.

²⁵² Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 222.

²⁵³ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:10–18*, 223.

²⁵⁴ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:107; Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 338; Wagner, *Heralds*, 45; Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 46.

²⁵⁵ Ambrosiaster, *Comm. Rom.* 76

- (3) Abasciano suggested that God's words to Abraham's distress over Ishmael are utilized by Paul to soothe his own distress over Israel.²⁵⁶ This coheres with the the main thrust of my reading, that 9:6–18 functions as a response to Paul's distress.
- (4) As per Origen, Mal 1:2–3 should be brought into dialogue with the Jacob and Esau narrative.²⁵⁷ Origen suggests tethering Mal 1:2–3 to Gen 25:27; I will suggest that Gen 25:28 is more significant.
- (5) Aquinas' theological assertion that God's mode of election drastically differs from that of humans can be grounded in Rom 9:1–18.²⁵⁸ I will suggest that Rom 9:1–18 contrasts God's mode of election with Paul's. Paul would elect Israel based on their fleshly descent (9:3-5) and works (implied by 9:11); God's election is not based on such factors (9:8, 11-12), but on his own will (9:15-16, 18).

²⁵⁶ Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1–9*, 192.

²⁵⁷ Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, II:121.

²⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Comm. Rom.*, §763.

PART 2: WHEN PAUL'S DESIRE AND GOD'S WILL COLLIDE:
A READING OF ROMANS 9:1–18

In this part I put forward my proposed reading of Rom 9:1-18. I suggest that Rom 9:1-5, when taken seriously as introductory to Rom 9–11, tunes the reader to read what follows (9:6-18 and following) as the Scriptural – more specifically, the divine – response to Paul's desire. If 9:1-5 gives us Paul's words, 9:6-18 gives us God's words. I will demonstrate that there is sufficient reason to understand the divine words articulated via Scripture as the divine *response* to Paul's anguish. Furthermore, Paul's use of the Pentateuch implies the metalepsis of an important common strand in each of the Scriptural passages: God's will triumphs over the desire of each Patriarch in the evoked narrative. Moses, Abraham, and Isaac each desired and expected God to act in a certain way. In each case God's will prevailed. Such is also the case with Paul.

Romans 9 in Context: Continuity and Discontinuity in Romans 8–9

The dissonance between Roman 8 and 9 is jarring. Discontinuity may initially appear more visible than continuity. In Romans 8 Paul has elaborated on a number of the blessings of being “in Christ” (8:1). For such people “there is therefore now no condemnation” (8:1); in them the “righteousness of the law” is fulfilled (8:4); the Spirit abides in them and they in the Spirit (8:9); they have been adopted as God's children (8:15-16); they are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (8:17); they will have great glory revealed to them (8:18); they “were saved” (8:24); all things work for their good (8:28); they are foreknown, predestined, “called according to his purpose”, justified, and

will be glorified (8:28-30); they can never be separated “from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (8:38-39). All of this is followed by Paul's “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (9:2) and his wish to be “accursed and cut off from Christ” for his fellow Israelites (9:3). The abrupt shift from great joy to deep despair highlights discontinuity.

The sharp dissonance between the two chapters is not indicative of a Paul who has haphazardly brought together two disparate and unrelated trains of thought. One theme that tightly weaves the two chapters together is the theme of “children of God.”²⁵⁹ This theme is represented by a number of recurring terms and phrases including “adoption” (ἡ υἰοθεσία, 8:15; 9:4) and “sons/children of God” (υἱοὶ/τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, 8:14, 16, 17, 19, 21; 9:8, 26).

How is the continuity and discontinuity to be understood? An important issue that is brought to the fore in these two chapters and finds its crux in the continuity-discontinuity therein is the question: who are the children of God? We have already noted above that the theme of sonship forges continuity between these two chapters. At the same time, the way this theme is deployed creates discontinuity. In Rom 8 it is Paul's audience of (mostly) *Gentile* Christians in Rome who are the children of God.²⁶⁰ They have “received a spirit of adoption” (8:15) and the Spirit testifies with their spirit that they are children of God (8:16). But for Paul this should be true of his fellow Israelites –

²⁵⁹ For lexical and thematic continuities see Neil Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 257-263. Concerning Rom. 8 and 9, and Rom. 1–11 by extension, Elliott suggests that “the thematic unity of the whole is the hope for the 'glory of the children of God' (8:20-21).” Elliott, *Rhetoric*, 357.

²⁶⁰ On the composition of Paul's audience in Rome as both Jewish and Gentile Christians with the latter being in the majority see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 36; Robert Jewett, *Romans* (HERM; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 70; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 13

“to them belong the adoption”! (9:4).²⁶¹ Something has gone wrong with them. So wrong that Paul has “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (9:2) and would even be “accursed and cut off from Christ” for their sake (9:3).

The continuity and discontinuity surrounding the theme of “children of God” reveals that for Paul the adoption and sonship of the Gentiles ought to be true of the Jewish people but in Paul's time his kinsmen are not children of God. What follows in 9:6–11:36 demonstrates how it is that God's word did not fail (9:6) even though the vast majority of Jews did not believe in Jesus and were not to be regarded as God's children.

Romans 9:1-5: Paul and Moses

The problem that Paul faced and that caused him “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (9:2) was no less than the accursed and unsaved state of his fellow Israelites. After all, the gospel that Paul preached was “the power of God for salvation (εἰς σωτηρίαν) to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16). According to Paul, the Jews did not experience this salvation which is why for them he prays εἰς σωτηρίαν (10:1). Thus, for Paul, confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in his resurrection are not optional for the Jews but necessary εἰς δικαιοσύνην and εἰς σωτηρίαν (10:10). So, in Romans 9–11 this is the problem: his fellow kinsmen have not attained righteousness, salvation, or sonship.

Romans 9:1-5 is where Paul expresses his grief over this situation. These verses

²⁶¹ It is likely that by “adoption” (υἰοθεσία) in 9:4 Paul has in mind scriptural references to Israel as God's son (e.g. Ex 4:22; Hos. 2:1; Is 1:2). However, it should be noted that υἰοθεσία never occurs in the LXX and in the New Testament this term is used exclusively by Paul (Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).

are vital to orient the reader to rightly hear what follows in 9:6-18 as a response – the scriptural and divine response – to Paul himself.²⁶² There are three facets of Rom 9:1-5 that I would like to stress. First, Paul writes of his *own* desire and he does so emphatically. Ten times Paul uses either a first person singular verb (λέγω, οὐ ψεύδομαι, ηὐχόμεν) or a first person singular pronoun functioning as subject or modifying a noun (συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς μου; λύπη μοι; τῆ καρδιά μου; αὐτὸς ἐγώ; τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου). Clearly, here Paul has expressed his own anguish and his deeply personal desire.²⁶³

The second element of Rom 9:1-5 is that Paul's intercession alludes to Moses' intercession for Israel after the golden calf incident (Ex 32:32):

On the next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.” (Ex 32:30-32)

Even though there is no lexical correspondence the thematic correspondence with Ex 32–34 is strong. For this reason, many interpreters have nonetheless heard an allusion to Moses' intercession.²⁶⁴ As the Israelites of Moses' day rebelled against the LORD by

²⁶² John Piper, *The Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 65. Piper understands 9:6-13 as “the solution” to the problem articulated in 9:1-5, but he does not tease out the significance of this in the same way that I do.

²⁶³ So, Francis Watson has said that “Paul briefly but emphatically becomes the theme of his own discourse.” Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 303.

²⁶⁴ See Origen, *Romans*, II:107; Brian J. Abasciano, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:1-9* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 45; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 558-559; James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC, 38B; Dallas: Word, 1988), 532; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 480 ; J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 45. Ernst Käsemann on the other hand rejects an allusion to Ex 32:32 and overstates his case, “it is tempting to follow the majority of exegetes and see a parallel to Exod 32:32. But there is no evidence that Paul had this example in mind ... or that he set himself alongside Moses.” Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 258. On the other hand, Munck is quite confident of the parallel. He says, “In my opinion there can be no doubt that in Romans 9:1 f. Paul is speaking of himself as a figure in New Testament *Heilsgeschichte*, and that

worshipping a golden calf, the Israelites of Paul's day rebelled against their God by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. Moses pleads to the LORD for the forgiveness of his people and insists that he be blotted out from the book of life if his request is denied. Similarly, Paul prays to God for the salvation of the Israelites of his day and is willing to be ἀνάθεμα for their sake (9:3).

Further bolstering the likelihood of an intentional allusion to Moses is Paul's later use of God's response to Moses when Moses asked God not to depart from the midst of Israel and to reveal his glory (Ex 33:19 in Rom 9:15). Also, this is not the only place that Paul compares his ministry to that of Moses (2 Cor 3:7-18).

It appears that Paul's use of Ex 32–34 provides the structural framework for Rom 9:1-18. Moses' appeal to God (Ex 32:32) provides the introductory allusion that opens Rom 9:1-18 and God's response to Moses (Ex 33:19) initiates the conclusion of this passage:

Rom 9:1-5: Paul's prayer for Israel as modeled on Moses' intercession for Israel
 Rom 9:15-18: God's response to Moses as appropriated by Paul

If Paul is appropriating for himself both Moses' prayer to God and God's response to Moses then this is additional support for my claim that, at the very least, Rom 9:14-18 is a response to Paul himself. (My contention is that the entirety of Rom. 9:6-18 is Paul's use of Israel's Scripture as the divine response to his own grief and request.)

