

## ROMANS 7 AND THE SPLIT BETWEEN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

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### 1. *Introduction*

The proliferation of literature on Romans 7 is inspired by a variety of reasons, ranging from personal agendas to shifts in theological and historical perspectives. The passage itself seems to raise more questions than it answers with regard to its place within the epistle as a whole, as well as with issues within the context of the element in Roman society to which it was addressed. Layer after layer of possibilities unravels which seem, at best, to point to enigmas. While not seeking to add to the confusion, it is inevitable new approaches will be built on the old, and that conclusions formed will have implications that extend, not only into Pauline literature as a whole, but into one's understanding of Christianity as it evolved—particularly in the early stages.

Although many scholars have approached Romans, and Romans 7, from a historical perspective, boundaries imposed have either been too tight to allow much meaningful insight into the situation, or selectively broadened in order to support a particular theory on the text. It is true, too, that historical information, particularly with regard to the Christian church at Rome, is ambiguous enough to preclude dogmatic assertions. Yet historical information can be pieced together sufficiently to allow some degree of accuracy. One issue that clearly emerges from both the historical evidence and text of Paul's epistle is the issue of Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian coexistence. Though it would be stretching the point to suggest that there was any animosity, or even any fundamental disagreement in their common bond of faith, historical circumstance and questions about the proper expression of that faith conspired together to create a breach that, while evident in later history, was certainly foreshadowed in events leading to Paul's writing of Romans. This split then,

between Judaism and Christianity, or rather the nascent elements of an impending split, places the epistle and the chapter on relatively steady historical grounds. Indeed, the pertinent question directing the historical research becomes, as Stanley Porter and Brook Pearson pose it, not “‘Why did Jews and Christians split?’”, but rather, “‘Whatever happened to Jewish Christianity?’”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Background Issues

Romans 7 cannot be properly assessed without beginning with questions about the occasion of the epistle as a whole. Though the circumstances in the church at Rome have no parallel, and cannot be precisely determined, it can be suggested that the Christianity in Rome, like the Judaism in Rome, was shaped by Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> And, like the Judaism in Rome, Christianity there had no central organization to dictate a unified doctrine before 57 CE.<sup>3</sup> This problem was overcome in the Judaism of Rome through a unity of the faith that was the result of a strong alliance with the Judaism of Jerusalem. Claudius’ edict against the Jews in 49 CE, and the subsequent reestablishment of the Jewish community after his death in 54 CE, posed a special problem for the Jewish Christians—who were likely the main target of the expulsion.<sup>4</sup> Logistical difficulties in Luke’s contention that Claudius expelled ‘all the Jews’ (πάντας τοὺς

1. S.E. Porter and B.W.R. Pearson, ‘Why the Split? Christians and Jews by the Fourth Century’, *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000), pp. 82-119 (114).

2. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 36; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 4. Other sources include F.J. Foakes-Jackson, *Peter: Prince of Apostles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), pp. 195-96; F.F. Bruce, *The Dawn of Christianity* (London: Paternoster, 1950), p. 156.

3. See W. Wiefel, ‘The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity’, in K.P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), pp. 100-119 (108).

4. Porter and Pearson’s point that there is no evidence that Christians were compelled to leave Rome (‘Why the Split?’, p. 102) is well taken but, balanced against this, is the impracticality of expelling such large numbers of Jews. J. Ross Wagner suggests that historical reconstruction is problematic since ‘there are compelling reasons to doubt that an expulsion of Jews on such a large scale ever took place’ in *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul ‘In Concert’ in the Letter to the Romans* (NovTSup, 101; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), p. 34.

Ἰουδαίους) are overcome by understanding that it would be in keeping with Roman policy to expel all the Jews who were not Roman citizens for their proselytizing activities (as had apparently happened in 19 CE).<sup>5</sup> Even taking into consideration Scot McKnight's well-reasoned argument that 'Judaism did have its occasional evangelists, but these appear to have been few and far between (Rome?)',<sup>6</sup> it can still be reasoned that the arrival of Christianity altered the dynamic, and that those Christians in Rome, who were distinctive by virtue of being Jews, were the object of the expulsion. Thus, when the Jewish Christians returned to Rome, they returned to a situation wherein Gentile Christianity had likely made advances outside of the synagogue.<sup>7</sup> This circumstantial shift in balance foreshadowed a regular pattern as Christianity expanded under the likes of Peter, James and Paul, notably in 'the shift from early Christianity being a predominantly Jewish group to one with a large non-Jewish or Gentile contingent'.<sup>8</sup> And, even though the formal practice of Jewish Christianity in Rome could withstand the change in circumstance, the advance of the message of freedom from the law for the Gentile Christians must have given the Jewish Christians cause for concern. The supersessionist position<sup>9</sup> finds better fodder for its theory in the letter addressed to Rome where, we contend, the Judaism was more closely tied to the Judaism of Jerusalem, than it would have been in the letters addressed to Christians in Asia Minor, where other factors affecting the nature of the Judaism there (and the Christian adaptations of these variations) must be taken into consideration.<sup>10</sup> We would therefore expect that the discussion of law would be at the heart of Paul's message to the

5. James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WCB, 38; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), pp. xlviii-xlix; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 77.

6. Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 75.

7. Wiefel, 'The Jewish Community', p. 113, argues that the subsequent majority of Gentile Christians were therefore addressed by Paul in order to help them 'live together with the Jewish Christians in one congregation'.

8. Porter and Pearson, 'Why the Split?', p. 84.

9. Supersessionism 'essentially holds to the view that whatever merits Judaism had had, Christianity supplanted it'. Porter and Pearson, 'Why the Split?', p. 90. Porter and Pearson offer an excellent summary of supersessionism in their discussion of the split (pp. 90-95).