Finally, Paul's use of “flesh” terminology is significant and alerts the reader that something in Paul's request is amiss. Paul wishes that he were cut off for his kindred

despite a lack of linguistic parallels there is a parallel between Moses and Paul” Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel* (trans. Ingeborg Nixon; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 29.

“according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα, 9:3). Furthermore, Paul's desire is grounded in the many privileges of the Israelites of which the climactic privilege is that from them is the Christ who is κατὰ σάρκα (9:5). It is not immediately obvious that in either usage of “flesh” Paul intends a negative sense for the term. There is nothing inherently wrong with being either Paul's kinsman κατὰ σάρκα (9:3) or with being related to the Christ κατὰ σάρκα (9:5). The point of what follows in 9:6-10 is that being children merely τῆς σαρκὸς (9:8) does not benefit the Israelites.²⁶⁵ Rather, it is “the children of the promise” who are God's children (9:8). So, there is nothing inherently wrong with being κατὰ σάρκα in Rom 9.²⁶⁶ What is wrong is being *merely* κατὰ σάρκα. And more than that, it is *Paul's* insistence and narrow focus on his kinsmen κατὰ σάρκα (9:3) who are related to the Christ κατὰ σάρκα (9:5) that is problematic since being κατὰ σάρκα is ineffective. James Dunn's comments on Paul's use of κατὰ σάρκα in Rom 9:3 are surely correct when he says that

it contains its usual negative overtone for Paul in the sense that here it denotes a too restricted understanding of the family who are God's people The lopsided narrowing of the grace of God thereby implied expresses a mind-set as much as “the desires of the flesh” (cf. 2:28; 7:5; 8:5-6, 12-13).²⁶⁷

Thus, Paul's use of Scripture in Rom 9:1–18 addresses and corrects Paul's κατὰ σάρκα perspective.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ So Dunn also comments concerning the use of σάρξ at Rom 4:1 and 9:3, 5: “Paul immediately goes on to stress that κατὰ σάρκα relationships are not the determinative factor in God's eyes (4:11-12, 16-17; 9:8).” Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 13.

²⁶⁶ Although, it is possible that here also σὰρξ carries the negativity of the term from its frequent and repeated use in Rom 8 (and 7): 7:18, 25; 8:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13.

²⁶⁷ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 525.

²⁶⁸ It is worth noting that on my reading, Paul's “wish” (9:3) is not hypothetical as Frank Matera suggests. He says that “What Paul writes here, however, is merely a hypothetical statement intended to underline the depth of his sorrow and distress since, at the end of chapter 11, he will affirm that all Israel will be saved, Frank J. Matera, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 220. Rather, God's response (9:6-18 ff.) and the realization of a future salvation for Israel (11:26) pacify Paul's sorry and satisfy Paul's wish. This is

Romans 9:6-9: Paul and Abraham

I have argued above that Rom 9:1–18 should be understood as the divine response to Paul's κατὰ σάρκα perspective. Paul heavily relies on Scripture throughout this section and throughout Rom 9–11 as a whole. After putting forward his “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” for his “kinsmen according to the flesh” as a Moses-like intercession (9:3) Paul then proceeds to align himself with Abraham and appropriates God's words to Abraham for himself.

Before Paul utilizes the figure of Abraham, in response to the present large-scale failure of his fellow Israelites to attain righteousness by faith in Jesus (e.g. Rom 3:22, 26; 9:30-32; 10:9-13), he asserts that “It is not as though the word of God had failed” (Οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, 9:6). Paul defends the success of God's word because the dismal state of Israel suggests that God's word (i.e. God's promises to Israel) had failed.²⁶⁹ That the failure of Israel suggests the failure of God's word is evident when Rom 9:6a is translated as “it is not as though the word of God had *fallen*.” This preserves the literal sense of ἐκπέπτωκεν. While the sense of the phrase remains essentially unchanged this translation preserves an important image and theme that resurfaces throughout Rom 9–11 with respect to Israel – falling and stumbling.²⁷⁰ God's word has not fallen (9:6) and neither has Israel. Israel has stumbled (ἔπταισεν) but not so as to fall (πέσωσιν) (11:11). The final resolution that Paul reaches is that there will be a future in which “all (πᾶς) Israel will be saved” (11:26). That is, Paul's Moses-like intercession

implied by Paul's movement from deep sorrow (9:1-5) to elevated doxology (11:33-36).

²⁶⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 573.

²⁷⁰ Rom 9:6, 32-33; 11:11, 22. N.T. Wright, “Romans” in *The New Interpreter's Bible X* (ed. L. E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 635.

(9:3) and “prayer to God for them” (10:1) will one day be answered. In other words, there will come a time when the unsaved state of Israel (10:1) that causes Paul such “great sorrow” (9:2) will finally be reversed (11:26).²⁷¹

Whereas 11:26 demonstrates that God's word has not fallen because a time is coming when $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ Israel will be saved, in 9:6b God's word stands because “not all [$\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$] who are of Israel are Israel, nor are all [$\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$] the children the (promised) seed [$\sigma\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\alpha$] of Abraham” (9:6b-7a).²⁷² It is unlikely that the second reference to Israel in 9:6b is a redefinition which signifies the church as the spiritual or true Israel.²⁷³ Rather, within the corporate entity of Israel there are some faithful Israelites. Here are the intimations of a remnant theology.²⁷⁴ Paul then proceeds to utilize the drama of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Ishmael from which he concludes that “it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ $\sigma\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\alpha$ ” (9:8). But here Paul's point is not *merely* a remnant theology. The principle that not all from Israel are truly Israel (9:6b) and that not all of the children are the seed of Abraham reveals a more fundamental and underlying principle: physical descent is not determinative. Paul's interpretation of the Abraham narrative is a response to his own situation. That it is not “the children $\kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}$ $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\kappa\alpha$ who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ $\sigma\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\alpha$ ” (9:8), is the scriptural proof that Paul's insistence on his kinsmen $\kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}$ $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\kappa\alpha$ (9:3) is askew and that they are not the children

²⁷¹ See part 3 for a fuller treatment of Rom 11:26.

²⁷² Stephen Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 221. The translation is that of Westerholm. The Greek words are my insertion.

²⁷³ Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” 221. See also Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 573-574.

²⁷⁴ Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” 221-222.

of God regardless of all of their fleshly advantages (9:4-5) – even if from their flesh is the Messiah (9:5). Paul's primary concern is “to explain *how* the election of Israel works.”²⁷⁵ And he demonstrates that divine election works differently than Paul's election. Unlike Paul's desire for his kinsmen which is based on fleshly kinship, God's means of bringing forth children is not constrained by natural descent. This allows “the children of the promise” to correspond with Paul's (largely) Gentile audience who have no claim *κατὰ σάρκα*.²⁷⁶ So, while 9:6a is best understood in the sense of God's selection of *some* from within Israel to true Israel – a remnant – what follows in 9:8-9 moves beyond remnant theology to give a more general principle that allows the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God and the rejection of Israelites. Thus, it is not the case that 9:6b-9 is *only* about remnant Israel and *not* about Gentiles. Rather 9:6b is preparatory for and climaxes in 9:12. More on this below.

In Rom 9:7b Paul cites God's words to Abraham, “it is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you” (ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα, Gen 21:12). Paul is interested in more than the words that he cites. Other features that are not cited by Paul are significant to his use and interpretation.²⁷⁷ This is evident from Paul's interpretation, “This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants” (Rom 9:8). Even though

²⁷⁵ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 539. Beverly Roberts Gaventa echoes Dunn's comments. She argues that “The emphasis falls on God's promise, God's initiating act that brings Isaac into being, rather than on the choice for him *over against Ishmael*” Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “On the Calling-Into-Being of Israel: Romans 9:6-29” in *Between Gospel and Election*. (ed. Florian Wilk and J. Ross Wagner; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010. But, to my mind, the creative act and selective act are not mutually exclusive.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Rom 4:9-25. N. T. Wright considers it “unwise ... to imagine that the true 'seed' of Abraham in 9.7 is simply a subset of ethnic Israel. In 4.16 it is already clearly a worldwide family” N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 238.

²⁷⁷ Paul's intimate awareness of this Genesis narrative (21:8-21) is further evidenced by his appeal to it elsewhere (Gal. 4:21-31).

Paul does not cite a scriptural passage that explicitly mentions Ishmael, his interpretation reveals that Ishmael is crucial to his use of Gen 21:12 and its greater context. After all, for Paul the unmentioned Ishmael must stand for “the children of the flesh” (Rom 9:8). So clearly Paul has in mind both God's divine affirmation of Isaac as well as the banishment of Ishmael.²⁷⁸

In Gen 21:1-8, the LORD's fulfillment of his promise to Abraham and Sarah is recounted – that they would have a son, Isaac (21:1-3). After this promised son is born the narrative progresses to a scenario where Sarah sees Ishmael laughing (21:9).²⁷⁹ Regardless of what Ishmael's “laughing” (MT) or “playing with Isaac” (LXX) may mean, Sarah implores Abraham to “cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac” (21:10). Abraham is distressed. Actually, “the matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son” (21:11).²⁸⁰ It is in response to Abraham's distress over Ishmael's not inheriting the covenant that God says, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that your offspring shall be named for you” (21:12 cf. Rom 9:7).

A number of thematic features of this patriarchal narrative cohere with Rom 9–11 and were utilized by Paul as a useful analogy for his situation:

²⁷⁸ See Gal 4:30 where Paul quotes Sarah's command to Abraham that he cast out both Ishmael and Hagar lest Ishmael inherit with Isaac (Gen 21:10).

²⁷⁹ The Hebrew text has Ishmael “laughing” (לָחַץ, 21:9) which is a play on Isaac's name (יִצְחָק). LXX has Ishmael “playing with Isaac” (παίζοντα μετὰ Ισαακ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς). The meaning of Ishmael's “laughing” is not important for the purposes of the present discussion.

²⁸⁰ MT: וַיִּרְעַ הַדְּבָרַי מְאֹד מְאֹד בְּעַיְנָי אֲבְרָהָם עַל אִוְרָת בְּנֵי.

LXX: σκληρὸν δὲ ἐφάνη τὸ ῥῆμα σφόδρα ἐναντίον Ἀβρααμ περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. It is possible that Paul also has his eye on the phrase σκληρὸν δὲ ἐφάνη τὸ ῥῆμα σφόδρα as σκληρὸν resonates with ὄν δὲ θέλει σκληρύνει (Rom 9:18).

*Genesis 21:1-21; 18:10, 14**Romans 9-11*

Isaac as the child of promise

Children of the promise (*predominantly* Gentiles)

Ishmael

Children of the flesh (Israelites)

Abraham's distress over Ishmael

Paul's anguish over the Israelites

That Paul understands Isaac and Ishmael as corresponding to his present situation, as we have already seen, is apparent from his interpretation of Gen 21:12, “this means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring” (Rom 9:8). Clearly, Paul is cognizant of Isaac as corresponding to the children of the promise and Ishmael as corresponding to the children of the flesh. But who are the children of the flesh and who are the children of the promise? It appears that “the children of the flesh” (9:8) are the Israelites who are Paul's “kinsmen according to the flesh”(9:3).²⁸¹ This makes further sense as the accursed status of Israel (9:3) finds its correspondence in Ishmael's banishment and not inheriting the covenant (Gen 21:10).²⁸² Isaac, who was the child of promise, corresponds to the “children of promise” (9:8). Elsewhere, this same narrative is used by Paul typologically and Paul uses Isaac as representative of his largely Gentile church audience (Gal 4:28).²⁸³ Such is also the case for Paul's church at Rome. Isaac represents the “children of promise” who are *predominantly* (though not exclusively) made up of Gentiles (Rom 9:30-31).²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Of course, Paul will later note that not all Israelites are accursed (9:30-31; 11:1). But his point in 9:1-5 is surely to say that ethnic Israel, for the most part, has rejected the gospel.

²⁸² By saying that Israel is rejected and Gentiles are included I do not mean that Paul considered every Israelite to be rejected (cf. Rom 11:1) or that every Gentile was included in God's people. But since the majority of Israelites rejected Paul's gospel and those who responded positively were mostly Gentiles, Paul can speak of Gentiles attaining the righteousness that Israel failed to achieve (9:30-31).

²⁸³ For an argument that Paul has a consistent typological hermeneutic in which Isaac represents the eschatological and expansive people of God – that is, the church which includes both Jews and Gentiles, see Gunther H. Jüncker, “Children of Promise: Spiritual Paternity and Patriarch Typology in Galatians and Romans” *BBR* 17.2 (2007), 131-160.

²⁸⁴ For Ishmael to represent Israel and Isaac to represent the Gentiles would be a scandalous application of

There is another thematic feature of Gen 21:1-21 that coheres with Rom 9–11 – Abraham's exceeding distress (Gen 21:11) with Sarah's command that he drive out his own son Ishmael (Gen 21:10).²⁸⁵ Abraham's distress is emphatic in the Genesis narrative as it is repeated (Gen 21:11, 12). That Abraham's distress is both repeated and the stated reason for God's words to Abraham that his offspring will be through Isaac (21:12) – which Paul cites – suggests that Paul may also have Abraham's distress in mind. There is another incident that emphasizes Abraham's disposition towards Ishmael. When God establishes his covenant with Abraham (17:7) and promises to bless Sarah with a son, Abraham pleads “O that Ishmael might live in your sight!” (Gen 17:18).²⁸⁶ But God responds that he will establish his covenant with Isaac (17:21). I am not alone in connecting Gen 21:12 with Gen 17:21. As noted in the previous section, Calvin brought the two together in his discussion of the general election and the hidden election of Israel.

So, in this narrative Paul finds a scriptural answer to his own dilemma and anguish (9:2). As Abraham longs for Ishmael to inherit the covenant and is distressed over Ishmael's rejection so Paul has great consternation over the Israelite rejection and longs for their inclusion. And in God's answer to Abraham's distress, Paul hears an answer to his own dilemma – inheritance is not based on anything “according to the

Scripture. This subversive interpretation is continued with Jacob and Esau who represent Gentiles and Israel respectively (see below). Finally, the scandalous application is continued as hardened Pharaoh (9:17-18) represents hardened Israel (11:25) (Craig S. Keener, *Romans* [NCCS 6. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009], 119-120.) Wagner, on the other hand, reads Esau as representative of Gentiles. J. Ross Wagner, “Not from the Jews Only, But Also from the Gentiles': Mercy to the Nations in Romans 9–11” in *Between Gospel and Election* (ed. Florian Wilk and J. Ross Wagner; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 241. For a discussion of ancient and early Jewish interpretations where Ishmael = Gentiles and Isaac = Israel see Abasciano, *Rom. 9:1-9*, 170-177.

²⁸⁵ Abasciano, *Romans 9*, 192. Abasciano suggests that just as God's word soothed Abraham's distress, so does Paul use it to soothe his own grief (Rom 9:1-3).

²⁸⁶ I am thankful to Emmanuel Belu for this suggestion.

flesh” κατὰ σάρκα (Rom 9:3, 5, 8). Rather, it is based on God's promise (9:8). Paul's argument is to show that his own anguish for his kinsmen κατὰ σάρκα (9:2-3) is inappropriately rooted κατὰ σάρκα. That Paul intends Abraham's distress as analogous to his own may be further confirmed by his immediately subsequent use of the Isaac, Jacob, and Esau narratives (Gen 25:19-34; 27:1-46) combined with his use of Mal 1:2, which are discussed below.

Romans 9:10-13: Paul and Isaac

Further confirmation for my suggested reading is found in the immediately subsequent reference to the Jacob and Esau narratives combined with Paul's citation of Malachi 1:2-3. Paul's use of the Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau drama (Gen 25:19-34; 27:1-28:9) further establishes Paul's argument by giving an additional example to the example of Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael and moving beyond it.²⁸⁷ Whereas the previous example of Isaac and Ishmael showed that natural descent does not secure Israel's sonship (Rom 9:8), the example of Jacob and Esau further excludes both good and evil works (Rom 9:11). It is God's promise and call that are decisive and effective (Rom 9:8, 12). In order to demonstrate that God's call is efficacious Paul cites God's word to Rebecca, “the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen 25:23).

It is appropriate to assume that in this case (as in the previous one), Paul has more of these narratives in mind than simply his citation of Gen. 25:23. This is appropriate because Paul's use of Mal 1:2-3, “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau” finds its

²⁸⁷ Paul introduces this example with “and not only but also Rebekah (Ὅν μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ῥεβέκκα, 9:10) indicating that he is continuing the same argument with a further scriptural proof for the response to his anguish which he has given in 9:6-9.

rhetorical punch by evoking and hooking onto an important theme in the Jacob and Esau narratives – the theme of a patriarch's preferential love for a son that is confronted and frustrated by God's will (Gen 25:28). In the Jacob and Esau narrative this theme is in close proximity to the passage that Paul cites (Gen 25:23 in Rom 9:12) – Gen 25:28. In Gen. 25:28, the narrator informs his audience that “Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.”²⁸⁸ Furthermore, it is because of Isaac's love for Esau (because of his game) that Isaac seeks to give the blessing to Esau (Gen 27:4, 9, 14). Isaac's intent was to bless Esau, which entailed that Esau would rule over Jacob (27:29). This is opposite to what God told Rebekah in 25:23 – that the older Esau would serve his younger brother Jacob. It is potentially illuminating that when Isaac realizes that he has blessed Jacob instead of Esau he “trembled violently” (27:33). This is one instantiation of a recurring theme in Genesis where a father desires the blessing of one son and is surprised – even distressed – when another is blessed. This has already been noted in the case of Abraham who wanted Ishmael to live before God (Gen 17:21) and was distraught at his wife's request to banish Ishmael lest he inherit with Isaac (21:11). Likewise, “Isaac loved Esau” (25:28), sought to bless Esau as the covenant heir (27:4, 29), and “trembled violently” (27:33) when he realized that he had not blessed Esau. The third reiteration of

²⁸⁸ Recall that in Origen's reading of Romans he brings together Mal 1:2-3 with Gen 25:27 even though Paul does not explicitly cite the latter verse: “But in order that you might know that Jacob was made into a vessel for honor because of the purity and simplicity of his soul, listen to how Holy Scripture bears testimony to his simplicity. It says, 'Jacob was a simple man, dwelling in a house.' On this account, then, the Apostle says about these men that before they were born it is said of them, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’” (Origen *Comm. Rom.*, 121). Origen is right to stitch Mal 1:2-3 with the Genesis narrative, but he has not brought together the right part of the Genesis narrative with Mal 1:2-3. My proposal is that Mal 1:2-3 ought to be positioned alongside Gen 25:28. Origen is incorrect to tether Mal 1:2-3 with Gen 25:27 because in so doing he tries to show that God loved Jacob *because* of his “purity” and “simplicity”. But Paul's point is surely to exclude any works, merits, or demerits from being the basis of God's election (Rom 9:11-12).