10. Barry F. Parker, 'Paul's Language Concerning Law in Galatians 3 and Romans 7 in the Light of Historical Factors' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1986), pp. 45-170.

church at Rome. Indeed, no other New Testament writing comes close to Romans in its exhaustive treatment of the subject of law. The future of Jewish Christianity rested, in part, on the success of Paul's rhetoric on law in Romans generally and, in particular, at the crux of the argument as it unfolds in Romans 7.

Romans 7 must then be approached through the Roman Christian understanding of law. On the evidence, we might suspect that Roman Judaism in the first century was representative of Judaism as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, there would be internal differences, but such differences would not necessarily indicate that Roman Judaism was a divergent form of Judaism. On the contrary, the insignificance of any differences between the Judaism of Jerusalem and the Judaism of Rome is demonstrated in that the entire spectrum of the Christian faith was initially absorbed into a dominant mainstream Jewish community in Rome (as in Jerusalem and contrary to the situation in Asia Minor, where the faith established itself from the onset in the Gentile community). There is no sign of a noteworthy segment of dissension. Romans, insofar as it appeals to the Jewish Christians at Rome, may be understood as a Jewish treatise as well as a Christian gospel. Paul would be cautious in his approach to the Jewish Christians in Rome, for to attack specific errors in one group or another would be to disregard the more conservative Judaism of the majority. Besides, Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. A large Gentile audience would naturally be urged to adopt this cautious approach as well. There is no substantial indication of factions between the Jewish and Gentile elements of the Roman church, let alone any anti-Semitism.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in a church that experienced such upheavals, doctrinal questions would arise. Since these upheavals were affected by

11. This is not to ignore the diversity of Judaism in the first century. It is argued that first-century Jewish society should be described in terms of 'Judaisms'. Richard A. Horsley, 'General Introduction', in Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 1-8 (7). Similarly, J. Neusner, *Studying Classical Judaism: A Primer* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 33. The distinction is better made, however, between the Judaism of Jerusalem and that of the Diaspora—Rome being the notable exception because of its direct line to Jerusalem.

12. Contra N.T. Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans', in Leander E. Keck *et al.* (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible. X. Acts; Introduction to Epistolary Literature; Romans; 1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 393-770 (407); and Wiefel, who sees the Gentile Christian anti-Semitic attitude as shaped by the culture in Rome ('The Jewish Community', *passim*).

the balance of Jews and Gentiles, the question of the law, particularly freedom from the law, would be among the most prominent.

By asking the right questions about the occasion of the epistle and about the issues of law that would rise from such circumstances, one can begin to formulate more specific questions about the purpose of Romans. Günter Klein, though rejecting the view that Romans attempts to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians, suggests that Romans provides the church in Rome with apostolic foundation.<sup>13</sup> Raymond Brown's strong disagreement with Klein is threefold. First, Brown notes the church's obvious contact with apostolic Christianity prior to Paul's epistle. Secondly, he notes that Paul would not praise the faith of the Roman community if he denied that it was a proper church. Third, Brown notes the existence of house churches.<sup>14</sup> But the value of this critique depends on what we mean by 'church' at Rome. That Paul was compelled to give these churches apostolic foundation *after the fact* says nothing against an existing, thriving church at Rome—though, like the synagogue before it, it was without central organization. Whether Paul was, in fact, trying to reconcile Gentiles with Jews is secondary to whether he was trying to reconcile Jews to the gospel of freedom from the law for Gentiles. If he were not, then he was ignorant of the needs of the Jews in Rome. Yet, if nothing else, the close ties between the Jews of Rome and the Jews of Jerusalem suggest that Paul was well informed. The epistle itself confirms this. We must therefore conclude that the cause of the Jewish Christian at Rome was central to Paul's appeal to the Roman church.

Historical data cannot supply the details of the occasion and purpose of Romans. Neither can it define the intricacies of Roman Christian understanding of law. Indeed, the historical data cannot even provide dogmatic evidence of the composition of the Roman church at the time that Romans was written. Nevertheless, with the historical data, we can still provide a basis for approaching Paul's discussion of law in Romans. The extensive Jewish community in Rome, with its high level commitment to the Judaism of Jerusalem and Judea, cannot be ignored in any attempt to explain the phenomenon of Roman Christianity. There can be

13. Günter Klein, 'Paul's Purpose in Writing the Epistle to the Romans', in Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate*, pp. 32-49 (42-49).

14. Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), pp. 115-16 n. 239.

little doubt that, in general, the Jewish community at Rome adopted a mainstream attitude (that is, the attitude prevalent in Jerusalem) concerning the significance of law. Even if Paul's discussion of law were directed to a Gentile audience, it would have been an audience nurtured in this same attitude. In effect, the fact that there was a large Gentile contingent (proselyte or otherwise) in the originally Jewish-Christian church at Rome made the issue of law more pressing.<sup>15</sup> Such an issue would have come to a head when the balance of power within the church shifted, temporarily at least, into Gentile hands. The Jewish-Christian segment of the church at Rome would require immediate answers to questions concerning the continued value of the law.