this theme is found in the Joseph narrative. Joseph, like his father Jacob and his grandfather Abraham, was displeased when Israel (Jacob) placed his right hand on Joseph's younger son Ephraim and his left hand on the firstborn Manasseh during the course of the blessing (48:10-20).²⁸⁹

My suggestion is that Paul capitalizes on this recurrent theme and utilizes its occurrences with Abraham and Isaac in reference to himself. As we have seen, the theme of a patriarch's preferential love that is overridden by God's will surfaces in Gen 25:28 which is very near to Paul's citation of Gen 25:23. With this theme and Gen 25:28 in view, Paul's use of Mal 1:2-3 becomes all the more forceful. Gen 25:28 reads, “Isaac loved Esau ... but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen 25:28). In Mal 1:2-3 the objects of love are reversed, “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.” Whereas “Isaac loved Esau” (Gen. 25:28), God says, “Jacob I loved” (Mal. 1:2).²⁹⁰ It is important to note, then,

²⁸⁹ The Hebrew text (MT) depicts Joseph's displeasure in similar wording to Abraham's distress:

Gen 21:11-12 (MT): : אֵל אוֹתָת בְּנֹוּ :
וַיִּרַע הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל אוֹתָת בְּנֹוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אֶל-יִרְעֵ בְעֵינֶיךָ

Gen 48:17 (MT): וַיִּרַע בְּעֵינָיו

The Greek translator does not preserve the similar wording in the two episodes:

Gen 21:11-12 (LXX): σκληρόν δὲ ἐφάνη τὸ ῥῆμα σφόδρα ἐναντίον Ἀβραὰμ περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. εἶπεν δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῷ Ἀβραὰμ Μὴ σκληρόν ἔστω τὸ ῥῆμα ἐναντίον σου περὶ τοῦ παιδίου

Gen 48:17 (LXX): βαρὺ αὐτῷ κατεφάνη

Related to the theme of the frustrated patriarch, Jon Levenson notes the recurrent theme of the younger son who surpasses the firstborn. He suggests that in Rom 9, Paul taps into this theme to address his current situation in which Gentiles overshadow Jews in the church. He says, “That the apostle to the gentiles came to think that the grace of the choosing God still attached itself in some measure to Israel according to the flesh (vv 4-5) qualifies but does not nullify the astonishing reversal of the positions of Jew and gentile that he helped bring about. Without such precedents as the partial dispossession of Ishmael by Isaac and of Esau by Jacob in the Hebrew Bible – the only Bible he knew – Paul and the Church's partial dispossession of the Jews could hardly have been conceived. Christian supersessionism is much indebted to the narrative dynamics of the Jewish foundational story” Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 70.

²⁹⁰ Paul further emphasizes God's love for Jacob by slightly adapting the LXX and fronting “Jacob” for emphasis (or he is quoting a non-extant text, see Abasciano, *Romans 9:10-18*, 38:

LXX: καὶ ἠγάπησα τὸν Ἰακώβ, τὸν δὲ Ἡσαυ ἐμίσησα

that Paul sets “God's purpose of election” (9:11) in *opposition* to Isaac's – and ultimately Paul's – desire. Whereas Isaac wanted to bless Esau, Jacob's inevitable blessing highlights that attainment of the blessing depends not on the works (of the recipient) but on God's call (Rom 9:12). Paul's use of Scripture is to answer his own dilemma and consternation over his fellow Israelites (9:1-5). Paul's answer, thus far, is to say that God's will prevails over his own desire. Whereas Paul would be accursed for the sake of his kinsmen *κατὰ σάρκα* (9:3, 5), it is God's promise that engenders God's children (9:8) and God's call that secures God's love (9:11-13). Here Paul demonstrates that the manner in which God elects is fundamentally different from the way that humans do. At this point, Aquinas' theological reflections on Paul's use of the Jacob and Esau narrative resonate well with my proposed reading:

Election and love, however, are ordered differently in God than in man. For in men, election precedes love, for a man's will is inclined to love a thing on account of the good perceived in it, this good also being the reason why he prefers one thing to another and why he fixed his love on the thing he preferred. But God's love is the cause of every good found in a creature; consequently, the good in virtue of which one is preferred to another through election follows upon God's willing it – which pertains to his love. Consequently, it is not in virtue of some good which he selects in a man that God loves him; rather, it is because he loved him that he prefers him to someone by election.²⁹¹

A comparison of Paul's interpretation of the Jacob and Esau narrative with other early Jewish interpreters is illuminating and renders my reading historically plausible in the first century CE. Early Jewish interpreters consistently portrayed Esau as evil and Jacob as just and conditioned Jacob's attainment of the blessing and Esau's rejection upon works. Paul's interpretation directly opposes such interpretations. Not only that, in one

Rom. 9:13: **τὸν Ἰακώβ ἠγάπησα, τὸν δὲ Ἡσαὺ ἐμίσησα.**

²⁹¹ Aquinas, *Aquinas, Comm. Rom.*, §763. I am not suggesting that Aquinas articulates my reading of Rom 9:1–18.

case (Jubilees) the divine affirmation of Jacob is based on Jacob's goodness and Esau's evil which reverses Isaac's preference for Esau in Gen 25:28. This makes my (above) suggestion, that for Paul Gen 25:28 is the implicit text that Mal 1:2-3 rebuts, historically plausible. Again, I suggest that Paul directly opposes such an early Jewish interpretation by insisting that God's mode of election is opposed to his own (and that of some of his fellow Jews) and triumphs.

Philo

The first century CE author Philo, when commenting on Gen 25:23 conditions God's promise to Rebecca such that the “righteous” Jacob will overtake the “unrighteous” Esau:

And this is a most helpful distinction of opposed concepts, since one of them desires wickedness, and the other virtue. And third, what is most just, that equals should not be mixed and put together with unequals, whence it is excellently said, “people will surpass people in excellence,” for it is necessary for one of the two to surpass the other and to increase, and for the other to decrease and to diminish. And “to surpass in excellence” again means the following, that the good man shall surpass the bad, and the righteous the unrighteous, and the temperate man the intemperate. *For one of them is heavenly and worthy of the divine light, and the other is earthly and corruptible and like darkness.*²⁹²

Furthermore when commenting on the description of Jacob and Esau in Gen 25:27-28 (which I have suggested is crucial to understanding Paul's use of Mal 1:2-3), Philo allegorizes Esau as an evil man:

Why was Esau a hunter and a man of the fields, and Jacob a simple man, living at home? This passage admits of allegorizing, for the wicked man is (so) in a twofold way, being a hunter and a man of the fields. Wherefore? Because just as a hunter spends his time with dogs and beasts, so does the cruel man with passions and evils, of which some, which are like beasts, make the mind wild and untamed and intractable and ferocious and bestial; and some (are like) dogs because they indulge immoderate impulses and in all things act madly and furiously ... and not

²⁹² *Quaest. in Gen* 4.164. Translation from Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis* (trans: Ralph Marcus; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1953).

having anything in common with righteous and good men. But the wise and the cultivated man, on the other hand, possesses both of the following (qualities): he is simple and he lives at home. A simple nature shows the truth of simplicity and a lack of flattery and hypocrisy ...²⁹³

The Targums²⁹⁴

Even though the Targums, as we have them, were not written down in the first century CE they are still rightly considered repositories of early Jewish scriptural interpretation that were current at the time of Paul. The tendency of the Targums to magnify Jacob's righteousness and to multiply Esau's evil, is, as we have already seen, attested to by Philo and as we will see is further substantiated by Jubilees, both of which were current at the time of Paul.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Ps.-J) at Gen 25:23 gives God's promise that the lesser Jacob will rule over the greater Esau and then attaches a conditional clause that is absent from the MT and LXX:

And the Lord said to her, “Two peoples are in your womb, and two kingdoms (issued) from your womb shall be separated; and one *kingdom* shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall *be subjected* to the younger *if the children of the younger keep the commandments of the Law.*”²⁹⁵

The addition of this conditional clause has most likely been inserted by the targumist in order to give a rationale for Jacob's attainment of what, according to birth order, should have been Esau's. The Targums go on to expand on Jacob's goodness and for Ps.-J specifically this means that Jacob has fulfilled the condition

²⁹³ *Quaest in Gen. 4.165.*

²⁹⁴ It is unfortunate that commentaries on Romans rarely utilize the Targums. An examination of the indices of commentaries on Romans bears this out. One exception to this is Brian Abasciano's monograph on Paul's use of Scripture, Abasciano, Brian J., *Romans 9:10-18: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

²⁹⁵ See bibliography for texts and translations of Targums that are used in this study.

of the promise.

At Gen 25:27-28 MT reads as follows: “When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilled hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents (יָשַׁב אֶתְהָרִים) (וַיֵּשְׁקֶבֶ אִישׁ הָהָם). Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.” The desire of the targumists to depict Jacob as righteous and Esau as wicked is so strong, that they take the scriptural text in exactly this direction. That Jacob is described as a יָשַׁב man in the Hebrew text is the likely trigger for the Targums attributing to Jacob the act of seeking instruction (Onq. and Ps.-J) or being “perfect *in good work*” (Nf.; cf. Ps-J):

Onq.: When the young boys grew up, Esau became a skilled hunter, a man *who would go out into the field*, but Jacob was a perfect man, who *attended the house of study*. Now Isaac loved Esau, *for he used to eat from his venison*, while Rebekah loved Jacob.

Similarly to Onkelos, Neofiti has Jacob dwelling “in the *schoolhouses*” (25:27) but also adds that he was “perfect in good work” (25:27). Furthermore, Esau's wickedness in giving up his birthright is expanded upon. Not only did Esau despise his birthright but he is also attributed with denying “the vivication of the dead” and “the life of the world to come” (25:34):

Nf.: And the boys grew, and Esau Esau was man knowing the hunt, a man of the fields, and Jacob was a man perfect *in good work*; he dwelt in the *schoolhouses*. (גִּבֹּר שְׁלֹם בַּעֲבָדָא טַבָּא יְתִיב בְּבֵת־מִדְרָשָׁא). And Isaac loved Esau, because he used to eat from his hunt, but Rebekah loved Jacob. ... And Esau despised his birthright, *and <made denial> concerning the vivication of the dead and denied the life of the world to come*.

Pseudo-Jonathan is the most expansive of the three Targums. Whereas in Gen 25:27 the other Targums only comment on Jacob's righteousness but are silent on Esau's evil, Ps.-J

depicts Esau as a murderer. Additionally at Gen 25:28 Ps.-J gives the reason why Isaac loved Esau: because Esau was deceptive. Furthermore, when Esau gives up his birthright, Ps.-J expands on Esau's evil to a greater degree than all of the other Targums by saying that Esau returned from the field and was tired “because he had committed five transgressions” (25:34):

Ps.-J: When the boys grew, Esau became a skilled hunter (*able*) to hunt birds and wild beasts, a man who would go out into the field to kill people. It was he who killed Nimrod and his son Henoch. But Jacob became a man (*who was*) perfect in his works, ministering in the schoolhouse of Eber, seeking instruction from before the Lord (גבר שלים בעובדוי משמש בבית-מדרשא דעבר תבע אולפן מן קדם יי). Isaac loved Esau, because there were *deceptive words* in his mouth; but Rebekah loved Jacob. *The day Abraham died, Jacob boiled dishes of lentils and went to comfort his father. Esau came from the country, and he was exhausted because he had committed five transgressions that day: he had practiced idolatry; he had shed innocent blood; he had gone in to a betrothed maiden; he had denied the life of the world to come, and had despised the birthright.*

It is worth noting at this point that Paul's interpretation appears to go in the direct opposite direction to that of the Targums:

Even *before they had been born or had done anything good or bad* (so that God's purpose of election might continue), *not by works* but by his call she was told, “The elder shall serve the younger.” As it is written, “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau” (Rom 9:11-13).

Whereas the Targums have Jacob as “perfect in his deeds” (שלים בעובדוי, Ps.-J) or “perfect in (every) good work” (שלם בעבדא טבא, Nf.) at Gen 25:27, for Paul that God's promise to Rebecca came before the twins were born excludes “anything good or bad” (9:11). All “works” are excluded so as to nullify commandment keeping as being the ground for Jacob's election or Esau's rejection and in order to make God's call and purpose ultimate (Rom 9:11-12).

Unlike his contemporary interpreters who magnify and *utilize* Jacob's righteousness and Esau's wickedness to explain how the younger Jacob could receive the birthright and the covenantal blessing that should have gone to the older Esau, Paul twice *excludes* works as a legitimate explanation for God's choice of Jacob. A couple of features suggest Paul's cognizance of his contemporaries' hermeneutical moves. First, Paul's *double* insistence to exclude works appear to show Paul's insistence against interpretations that prominently feature “works.” The promise was given to Rebecca prior to the birth of the twins and so they had no opportunity to have “done anything good or bad” (9:11). He then insists that the reason for excluding such works to highlight God's election and Paul immediately repeats the exclusion of works - “not by works but by his call” (9:12). Second, Paul's exclusion of works “good or bad” (9:11) suggests familiarity with such Jewish interpretive traditions. This is not a typical Pauline phrase.²⁹⁶ The phrase suggests that Paul has in mind Jewish traditions that extol Jacob's *good* works and magnify Esau's *bad* works as the basis of Jacob's election and Esau's rejection. Paul's double exclusion of works suggests that he wishes to prevent his audience from adopting an interpretive tradition that he and his audience was familiar with.

So far, the testimony of early Jewish interpretation has shown that for Paul, contra his Jewish contemporaries, God's election is irrespective of works. But what about my insistence that Paul seeks to show that God's election *works* differently from and frustrates Abraham's, Isaac's, and Paul's desire – a desire that is according to the flesh and based on works. To Jubilees we must turn.

²⁹⁶ N.T. Wright, “Romans” in *The New Interpreter's Bible X* (ed. Lander Keck; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 637.

Jubilees

The second century B.C.E.²⁹⁷ rewritten scriptural work, Jubilees, adds its voice as a further witness to early Jewish interpretations of Jacob and Esau that magnify the righteousness of Jacob and the evil of Esau. So, for example, when Rebecca tells her son Jacob to honour his father and brother throughout his life, the conversation between Jacob and Rebecca magnifies Jacob's good and “upright deeds”:

You, mother, know everything I have done and all my thoughts from the day I was born until today – that at all times I think of what is good for all. How shall I not do what you have ordered me – that I should honor my father and brother? Tell me, mother, what impropriety you have noticed in me and I will certainly turn away from it and will experience mercy'. She said to him: 'My son, throughout my entire lifetime I have noticed no improper act in you but only proper one(s).²⁹⁸

More pertinent to my proposed reading, in which Mal 1:2-3 reverses Gen 25:28, is Jub 19:13-23 where Gen 25:28 (the description of Jacob and Esau and the preferential love of their parents) is richly expanded:

In the sixth week, during its second year [2046], Rebecca gave birth to two sons for Isaac: Jacob and Esau. Jacob was perfect and upright, while Esau was a harsh, rustic, and hairy man. Jacob used to live in tents. When the boys grew up, Jacob learned (the art of) writing, but Esau did not learn (it) because he was a rustic man and a hunter. He learned (the art of) warfare, and everything that he did was harsh. Abraham loved Jacob but Isaac (loved) Esau.²⁹⁹

Whereas, at Gen 25:28, the MT speaks of *Rebecca's* love for Jacob, Jubilees highlights *Abraham's* love for Jacob where Abraham represents the divine approval of Jacob.³⁰⁰ The reversal of the objects of love created by Jubilees is similar to what I have suggested Paul does with his use of Mal 1:2-3. In both Jubilees and Paul,

²⁹⁷ For the dating of Jubilees see James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 17-22.

²⁹⁸ *Jubilees* 35:3-6. See bibliography for complete reference.

²⁹⁹ *Jub* 19:13-15.

³⁰⁰ Abasciano, *Romans 9.10–18*, 23. In Jubilees, Rebecca's love for Jacob is not entirely eclipsed by Abraham's love for Jacob but is affirmed by it.

Issac's love for Esau is in conflict with God's love for Jacob. Immediately

following this, Jubilees elaborates on Abraham's love for Jacob:

Abraham loved Jacob but Isaac (loved) Esau. As Abraham observed Esau's behavior, he realized that through Jacob he would have a reputation and descendants, He summoned Rebecca and gave her orders about Jacob because he saw that she loved Jacob much more than Esau. He said to her: 'My daughter, take care of my son Jacob because he will occupy my place on the earth and (will prove) a blessing among mankind and the glory of all the descendants of Shem. For I know that the Lord will choose him as his own people (who will be) *special* from all who are on the surface of the earth. My son Isaac now loves Esau more than Jacob, but I see that you rightly love Jacob. Increase your favor to him still more; may your eyes look at him lovingly because he will prove to be a blessing for us on the earth from now and throughout all the history of the earth. May your hands be strong and your mind be happy with your son Jacob because I love him much more than all my sons; for he will be blessed forever and his descendants will fill the earth. If a man is able to count the sands on the earth, in the same way his descendants, too, will be counted. May all the blessings with which the Lord blessed me and my descendants belong to Jacob and his descendants for all time. . . . Rebecca loved Jacob with her entire heart and her entire being very much more than Esau; but Isaac loved Esau much more than Jacob.³⁰¹

Jubilees adds Abraham's voice so that his perspective reflects the divine will.³⁰² This is significant because here we have early Jewish interpretative tradition in which Isaac's love and preference for Esau is shown to oppose God's preference to which it must ultimately give way. Furthermore, unlike Paul (Rom 9:11-12), Jubilees has God loving Jacob *because* of the works of the twins (the works of Esau, more specifically).

Immediately after asserting that “Abraham loved Jacob,” Jubilees says that “Abraham observed Esau's behaviour”(19:16). This observation causes Abraham to realize that his “reputation and descendants” (19:16) will be through Jacob. Jubilees then proceeds to have Abraham bless Jacob (22:28-30).

When Rebecca is on her death bed she makes a final request to her husband Isaac. She asks that he ensure that Esau does not kill Jacob. And Isaac responds with a confession and repents for having previously preferred Esau over Jacob. Jubilees recounts

³⁰¹ *Jub* 19:15-31.