A further consideration for Paul in his discussion of the law with the church at Rome would be the extent of its influence. The Jewish community was conducive to the growth of the Christian faith. A number of factors contributed to this. First, there was the fluency of the communication between Jerusalem and Rome. It is hard to imagine that this communication network would have bypassed Christianity for very long. Secondly, Roman Judaism not only resisted outside influences, but exerted its own influence on Roman society: indirectly through its penetration into various levels of social and political spheres, and possibly (at least, more possibly in Rome than elsewhere in the Empire) through what might be described, in broad terms, as proselytism. Although there was not necessarily any active campaign on the part of Jews to proselytize the Gentiles, there was 'a serious openness by Judaism to Gentiles to participate in Judaism at the level desired by individual Gentiles'.<sup>16</sup> Such openness, whether or not it can actually be described as proselytism, provided an atmosphere in which the Christian gospel could be accelerated into the heart of Roman society. The organizational forms inherited by the Christians also facilitated this growth. There would be little censure on Christianity, and the Christian house churches, into which the faith at Rome was born, were the by-products of the complex synagogue system. The foreign quarters at Rome, where the bulk of the Christian community was located, were an ideal focal point for propagating the Christian message into other segments of the

15. Although unnecessarily introducing the concept of anti-Jewish sentiment that he believes gives rise to the discussion of law, Wright is nonetheless correct in stating that 'The historical sequence produces a situation into which Romans fits like a glove' ('The Letter to the Romans', p. 406).

16. McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles*, p. 117.

Empire. Paul's discussion of the law, therefore, though pertaining directly to the Jewish Christians at Rome, would necessarily appeal to the spectrum of the faith.

Paul's immediate focus, however, is on the church at Rome. There is no basis for assuming that it was only the Jewish-Christian segment of the church that concerned him but, in any case, there would be no need for Paul to make his language palatable to the pagan mind—for few in the church of Rome would have been unfamiliar with Christianity's Jewish heritage. Therefore it is plausible that Paul could, at points in *Romans*, fall into an easy dialogue with the Jews. If it is true that *Romans* itself gives Rome its apostolic foundation then, whether or not Paul was aware of any divergent views of the law held by the Roman Christians, he would still approach the issue dialogically, without concern for particular heresies, appealing to a general view.

With the ties between Jerusalem and Rome so strong, and with the Jewish population's openness to Gentiles so prominent in Rome, Paul undoubtedly had many insights into the situation there. These insights would be reinforced by Paul's self-admitted contacts with members of the Christian congregation there—which, too, would give force to the dialogical thrust of his discussion of law. We would expect Paul's language to betray his insight into the situation concerning the Jewish heritage of the church through its adaptation and application of traditional Jewish thought. The task of expounding the law to the mixed congregation was a task particularly suited to the Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles. In *Romans* especially, Paul's heartfelt love of his own Jewish heritage could be given full expression. Yet in *Romans*, too, Paul could explore the full implications of freedom from the law—a doctrine undoubtedly current among those Gentiles who had bypassed the Jewish faith in their acceptance of the gospel. Such a major disparity in perspective, especially in light of the ever-increasing imbalance in favour of the Gentile Christians, would seem to suggest that the Jewish Christians would inevitably fade from the picture. Paul however was not willing to surrender that point. And while the case might be made that 'Paul, or at least his interpretation of the Law, does not fit into the scheme that sees Judaism and early Christianity living in harmony',<sup>17</sup> his bold tack in *Romans* 7 does attempt to create that possibility.

17. Porter and Pearson, 'Why the Split?', p. 110.

### 3. *Romans 7.7-13: Living to the Torah not Knowing Christ*<sup>18</sup>

#### a. *The First Person Singular in Romans 7.1-13*

Although the dialogue with the Jews continues in Rom. 7.7-13, Paul's use of the first person singular throughout this section poses major difficulties for interpreters. T. Dekruyft's comment remains apt: 'The history of the interpretation of Rom. vii is an outstanding example of the fact that the interpretation and evaluation of the linguistic data are influenced, to a notable degree, by the perspective and point of view of the interpreter'.<sup>19</sup> In short, the wrong questions are asked. Nevertheless, by incorporating what we know of the historical data into our interpretation, we may hope to remove ourselves at least one step from our preconceptions. The audience, we have determined, was a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish element of that church would have a background of Judaism not far removed from the Judaism of Jerusalem and Palestine. Further, 7.1-6 indicates that this portion of the epistle is directed pointedly to the Jews.<sup>20</sup> Still, there is a problem with Paul's use of the first person singular.

Both the frequency of the use of the first person singular, and the intensity of the anguish and frustration displayed, suggest that the

18. Not 'knowing' Christ is posited here in the sense of aspect that Stanley Porter unfolds in the aorist of not 'knowing' sin in Rom. 7.7: 'Paul says he did not know (ἔγνων) sin unless through the law, for he did not know (ἤθειν) desire unless the law said... In the ἔγνων clause Paul specifically lists the means of acquisition, the law. In the clause using the Pluperfect, understanding the negation is crucial. He in effect says that he was not in a state of knowledge of desire, without reference to the acquisition of it.' See S.E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood* (Studies in Biblical Greek, 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 286.

19. T. Dekruyft, 'The Perspective of Romans VII', in T. Baarda and W.C. van Unnik (eds.), *Miscellanea Neotestamentica* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 127-41 (127).

20. The first person pronoun, initiated in v. 4, is confirmed in v. 5, demonstrating Paul's solidarity with the Jews in the case that he wants to present: *the actualization of sin through the Torah in the history of Israel*. The one 'in the flesh' needs a catalyst to actualize the potential for sin, and that catalyst is the Torah, reinforcing the fact that this portion of the letter concerns the Jewish Christians who had *consciously* lived under the Torah. See D.W. Oostendorp, *Another Jesus* (Kampen: Kok, 1967), p. 84 n. 8.



reference here is, to some extent, personal.<sup>21</sup> Such confessional utterance is paralleled in the Old Testament in the penitential Psalms,<sup>22</sup> and also in Qumran.<sup>23</sup> The rhetorical view, on the other hand, by arguing that Paul is implying a style form indicating a general situation, is more appropriate for both the contents and context of Rom. 7.7-25. W.G. Kümmel (whose *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* brought the autobiographical view into serious question)<sup>24</sup> gives evidence of ‘I’ as a *Stilform* from Talmudic sources,<sup>25</sup> though some shadow of doubt may be cast on the value of these references in the opinion of Longenecker<sup>26</sup> and, more strongly, Douglas Moo, who states that ‘this use of *egō* is not frequent in Paul and almost always occurs in conditional or hypothetical statements—a far cry from the sustained narrative and descriptive use in 7.7-25’.<sup>27</sup> Moo therefore concludes that the first person is ‘Paul in solidarity with Israel’.<sup>28</sup> In fact, *the parallel uses of the first person in Jer. 10.19-22; Mic. 7.7-10; Lam. 1.9-22; 2.20-22 and Pss. Sol. 1.1-26 actually represent Jerusalem and Israel*. There has already begun a more personal identification with the Jews with the use of the first person plural

21. Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of the Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup, 76; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 233, observes: ‘The usual question put to the text, whether it reflects the preconversion or post-conversion Paul, misses the decisive element of Paul’s use of the ἐγώ. He here portrays himself, according to a pattern found in early Jewish penitential prayer and confession, from the limited perspective of his intrinsic soteriological resources.’

22. See W. Manson, *Jesus and the Christian* (London: James Clark, 1967), p. 150. While making this point, however, Manson notes the contradiction that such an interpretation involves: the objectification of an existential situation. E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. G.W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 193, states that, in fact, the Old Testament Psalms of thanksgiving (along with various Qumran literature) confirm the *rhetorical* nature of these verses.

23. For a specific treatment of the Qumran parallels, see H. Braun, ‘Römer 7.7-25 und das Selbst-Verständnis des Qumran-Frommen’, in his *Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testamentum und seine Umwelt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), *passim*.

24. W.G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (Leipzig: J.G. Hinrich, 1929), republished in its entirety in W.G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und das Bild des Menschen im Neuen Testament* (Munich: Kaiser, 1974), pp. ix-xx, 1-160.

25. Kümmel, *Römer 7*, pp. 128-32.

26. R.N. Longenecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 88.

27. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 427.

28. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 431. Moo, however, qualifies this conclusion in a manner inconsistent with the text. See below.

in vv. 4-6. Further, Romans 9–11 demonstrates the depths of Paul's feelings of identification with the Jews. N.T. Wright offers a convincing argument that it is 'the strange plan of God to deal with sin by collecting it in one place and condemning it there',<sup>29</sup> but, while it may be true that the focus does ultimately narrow to Israel's representative,<sup>30</sup> the application is universal and Israel is just an appropriate (and extremely relevant) illustration. Nonetheless, it would not make sense for Paul to appeal so specifically to his readers in 7.1-6 only to focus upon himself. Therefore, though what Paul relates may be true of himself (and very dramatically so), it is not peculiar to himself<sup>31</sup> and, as Wright states, 'It is sin, in the humanity which the Jew shares with everyone else, that is the problem from which he or she needs to be delivered'.<sup>32</sup>

The law remains the focus of Rom. 7.7-25. Paul introduces the concept of dying to the Torah in 7.7-25, and follows this with the concept of living to the Spirit in ch. 8. For many of Paul's critics, the possibility of such a connection demonstrates the extent to which Paul has dissociated the Torah from the covenant. For Bultmann, the problem is that, in being zealous for the law, one becomes dependent on one's own efforts and increases the schism between humanity and God.<sup>33</sup> The key, however, lies in Rom. 5.20, where we learn that, with the advent of the Torah, sin increased.<sup>34</sup> *The origins of this process and its effects upon the Jews, are the focus of Rom. 7.7-13.* Paul's approach to the issue through the first person singular is either personal, rhetorical or what we might call 'salvation-historical' or 'redemptive historical'.

29. N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 198.

30. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 196.

31. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith*, p. 148, correctly observes: 'Since Paul here identifies himself with his readers, his following first-person singular statements suggest that he is speaking of himself in a typical or representative manner. And even more importantly, in both 7:7-13 and 7:14-25, Paul describes the encounter of a human being with the Law.'

32. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 199.

33. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; London: SCM Press, 1952), I, pp. 264-69.

34. See Seifrid, *Justification by Faith*, p. 151, who states that Paul's 'construal of sin as "power" which has completely overcome the human being is not simply a product of Paul's postconversion soteriology. It has roots in his preconversion experience of rebellion against the Law.'

b. *Three Approaches to Romans 7.7-13*

The personal or autobiographical view, though inappropriate if understood in pre- or post-conversion terms, provides an important perspective when it is understood to reflect Paul's Jewish childhood.<sup>35</sup> The narrative, in this understanding, describes Paul's attaining the status of *bar mitzvah*. The commandment, not to covet, concerns the sin of sexual lust, which becomes active in Paul at about that time.<sup>36</sup> Though it is the message of the law, received in his conscience at the time of becoming *bar mitzvah*, that stimulates his concupiscence.

There are, however, major problems with this perspective. First, it is difficult to accept that Paul considers his childhood to be 'apart from the law'. Further, it is difficult to explain the dramatic tones of Paul's discussion over such an issue as adolescent sexual lust. Nonetheless, when the three periods of Paul's life, as understood in this view, are interpreted in terms of the *yêtzet hâra'* (evil impulse), Paul's argument falls more easily into place. The first period, the age of innocence, is the age when the *yêtzet hâra'* has free reign. The second period, the becoming *bar mitzvah*, is the age in which the *yêtzet hâra'* encounters opposition in the form of law. The third period corresponds to the delivery from the *yêtzet hâra'* through the Spirit—contrary to the rabbinic view that the law grants such deliverance. Yet, even in this analysis, the autobiographical view does not overcome the difficulty of explaining Paul's need to focus Jewish attention upon his own inward condition. And, though it does demonstrate a progression in Paul's thoughts, there is no basis on which to defend the view that Paul was even concerned with becoming *bar mitzvah*. Nevertheless, two points arise. First, *Paul's personal affiliation with the conflict described cannot be denied*. Secondly, as an examination of vv. 14-25 will further demonstrate, *the rabbinic concept of yêtzet hâra' is never far from Paul's thoughts in Rom. 7.7-25*.