³⁰² Abasciano, *Romans* 9.10–18, 23.

the story as follows:

She went in to Isaac and said to him: 'I am making one request of you: make Esau swear that he will not harm Jacob and not pursue him in hatred. For you know the way Esau thinks – that he has been malicious since his youth and that he is devoid of virtue because he wishes to kill him after your death. ... He is behaving bitterly toward you due to the fact that you blessed your perfect and true son Jacob since he has virtue only, no evil. ... Isaac said to her. 'I, too, know and see the actions of Jacob who is with us – that he wholeheartedly honors us. At first I did love Esau more than Jacob, after he was born; but now I love Jacob more than Esau because he has done so many bad things and lacks (the ability to do) what is right. For the entire way he acts is (characterized by) injustice and violence and there is no justice about him.³⁰³

For the author of Jubilees, Isaac's preferential love for Esau was misguided. Deeds are determinative for securing Isaac's (and God's) love. Jacob has taken hold of Isaac's love because of his good deeds and Esau loses his father's preferential love because of his evil deeds.

So, Paul's interpretation is similar and yet different from that of Jubilees. It is similar in that Paul has (via metalepsis) set Isaac's love for Esau (Gen 25:28) in opposition to God's love for Jacob (Mal 1:2-3). In both Paul and Jubilees Isaac's preference for Esau is contrasted with God's love for Jacob. And in both cases, God's preference prevails.

Even though Paul and Jubilees both set the stage for a conflict between God and Isaac. They resolve the conflict differently. Jubilees insists that God loved Jacob more than Esau *because* of the goodness of Jacob and the malevolence of Esau. So, for Jubilees God's choice of Jacob is based on works. Paul goes in the exact opposite direction and twice excludes works from playing any part in God's election of Jacob and rejection of Esau (9:11-12).

³⁰³ *Jub 35:9-13*

In Rom 9:7-10 we saw that Paul aligned himself with Abraham in his desire for his kinsmen “according to the flesh.” There, Paul's appropriation of God's response to Abraham and his interpretation that God's children are not those of flesh but those of promise (9:8) had as their goal the exclusion of physical descent as determining who are God's children. That is “flesh” does not secure one's place in the people of God. Here in 9:10-12 Paul rules out works . Though Paul himself would (like the repentant Isaac of Jubilees) desire the calling of his fellow Israelites because of their works,³⁰⁴ his own interpretation of the Genesis narrative (Rom 9:11) and his use of Mal 1:2-3 has God himself repudiating such a mode of election. Unlike Jubilees, Paul does not ultimately allow works a place in either securing or deterring God's electing love (9:11). But surely Paul could not himself have desired the salvation of his fellow Israelites based on their works. Could he? After all, Paul insists that both Jews and Gentiles are under the same condemnation for their enslavement to sin:

What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God” (Rom 3:9-11).

Furthermore, Paul repeatedly excludes works as taking any part in securing righteousness (9:11; 9:30-31; 11:6-7). But even though Israel did not achieve the righteousness enjoined in the Mosaic law, this does not mean, for Paul, that Israel did not *try* to fulfill the law.

³⁰⁴ In Rom 4, as in 9, Paul excludes both ethnic descent (4:1) and works (4:2). The former requires a translation of: “What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?” See Wright, *Romans*, 489. The exclusion of flesh in Rom 9 supports this translation. But even if one does not accept this translation, it is still pertinent to note that the issue of “flesh” seems to naturally raise the issue of “works” in both Rom 4 and 9. Therefore, even if one does not accept that Paul desired the salvation of Israel based on their works (9:10-12), he can still situate himself in the likeness of Isaac in desiring the salvation of Israel. The movement to exclude works (9:10-12) would simply be one that naturally arises in the course of Paul's discussion of “flesh,” as in Rom 4:1-2.

So, Paul can speak of Israel “pursing a law of righteousness did not attain it” (9:31) or Israel “failing to obtain what it was diligently seeking” (11:6).³⁰⁵ So, in this sense it is possible to see how Paul could desire the salvation of his fellow Israelites based on their works and paint himself with the colours of his contemporary Jews (like the Isaac of Jubilees) who who expected the works of Jacob and Esau to play a critical role in their destinies.

Paul, having shown that he desires the salvation of Israel because of their physical descent (and then proving this desire problematic by citing God's response to Abraham) appeals to the example of Jacob and Esau in order to further exclude *any* works. In so doing he shows that God's mode of election differs with that of humans. Humans tend to choose based on natural descent and good or evil works (Rom 9:1-13). It is for these reasons (descent and works) that Paul desires the salvation of his fellow Israelites (9:1-5). God, in opposition to Paul, does not elect based on these grounds. God's prerogative to show mercy to whomever he will is ultimate and he has chosen the Gentiles.

That Paul likely considered Esau as an appropriate representative of Israel and Jacob of the Gentiles is confirmed by the parallel between 9:11-12 and 9:30-32:

Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, *not by works* but by his call) she was told, “The elder shall serve the younger.” (Rom 9:11-12)

What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is *based on the law*, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but *as if it were based on works*. (Rom 9:30-32)

In 9:30-32, the success of the Gentiles and the failure of Israel are explicitly

³⁰⁵ The corollary is that “Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, obtained it” (9:30).

articulated. Stephen Westerholm rightly suggests that 9:11-12 provides the general principle that lies behind 9:30-32:

Some connection must exist between the ruling out of any role for human “works” in 9:12 and the claim that Israel wrongly pursues a path of “works” in 9:32. The parallel is, to be sure, not complete. In 9:11-12, it is not certain specific “works” that are excluded from consideration in God's election; rather, by definition, no human activity can be a factor if God's “election” is to remain rooted in his sovereign purpose alone. On the other hand, when Paul refers to the “works” wrongly pursued by Israel in 9:32, there is no doubt that he has specific “works” in mind: those required by the Mosaic law, perhaps especially the boundary-defining “works” for which Jews displayed particular zeal. But it is at least tempting to suspect that Paul introduced the exclusion of “works” (in general) in 9:12 with a view to the later claim that Israel's pursuit of a path involving particular human “works” was misguided. And the question is at least worth posing whether part of the thinking behind Paul's claim that Israel's pursuit of (specific) “works” was misguided is to be found in his reason for thinking “works” in general are excluded in 9:11-12: God achieves his purposes without reference to human activity.³⁰⁶

I would like to extend the connection between 9:11-12 and 9:30-32 to include the failure of Israel regardless of her works (9:31-32) as parallel to the failure of Esau (9:12-13). Furthermore the success of the Gentiles in attaining righteousness apart from any striving (9:30) parallels Jacob's attaining God's election apart from any works (9:12).

Romans 9:14-18: Paul as Moses – Again!

In Romans 9:1-13, Paul has demonstrated that the basis upon which God elects his people is fundamentally different than the basis on which humans, namely Paul, choose who should be God's people. This has resulted in a collision of the human will with the divine will. Abraham desired his son according to the flesh, Ishmael; God destined the child of promise, Isaac. Isaac loved Esau; God loved Jacob. Paul greatly desired his fellow

³⁰⁶ Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” 223-224.

Israelites; God has called the Gentiles.

Having ruled out natural descent as well as good and evil works Paul anticipates the objection: “What then are we to say? Is there injustice (ἀδικία) on God's part?” (9:14). To this Paul immediately responds, “By no means!” (9:14). The rhetorical question insinuates that it is a natural reflex on the part of Paul's audience to conclude that election apart from a consideration of natural descent or works is unjust. Paul then appeals to God's words to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (9:15) and in so doing he asserts the primacy of God's will *over* Abraham's, Isaac's, Moses', and Paul's. The weight is on the divine “I” – “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (9:15).³⁰⁷ Calvin's comments here are worth noting:

And thus he assigns the highest reason for imparting grace, even his own voluntary purpose, and also intimates that he has designed his mercy peculiarly for some; for it is a way of speaking which excludes all outward causes, as when we claim to ourselves the free power of acting, we say, “I will do what I mean to do.”³⁰⁸

And this divine “I” is in opposition to the Pauline “I” of 9:1-5. The recipients of God's mercy are so only as a result of God's prerogative to show them mercy. God's will is decisive, not Paul's. The same is true of those who are hardened. They are unresponsive to Paul's gospel because God has chosen to harden them.

Paul has framed this section of Romans with Moses' intercession for a rebellious Israel (9:3) and God's response to Moses' plea (9:15). And these two bookends are

³⁰⁷ Nahum Sarna comments on Ex 33:19 that “[t]he exercise of God's attributes is an act of pure volition on His part. In the religion of Israel there is no magical practice that is automatically effective in influencing divine behavior” Nahum Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS; New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 214.

³⁰⁸ Calvin, *Comm. Rom.*, 356.

appropriated by Paul to his own situation. He is like Moses and pleads to God for his fellow Israelites and God responds.

In Ex 32–34, Moses' initial intercession and request to God for Israel's forgiveness is not granted. Moses' first request was rejected (32:30-35). But Moses perseveres and intercedes yet again asking that God's presence would travel with his people. After all they are God's people and how else will they be shown to be unique in the world unless God dwells among them (33:13-16). Finally, God grants Moses' request and says, “I will do the very thing that you have asked” (33:17). But Moses wants proof. He then asks God for “a sign that God himself will truly dwell among them without judgment”:³⁰⁹ “Show me your glory, I pray” (33:18). To this request God responds that he will pass his “goodness” before Moses (33:19) and proclaim the divine name and he adds, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (33:19). These are words in which God asserts the ultimacy of his will to show mercy. That is, the back-and-forth between Moses and God could show that God is manipulated or suggest that his sovereignty is diminished. After all Moses does get *his* way. Israel is not destroyed. But these words preserve that even though Moses does get his way it is ultimately God's way. It is God's prerogative to show mercy.