35. For this view, see W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977 [1895]), p. 180; C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936 [1932]), pp. 110-13. W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1979 [1949]), pp. 24-31.

36. See R.H. Gundry, 'The Moral Frustration of Paul before his Conversion: Sexual Lust in Romans 7.7-25', in D.A. Hagner and M.J. Harris (eds.), *Pauline Studies* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), pp. 228-45. Gundry understands 'apart from the law' in the restrictive sense of 'the absence of the tenth commandment in Paul's prepuberal boyhood' (p. 232).

A wide variety of commentators are in agreement with the view that Romans 7 has personal significance, though with general implications.<sup>37</sup> Many see these general implications expressed in terms of the fall of Adam. There are both general and specific bases for this understanding. The frequency of Paul's references to the early chapters of Genesis within the corpus of his letters is unparalleled in Jewish literature apart from the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament. In Romans, generally, the theme is centered, to a large extent, on the early chapters of Genesis. In the first chapter of Romans, as Morna Hooker points out, both the language and the sequence of events connect the chapter to the narrative of Adam in Genesis 1–3.<sup>38</sup> In Romans 1, the fall is described 'in terms of (a) idolatry, (b) sexual license and perversion, (c) wickedness in general'.<sup>39</sup> Rabbinic tradition, in similar fashion, supports the view that the fall is associated with sexual desire, and that 'at the fall Adam lost the glory of God which had hitherto been reflected in his face'.<sup>40</sup> In Romans 7, we find a specific application of some of these general themes. Though Adam is not specifically named, the persons of the two narratives bear a strong resemblance. A pointed allusion to the fall (Gen. 3.13) may be detected in Paul's use of ἐξηπάτησεν (v. 11), if it is understood in conjunction with its use in 2 Cor. 11.3 and 1 Tim. 2.14. The allusion to death inflicted by sin may be understood in terms of the divine prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: 'for in the day that you eat of it you shall die' (Gen. 2.17).<sup>41</sup> The direct reference to the commandment in the Decalogue, 'You shall not covet' (Rom. 7.7b), is also seen as a summary prohibition in Gen. 2.17 since receiving of that tree is viewed as receiving the law in whole,<sup>42</sup> and pre-Pauline tradition similarly understands this Mosaic commandment as a summary of the

37. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 424–31, provides a good overview of the three views and the combination of views, though he presents them as four views, separating the Adamic view from the rhetorical view. Dunn's summary (*Romans 1–8*, pp. 463–65), however, seems to be lacking a clear definition of the redemptive historical view.

38. M.D. Hooker, 'Adam in Romans 1', *NTS* 4 (1959–1960), pp. 297–306 (300).

39. Hooker, 'Adam in Romans 1', p. 301.

40. Hooker, 'Adam in Romans 1', p. 305; cf. Rom. 3.23.

41. E.E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. I Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), I, p. 421, notes: 'The story of Adam and his prohibition of eating the fruit of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" establishes unequivocally the casual nexus between sin and punishment'.

42. See 2 Esd. 7.11.

law.<sup>43</sup> The immediate context of Paul's argument in Rom. 7.7-13 suggests that Adam is in view. Longenecker states that 'Here, in the cry "sin deceived me", we have the Adam of Romans 5 finding his voice'.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the appeal of the Adamic interpretation, in which we can well explain how sin is aroused and the ἐγὼ is put to death, the central issue of the Torah is not adequately explained. Other problems arise concerning the period of time that the ἐγὼ was without law, the apparent existence of sin before the commandment and the fact that Adam is not actually named. Also it is difficult to understand how the period of the law could be seen as beginning at the fall. In Rom. 7.7-13, Paul speaks of the effect of sin as death in unqualified terms. In this sense, it would be appropriate for Paul to make use of the fall narrative to emphasize the devastation of sin more fully than he could with a reference to the giving of Torah on its own. There is a graphic transition: sin, in awakening desire, the urge to live, kills me and, as I die, sin comes alive. The Adamic interpretation must assume that sin existed from the beginning but, as Conzelmann observes: 'The recollection of Adam is in fact simply a means of representation in order to describe the moment of encounter'.<sup>45</sup>

Paul's preceding argument has conveyed the impression that the Torah may actually be directly connected to sin. But the intention of the giving of the commandment is obviously not to provide a negative backdrop for salvation by faith. The Torah is given so that the Torah should be obeyed. The question posed in Rom. 7.7 as to whether the Torah should be identified with sin is answered by an examination of the interaction between sin and Torah. *The role of sin in living to the Torah, not knowing Christ, is vividly portrayed in the Adamic interpretation, but it is the role of Torah that calls for further clarification.*

It is the 'redemptive-historical' view (that is, the view that the first person singular represents the theological history of Israel) that most clearly focuses on the problem of Torah in Rom. 7.7-13. This view utilizes the historical data that can be established, and the importance of utilizing the historical data in approaching the entire chapter cannot be

43. E.g. *4 Macc.* 2.4-6.

44. Longenecker, *Paul*, p. 93.

45. H. Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 233.

overemphasized.<sup>46</sup> Whom Paul is addressing and the circumstances of the epistle dictate our approach to what Paul is saying. Paul's language not only fits the historical occasion, but demonstrates the profound nature of the issue at hand.<sup>47</sup> The questions raised by a Jewish Christian leaving a Jewish-Christian church and returning to a Gentile-Christian church are of apocalyptic proportions. The same questions would not, and apparently did not, arise in an essentially Gentile congregation. Paul, in this instance, resorts to broad salvation historical illustrations rather than just offering some emotional stopgaps. Thus, Paul is concerned with the Jewish audience for this segment of the epistle. This position is not countered by Paul's specific references to Gentile members of the church or even his own declared role as Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 1.5). There is no reason even to posit that here he was addressing the Gentiles explicitly with a view to being 'overheard by Jewish Christians in the Roman congregations'.<sup>48</sup> Precisely the opposite may well be the case. This chapter, in particular, presumes a sophistication in the Judaism of Paul's audience which would coincide with the mainstream Judaism of Jerusalem and Judea. Particularly in dialogue with the Jews, it is natural to expect that Paul should view the Torah as God's special gift to Israel. The analogous elements apparent in comparing Rom. 7.7-13 to the fall narrative assume a different form in the redemptive-historical view: *Sin's revival corresponds to power it assumes from the Torah. The death of the ἐγὼ simply elaborates on Israel's changed status, and the life of the ἐγὼ is related to the period before the coming of the Torah* (cf. Rom. 5.13).

46. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 22, states that when we 'focus so much on specific local and personal situations... we miss the larger theological and philosophical concerns'. But those broader questions come to the forefront when we approach Romans 7 in this manner.

47. Contra Leander Keck, 'What Makes Romans Tick?', in David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (eds.), *Pauline Theology. III. Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 3-29 (29), who states that Paul 'did not allow his immediate situation to govern completely what he had to say' and instead subjected 'his readers to a certain amount of overkill'.

48. Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 36. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 79, correctly notes that Paul 'regards the whole community as particularly close to Jerusalem's church', and that Romans is 'not an abstract, dogmatic treatise or dialogue with the Jews who do not accept his gospel', but is 'intended for discussion by the Jewish and Gentile Christians of Rome, for their understanding and their conduct'.

Paul asks if the Torah is sin in Rom. 7.7a, and it logically follows that the Torah is in view when he develops his defense in 7.7b-13. The narrative must relate, in the first instance, to the giving of Torah at Sinai. This clearly directs the discussion into Jewish quarters where it was directed in throughout the initial verses of Romans 7. The language of Rom. 7.7-13 must therefore be understood, in the first place, in the fullness of ‘Paul’s apparently objective language’,<sup>49</sup> and its historical bent. Nevertheless, Paul’s allusions to the fall narrative, though more subtle, are still evident. And it is through this undercurrent of thought that he is able to stress vividly the role of sin in its utilization of the commandment (ἐντολή) in a manner likewise unmistakable to his Jewish readers. Thus he draws together the divergent threads of 5.12-21: On the primary level, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, sin is not imputed (ἐλλόγεται) before the event, and then becomes manifest in the sins (ἁμαρτία) of Israel; on the secondary level, the giving of the summary commandment to Adam, sin does not exist beforehand and becomes manifest in the transgression (παραβάσεως) of Adam. Death results in both instances.

Finally, it must be maintained that, in Rom. 7.7-13, ‘Paul speaks as one who recognizes his solidarity with the whole history of Israel’.<sup>50</sup> *In that sense, the conflict described is intensely personal*—though that does not mean that Paul’s presentation is also autobiographical in any unique way.<sup>51</sup> Thielman is on the right track when he states that ‘the anguish of the confession and the origin of that anguish in continued disobedience to the law open the possibility that as he wrote Paul was not simply thinking of himself but his people and the biblical story of their disobedience’,<sup>52</sup> but he is too desperate to keep the passage autobiographical and does not take biblical disobedience to the more overarching principle of the fallenness that is highlighted by the law. Still,

49. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 430.

50. Oostendorp, *Another Jesus*, p. 85 n. 9.

51. Contra Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 431, who adds the autobiographical distinction in order to preserve his view on vv. 14-25 (below).

52. Frank Thielman, ‘The Story of Israel and the Theology of Romans 5–8’, in Hay and Johnson (eds.), *Pauline Theology*, III, pp. 169-210 (194). Better is Christopher Bryan, who states that ‘it is perhaps best if we take even “a Jew” in its fullest possible sense: it is as if it were “Israel” itself, God’s own possession, that stands before us in the “I”.’ See his *A Preface to Romans: Notes on the Epistle in Its Literary and Cultural Setting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 141. This argument, however, is (unnecessarily) taken too far when Bryan introduces Thielman’s point.

there is no need to dismiss the idea that the *yêtzet hârâ'* is in view in so far as it is active within Paul personally while living to the Torah. But that is almost incidental. There is a greater emphasis on the tempter in the fall narrative. But that is almost subconscious. *The idea that concerns Paul is sin, resuscitated through the Torah in the history of Israel.* As such, Paul's argument in Rom. 7.7-13 serves the dual purpose of confirming the Jewish-Christian position of reverence for the law within the broad historical context and of opening the case for examining how the continuing problem of sin is addressed in the present era. The ethnic division that Porter and Pearson correctly identify as the primary cause of the split<sup>53</sup> was, perhaps, underestimated by Paul—who continues to weave history and theology together into what must have seemed to him an unassailable case for unity.