That this is the sense of the Exodus narrative that Paul hears and appropriates for himself is confirmed by the coherence that such a reading has with my suggestion of how the Isaac and Ishmael narrative is to be read as well as how the Jacob and Esau narrative should be understood. In Rom 9:1-18 Moses intercedes (9:3) and God responds (9:15).

³⁰⁹ Terence Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 299.

Even though God grants Moses' request, God's response preserves the divine will as ultimate over that of the intercessor. Abraham desired Ishmael to inherit and was disturbed at the prospect of having to banish him. God's response to Abraham confirms that the one whom *God* promised, Isaac, would be considered Abraham's seed (9:7-9). Jacob and Esau continue the theme. Isaac loved Esau, but God loved Jacob and the divine will came to pass (9:10-13). Finally, Paul is in anguish over the accursed state of his fellow Israelites (9:1-5). And Paul appropriates God's response to Abraham, Isaac, and Moses as the the divine response to himself. God's purpose of election will prevail and his mode of election – not according to the flesh and not according to works – is different than the fleshly mode that Paul desires. God's will is in opposition to Paul's and God's will prevails – or does it?³¹⁰

³¹⁰ See my answer in part III below.

PART 3: IMPLICATIONS

What implications does my proposed reading of Romans 9:1–18 have for Rom 9–11 as a whole and other issues in Pauline theology? This section considers whether or not – and if so, how – my suggested reading sheds light on: (1) the identity of “all Israel” in 11:26; (2) the claim of E. P. Sanders and some other New Perspective proponents that Paul's debate with contemporary Jews was not one over the issues of “works” and “grace.”

Rom 11:26: “And so all Israel will be saved.”

The meaning of these five words (καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται, 11:26) near the end of Rom 9–11 has riddled both ancient and contemporary biblical scholars alike such that the one approaching this verse easily gets stumped by the riddle. Martin Luther said concerning 11:25-26 that “the text is so obscure.”³¹¹ While there are a number of issues that could be addressed, here I would like to focus more specifically on how my proposed reading of 9:1–18 clarifies the meaning of 11:26 to suggest a future salvation of the majority of Israelites alive at the time.

Paul begins Rom 9:1–18 by articulating his grief for his fellow Israelites (9:1-5) of whom the majority have rejected the gospel. Paul is so desirous for their salvation that he is even willing to be accursed for their sake (9:3). His grief is accentuated by the fact that they are his “kinsmen κατὰ σάρκα” (9:3). What follows in 9:6–18 is Paul's appropriation of Scripture to address his very own distress. Paul scripturally paints

³¹¹ Luther, *Rom.*, 429.

himself in the likeness of Moses (9:3), Abraham (9:7), Isaac (9:12-13), and Moses again (9:14). Moses interceded for Israel and asked for her forgiveness (Ex 32:32). Abraham desired Ishmael to be blessed (Gen 17:18) and was distressed with his wife's request that he drive Ishmael away (Gen 21:10-11). Isaac loved Esau and sought to make him the covenant heir (Gen 25:28; 27:1-4). Paul utilizes God's words to these figures as the divine response to his own grief over his “kinsmen κατὰ σάρκα” (9:3). God's response in each case demonstrates that God's will prevails, not that of the distressed figure of Israel's history. So, God promised that Isaac would be the seed, not Ishmael (Gen 21:12). God loved Jacob, not Esau (Mal 1:2-3). And God's response to Moses highlights the ultimacy of God's will in showing mercy (Ex 33:19).

On such a reading, where God's will is repeatedly shown to be opposed to the will of the biblical figures (including Paul himself), it seems reasonable to conclude that Paul's desire for the salvation of his “kinsmen κατὰ σάρκα” (9:3) will not be granted but is ultimately frustrated by God's purpose. After all, as the example of Isaac and Ishmael tells Paul, “it is *not* the children τῆς σαρκὸς who are the children of God; rather the children of promise are counted εἰς σπέρμα” (9:8). Paul wants Israel, but God is calling Gentiles.³¹² This seems to prohibit 11:26 from meaning a future salvation for *ethnic* Israel where “πᾶς Ἰσραήλ” carries the connotation of the great majority of Israelites who are alive at the time.³¹³ If Paul demonstrates that God's will and purpose prevail over his own

³¹² Cf. Rom 9:24-25, 30-32, 10:3, 11:11.

³¹³ Cranfield lists the following four interpretive possibilities:

- (i) all the elect, both Jews and Gentiles;
- (ii) all the elect of the nation Israel;
- (iii) the whole nation Israel, including every individual member;
- (iv) the nation Israel as a whole, but not necessarily including every individual member, C. E.

B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Vol. II: ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 576.

in 9:1–18, and if we grant that Paul argues with coherence, then in 11:26 Paul's desire for the salvation of his fellow Israelites is not answered. Or is it?

My proposed reading of 9:1–18 does not prevent Paul's request from being finally answered in 11:26. First, Paul appeals to Ex 32–34 in such a way that the golden calf incident including Moses' intercession (32:32) and God's *second* response to Moses (33:19) frames Paul's use of Scripture in Rom 9:1–18. God's response to Moses, that he will have mercy to whomever he will (33:19) is given in order to protect God's sovereignty in granting mercy to Israel. Since God does eventually give in to Moses' request and does not altogether abandon his people, the divine utterance is meant to guard God's prerogative to show mercy. In other words, Moses repeatedly entreated God for the forgiveness of his people (32:30–32; 33:12–18) and Ex 33:19 shows that even though Moses received what he asked for, it was not ultimately Moses' will but God's will that secured mercy and compassion for the people. Paul's casting himself in the likeness of Moses and his use of Ex 32–34 to frame Rom 9:1–18 *may*³¹⁴ intimate that Paul's request,

³¹⁴ Even if Paul does not have this feature of Ex 32–34 in mind – God finally answering Moses' request – the surprising resolution in which God answers Paul's request for the salvation of “all Israel” (11:26) is not excluded by my reading of 9:1–18. In fact, the phrase “*all Israel* will be saved” (11:26), which comes near the conclusion of Paul's argument, likely corresponds to the phrase, “*not all* those who are *from Israel* are Israel” (9:6):

οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ (9:6)
καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται (11:26)

Rom 9:6 opens Paul's defense of God's word and does so by saying that God's word to *ethnic* Israel has not failed since only *some* Israelites are *true* Israel (9:6). 11:26 closes Paul's argument by saying that *all* Israel will be saved. In other words, “all Israel” will eventually become true Israel. In what comes between 9:6 and 11:26, Paul unravels how “not all Israel” (9:6) is remedied to become a saved “all Israel” (11:26). N.T. Wright, on the other hand, suggests that the “all” of 11:26 looks back to the ‘all’ of 10:11–13, and behind that of 4:16 (‘all the seed . . . Abraham as the father of all of us’).” Wright, *Romans*, 690. But the parallel I have suggested above is on firmer linguistic grounds as it has more than simply the word “all” in view.

An additional feature that more firmly secures the parallel between 9:6 and 11:26 is Paul's appeal to “the fathers” (9:5; 11:28). Paul's grief over his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3) is grounded in that they are descended from “the patriarchs” (οἱ πατέρες, 9:5). In 9:6–9 Paul shows that mere fleshly descent does not avail implying that the benefit Israelites have as descendants of the fathers does not guarantee their place as children of God (9:7–13; cf. Matt 3:8; Gal 3:28). Paradoxically, in 11:26, the future salvation

like that of Moses, is finally answered.³¹⁵ But the reader should understand that it was not Paul's desire or will that secure Israel's salvation. Rom 9:6–18 responds to Paul's distress by stating that Paul's anguish is (in a sense) misguided. It is “according to the flesh” (9:3). This would appear to be a sufficient response in and of itself. But beginning in 11:11 Paul asserts that Israel's stumbling is not irrecoverable. This climaxes in the surprising resolution that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26). Such a conclusion is surprising because of the way Paul has used Scripture in 9:1–18 to show that God's people are not defined by “flesh” (9:8) or by “works” (9:11-12). God's promise prevails over the “flesh” (9:8); God's election is irrespective of “anything good or bad” (9:11); and mercy is God's to give to whomever he pleases (9:15-16, 18). Nevertheless, “all Israel will be saved” (11:26).

of “all Israel” is actually secured because “they are dearly loved for the sake of the fathers” (διὰ τοὺς πατέρας, 11:28). For Paul, the appeal to “the fathers” should be understood in two ways. First, mere descent from the fathers does not make God one's father. So, appeal to a mere fleshly descent from the fathers is inappropriate. Second, a future is secured for Israel *because* they are descended from the fathers (11:28). There will be a large-scale conversion in which they confess Jesus as Lord.