#### 4. *Romans 7.14-25: Living to the Torah through Christ*

##### a. *Believer or non-Believer?*

The main difficulty that has inspired such a proliferation of material on Rom. 7.14-25 is determining whether the first person singular (whether Paul himself or a gnomic figure) is here portraying the conflict of the believer or non-believer. Although seemingly advocating the historical redemptive view, scholars have edged away from this perspective by here inserting the distinction of regenerate and unregenerate. Stating that it is an unregenerate person that Paul has in view, Douglas Moo adds that 'Rom. 7:14-25 describes from a personal viewpoint the stage in salvation history that Paul delineates objectively in Gal. 3:19-4:3'.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, though emphasizing that the passage is not 'autobiography', N.T. Wright speaks of 'a specifically *Christian* analysis of the plight of Israel under Torah'.<sup>55</sup> But, from a salvation historical perspective, the issue is the role of the law in the new era and, specifically, the plight of Israel under the Torah. The Christian perspective is not distinguished from the salvation history of Israel. Thus, the shift in tense between 7.13

53. Porter and Pearson, 'Why the Split?', pp. 114-15.

54. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 448.

55. N.T. Wright, 'Romans and the Theology of Paul,' in Hay and Johnson (eds.), *Pauline Theology*, III, pp. 30-67 (51).



and 7.14 is not marked so much by a shift in time as in aspect.<sup>56</sup> Galatians 3 is another issue altogether, wherein Paul's more specialized use of language concerning law does not warrant comparison to these verses in Romans 7.<sup>57</sup> The problems begin when the passage is isolated from the discussion of living to the Torah. As we become further removed from the first century, the text becomes more exclusively personal. There is difficulty in determining the extent of Wrede's assertion that 'the soul strivings of Luther here stood as a model for the portrait of Paul'.<sup>58</sup> Stendahl raises the question as to how far we can attribute Luther's '*simul justus et peccator*' towards 'Paul's conscious attitude of his personal sins'.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the change in tense-form, from aorist to present, between vv. 13 and 14, has been often misconstrued,<sup>60</sup> and has given rise to a series of misinterpretations.<sup>61</sup>

Scholars have revived the view that, in Rom. 7.14-25, the reference is to the Christian. The intensification of Paul's use of the first person

56. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith*, p. 234, adds: 'The change to the present tense in 7:14-25 signals a change to description, but in this instance it is accompanied by a change in time'.

57. Cf. Parker, 'Paul's Language', *passim*. Wright, assuming that the issues in Galatia are issues of legalism, likewise compares the situations in Rome and Galatia, speaking of a 'mirror-opposite'. More difficult than reconciling Paul's language concerning law in those two epistles, however, is reconciling why one group of predominantly Gentile Christians would be legalistically inclined while another group 'were in danger of rejoicing too happily over its apparent demise' (*The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 195).

58. W. Wrede, *Paul* (trans. E. Lummis; London: Phillip Allen, 1907), p. 146. R. Bultmann, 'Christ the End of the Law', in his *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (trans. J.C.G. Grieg; London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 36-66 (53), notes that Luther's own interpretation 'is, indeed, exegetically unsound, but essentially it is not un-Pauline'.

59. K. Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West', in K. Stendahl, *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles and other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 78-96 (82).

60. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 286 n. 27.

61. A long list of these scholars would include J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1959, 1968]); J.I. Packer, 'The "Wretched Man" in Romans 7', in F.L. Cross (ed.), *Studia Evangelica* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), I, pp. 621-27; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*; C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, I (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1977). Cranfield cites in support of his view: Methodius, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Augustine (later works), Aquinas, Luther and Calvin (pp. 345-46).

singular in these verses does, indeed, suggest that the experience described is of immediate relevance to him as a Christian. The change in tense form, despite the overall coherence of the discussion, seems to confirm this view.<sup>62</sup> A struggle emerges that was not apparent when sin launched its attack in 7.7-13. The internal delight in the law (7.22), the final summary of the condition of life under the law (7.25b) and the dilemma of living at the turn of the ages (indeed, of being justified in the flesh), all argue for this view. The majority of these scholars, however, have followed Kümmel's lead in attributing this passage to Christian insight into the non-Christian predicament.<sup>63</sup> Many proponents of this view understand that sin relates to law in 7.7-13 as master. Thus 7.14-25 shows the outworking of 'this fatal connection'<sup>64</sup> in humanity. Despite the change in tense-form, however, there is no definite break in thought between v. 13 and v. 14, and 'although there is a change in verb tense, the transition between 7:13 and 7:14 is too weakly marked to conclude that Paul intends the reader to perceive a shift to a discussion of the Christian'.<sup>65</sup> The dialogue is consistently pursuing the subject of living to the Torah.<sup>66</sup> The view that it is a Christian who is here portrayed suggests something of a relapse.

Before considering the arguments on either side, there are two factors which must be borne in mind. First, we must remember that Rom. 7.14-25 cannot be considered in isolation from ch. 8. The juxtaposition of these chapters should not obscure but sharpen our perspective for interpretation. Secondly, we must be aware of our distance from the text. Christianity has been, since the early centuries, a Gentile religion. Especially in the light of the historical data, it is particularly important not to lose contact with Paul's message to the Jews. Stendahl strikes to the heart of the matter when he reminds us that what happened was that

62. As we shall see, however, the distinction in tense-form here is not one of time, but of aspect. See Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 75-109. Cf. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith*, p. 234.

63. Kümmel, *Römer 7*, pp. 118-19.

64. Günther Bornkamm, 'Sin, Law and Death: An Exegetical Study of Romans 7', in his *Early Christian Experience* (trans. P.L. Hammer; London: SCM Press, 1969), pp. 87-104 (89-90).

65. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith*, p. 232. Seifrid refers here to Gerd Theissen, *Psychologische Aspekte paulinischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), p. 186.