Bruce Longenecker comments on the tension created by 11:26 and 28, “What are we to do, then with the statement, 'All Israel will be saved'? It does not fit well with the rest of the case that Paul has tried to establish throughout his letter to the Romans. Paul's thesis that salvation is by faith would seem to undermine this return to a Jewish ethnocentrism. The problem is a real one, for Paul seems to have deviated significantly from his case for salvation by faith alone. He himself seems to recognize the tension within his own argument when he writes in 11.28, 'As far as the gospel is concerned, they [Israel] are enemies on your account. But as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs'. Whereas the whole of his argument up to this point might have led us to expect his final verdict on unbelieving Israel to be encapsulated by the first sentence ('they are enemies'), Paul precedes into another logic which is in tension with, if not contradictory to, his case for justification by faith ('they are loved on account of the patriarchs'). Although he can sustain the logic of salvation by faith throughout most of Rom. 9–11, at this point he admits to a salvation which will ultimately spring from an ethnic condition,” Bruce W. Longenecker, “Different Answers to Different Issues: Israel, the Gentiles, and Salvation History in Romans 9-11,” *JSNT* (36) 1989, 97-98.

³¹⁵ Wagner, *Heralds*, 53. It is worth noting that Paul, like Moses, repeatedly prays for Israel's salvation (Rom 9:3; 10:1) even after apparently receiving an initial response of “no.”

E. P. Sanders on “Grace” and “Works” in Judaism and Paul

E. P. Sanders, who is the fountainhead of the New Perspective on Paul, has insisted that Lutheran readings of Paul have misunderstood him.³¹⁶ He suggested that Lutheran readings of Paul have imported sixteenth-century debates between Protestantism and Catholicism into first-century disputes between Paul and his Jewish opponents.³¹⁷ This results in a distortion of first-century Judaism as “legalistic” and a misreading of Paul. Paul, according to Sanders, was not opposing a self-righteous Judaism that sought to merit God's favour by works.³¹⁸ Both Paul and his Jewish milieu are in agreement regarding the place of deeds and grace in salvation and judgment. “*Salvation is by grace but judgment is according to works; works are the condition of remaining 'in', but they do not earn salvation.*”³¹⁹ Rather, the problem that Paul confronted was an insistence that “Gentile converts must accept the Jewish law in order to enter the people of God or to be counted truly members.”³²⁰ Paul's problem was not any doing the Mosaic law, but rather the insistence of some to make it an *entrance* requirement that Gentiles were to embrace in order to be included in the people of God. For Paul, according to Sanders, “faith is the sole membership requirement.”³²¹

³¹⁶ It is of course worth noting that the New Perspective on Paul is not a monolithic entity but there are “many variation and sub-branches” N. T. Wright, “Romans 9–11 and the 'New Perspective'” in *Between Gospel and Election* (ed. F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 37.

³¹⁷ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 57. Sanders says, “The supposed legalistic Judaism ... serves a very obvious function. It acts as the foil against which superior forms of religion are described. ... One must note in particular the projection on to Judaism of the view which Protestants find most objectionable in Roman Catholicism: the existence of a treasury of merits established by works of supererogation. We have here the retrojection of the Protestant–Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity the role of Lutheranism.”

³¹⁸ Sanders, *Paul and Judaism*, 59.

³¹⁹ Sanders, *Paul and Judaism*, 543.

³²⁰ E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 20. These are Sanders's comments on Gal 2 and 3.

³²¹ Sanders, *Paul, Law, Jewish People*, 20.

Sander's point regarding first-century Judaism as having categories for divine grace is fair. But this does not mean that Paul agreed with first-century Jews with regards to the relative significance they ascribed to grace and works. And as we have seen, Paul's interpretation of the Jacob and Esau narrative reveals that Paul *is* in sharp disagreement with some of his contemporary Jews regarding the role works play in salvation and entrance into the people of God. Jewish interpreters in Paul's day assigned a more significant role to works in the achievement of divine favour than Paul would allow (Rom 9:10-13). Early Jewish interpretations consistently portrayed Esau as evil and Jacob as good. The impulse behind such portraits was to explain how the firstborn Esau could be overtaken by his younger twin in receiving the covenantal blessing. Thus, for some of Paul's contemporaries Sanders's dictum, “*obedience maintains one's position in the covenant, but it does not earn God's grace as such,*”³²² does not hold. For early Jewish interpreters Esau lost the blessing because of his evil works and (by implication) Jacob attained the covenantal blessing because of his good works.³²³ Paul repudiates such a rationale. In 9:11-12 Paul writes of the inefficacy of *all* works to secure election or rejection. His double insistence that God's promise concerning the twins was made “before they were born or had done anything good or bad” and that it was “not by works” (9:11) diverges from (and even contradicts) Jewish interpretations.

The insistence of Sanders and others that first century Judaism ought not to be caricatured as “legalistic”³²⁴ must not be allowed to obscure the greater weight that (some) Jews placed on “works” than Paul did. Unlike other Jewish interpreters, Paul will

³²² Sanders, *Paul and Judaism*, 420.

³²³ See *Jub* 19:15-31; 35:9-13.

³²⁴ Sanders, *Paul and Judaism*, 59.

not allow *any* works *any* place in Jacob's attainment of the blessing or in Esau's rejection. Paul is not merely opposed to a certain type of works, namely those of Jewish particularism.³²⁵ He is not merely opposed to the idea of Israel's law as an entrance requirement. He opposes *any* and *all* works from grounding God's election. Westerholm notes the parallel passages in Rom 9–11 (9:11-12, 9:30-31, 11:5-7) where Paul's discussion of “works” in general (9:11-12) finds expression in: 1) Israel's failure to achieve the righteousness of the law since they pursued it by “works” (9:31-32); 2) a remnant chosen by *grace* and not by “works” (11:5-6). He says concerning “works” in these passages:

To be sure, the “works” performed by Israel are those prescribed by the Mosaic law; but nothing in this passage suggests that Israel is pursuing the wrong *kind* of “works.” What is emphatically excluded is consideration of *any* human “work” in the granting of divine favour (9:12): an exclusion which naturally includes the particular “works” enjoined by Moses. ... To repeat: the “works” in view may be those demanded by Israel's “particularism”; but it is not because of the *kind* of “works” they are (i.e. , that they are expressions of Israel's particularism, or, for that matter, that they are done in a spirit of self-assertion or self-righteousness) that they are excluded, but because the assigning of a role to human works of *any* kind would mean that God's purposes were not being achieved through his own gracious election: and it is through gracious election, which programmatically excludes consideration of human endeavour, that God has determined to act.³²⁶

The exclusion of *all* human activity, or, in Paul's words, “anything good or bad” (9:11) guards “God's purpose in election” (9:11) and ensures that God's “calling” (9:11) is the decisive factor in naming his people, not human effort.

³²⁵ Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” 228.

³²⁶ Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” 228–229.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to evaluate my reading with respect to the points of which I am more confident as well as those of which I am less certain. First, to understand Rom 9:6-18 as the divine response to *Paul's* wish (9:3) is amply demonstrated by the following: (1) Paul's scriptural interpretation which excludes *fleshly* descent (9:8) from engendering the children of God is a response to Paul's desire for his “kinsmen according to the *flesh*” (9:4). (2) Rom 9:1-5 gives Paul's words, whereas Rom 9:6-18 gives God's words. This coheres with my argument that in 9:6-18 Paul has set up God as the respondent to Paul's anguish and intercession (9:1-5). (3) The use of Moses' intercession (Ex 32:32) and God's response to Moses (Ex 33:19) to frame Rom 9:1-18 agrees with my suggestion that 9:6-18 is a response to Paul (9:1-5). (4) Paul's use of God's words to Abraham's distress over the banishment of Ishmael (9:7) matches my suggestion that 9:6-18 is God's response to Paul's angst over Israel. I grant that not all of these points are equally forceful. But the totality confirms my suggestion that here we have a collision between Paul's desire (9:1-5) and God's will (9:6-18).

What about my suggestion of reading Mal 1:2-3 alongside Gen 25:28 such that God's preference for Jacob collides with Isaac's love for Esau? I have not added this as further support to the general contours of my reading above. I grant that this part of my reading is less certain because it requires an imaginative leap to Gen 25:28 on the part of the reader. However, as the example of Jubilees has shown, the prominence that I have ascribed to Gen 25:28 is historically warranted. Other interpreters at the time of Paul

(such as Jubilees) capitalized on this terse verse and emphasized the conflict between Isaac's preference for Esau and God's preference for Jacob with God being the victor. Furthermore, when Rom 9:10-13 is read in the context of God's responses to Moses (9:3, 15), Abraham (9:7), and ultimately to Paul (9:6-18), my proposal that Paul uses Mal 1:2-3 as the divine response to Isaac (9:13) is not incredible.

In Romans 9:1-18, Paul has carefully used Scripture to shape his discourse. He repeatedly invokes God's responses to biblical figures who are in distress and have a particular desire. In so doing he addresses his own grief and desire for the salvation of his fellow Israelites. But to his insistence on his fellow Israelites grounded in their fleshly kinship to him and fleshly descent from Abraham, God responds that fleshly descent is not determinative (9:7-9); God's promise is effective and it is *predominantly* Gentiles who are children of the promise. The example of Jacob and Esau continue the drama of the conflict of wills. Isaac's preference for Esau is frustrated by God's love for Jacob (9:13); Paul's desire for his fellow Israelites is frustrated by God's love for Gentiles. Finally, Moses' request for the forgiveness of Israel (9:3) is answered by God (9:15). Again God's will is shown to be ultimate (9:15-18). Paul's desire for Israel's election conflicts with God's will because the divine will operates differently – irrespective of descent or deed. The resolution to the conflict between Paul's desire and God's will is surprising. Like Moses, Paul's striving for his people is finally granted and Paul can conclude “And so all Israel will be saved” (11:26).

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