66. Contra Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 473, who sees a shift from confession to apology.

‘the question about the law became the incidental framework around the golden truth of Pauline anthropology’.<sup>67</sup>

b. *The Death Cycle*

The argument in Rom. 7.7-13 establishes that law serves to give knowledge of sin concretely, through the issue of the Torah. Sin, on its side, has worked death through the Torah. *There evolves, as it were, a death cycle: Torah reveals sin which utilizes Torah. The result is death.* The Torah can only reveal sin, it cannot impart righteousness, so the cycle continues. In Rom. 7.14-25, Paul focuses on the dilemma of heightened sensitivity to the Torah which is, in light of this death cycle, heightened sensitivity to sin. Thus it is sin, not anthropology, that is the continued means of Paul’s approach to the Torah. Paul understands sinfulness in terms of Torah disobedience,<sup>68</sup> that is, in contrast to Torah approval and Torah obedience. The problem for Paul is release from the power of sin. For Paul, the power of sin is manifest in the death cycle. It is this cycle that must be broken, for the ἐγώ is torn apart as it cooperates with a power from which, in ever increasing sensitivity to the demands of the Torah, it seeks deliverance.

There is, however, a counterbalance to this death cycle through living to the Spirit which, if only implicit in Rom. 7.14-25, is certainly explicit in ch. 8. Romans 7.7-25, on its own, does not offer the complete picture. In fact, on its own, it is very difficult to decipher exactly what it represents. Nevertheless, looking back to Rom. 7.6 and ahead to its exposition in Romans 8, we detect throughout Rom. 7.7-25 an undercurrent of salvation history, introduced as an ongoing dilemma (vv. 7-13) and brought fully into the forefront at the turn of the ages (vv. 14-25). It is important to note, then, that *the death cycle must be broken through the elimination of sin, not the Torah, which shows that sin in its true light.* Sanders summarizes the problem of Romans 7 as Paul’s ‘continuing theological problem of how to hold together both his native belief that God gave the law and his new conviction that salvation is only by faith in Christ’.<sup>69</sup> Yet, though this is true in so far as it depicts Paul’s positive concern for both law and gospel, and his unmoved conviction that

67. Stendahl, ‘Apostle Paul’, p. 93.

68. There is a parallel to Paul here in Qumran’s consciousness of sin. See Braun, *Römer* 7, p. 105.

69. E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 76-77, cf. p. 81.

salvation is only in Jesus Christ, it improperly juxtaposes law and gospel in a manner alien to the text—particularly Romans 7 and its continued primary emphasis on law and living to the Torah.

The key anthropological term for understanding Paul's language concerning law in Rom. 7.14-25 is σάρξ. Its centrality on this issue must be attributed to association with sin. Whether, on the basis of this association, σάρξ is used descriptively or evaluatively is a matter of some controversy. Notably, Bultmann characterizes σάρξ in terms of revolt (shown in strict adherence to the law).<sup>70</sup> For Bultmann, the flesh is at the base of the attitude of self-reliance which is, in its extreme, an attitude of boasting.<sup>71</sup> This perspective has influenced much subsequent thinking on the issue. J.A.T. Robinson, for example, though careful to point out that σάρξ is the whole person considered from the point of view of his external physical existence,<sup>72</sup> observes that it is man in contrast to God,<sup>73</sup> and is indicative of man's distance from God through his creatureliness as evidenced by his worldliness.<sup>74</sup> As such, σάρξ can have the neutral implication of being in the world, and the sinful implication of being for the world. Like Bultmann, however, Robinson understands σάρξ in terms of self-reliance.<sup>75</sup> Better is Brendan Byrne who observes that the passage 'powerfully depicts the bankruptcy of any attempt to correct moral failing simply through the imposition of an external code where the inner root problem of human life (what Paul calls "flesh" infested with sin) is not addressed. In such a situation, law does not help but only exacerbates the problem all the more'.<sup>76</sup> Yet, while this is true, it is only incidentally so. Paul's focus remains on Israel and Israel's problem with the Torah.

In Rom. 7.14-25, σάρξ is clearly used in contrast to πνεῦμα. This is part of the overall contrast between Rom. 7.7-25, wherein Paul speaks of living to the Torah, and Romans 8, wherein Paul speaks of living to the Spirit. The contrast between σάρξ and πνεῦμα, in this respect, is best

70. Bultmann, *Theology*, I, p. 238.

71. Bultmann, *Theology*, I, pp. 239-46.

72. J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1977 [1952]), pp. 17-18.

73. Robinson, *The Body*, p. 19.

74. Robinson, *The Body*, pp. 20-21.

75. Robinson, *The Body*, pp. 25-26.

76. Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Sacra Pagina, 6; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 230.

illustrated by the words of 8.4: ‘in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh (κατὰ σάρξ) but according to the Spirit (κατὰ πνεῦμα)’. C.K. Barrett interprets σάρξ as ‘the physical part of man’s nature’ as opposed to πνεῦμα ‘as the immaterial side’,<sup>77</sup> but A.C. Thiselton, commenting on Barrett’s remarks and his own conclusions, points out that, although his essay seems to call ‘for a recognition of vagueness or open-endedness in Paul’s language’, it must be noted ‘that we often *choose* to use language vaguely for very good reasons’.<sup>78</sup> Such is undoubtedly the case in Rom. 7.14-25.

If we review the use of ‘flesh’ language in Qumran, for instance, we find a possible link to Paul’s ‘I’-style in Romans 7. In Qumran, ‘flesh’ language is indicative of the creatureliness of humanity, and has the negative connotations which are apparent in Paul’s use of the term σάρξ in Romans 7.<sup>79</sup> The frustrating effect of ‘fleshliness’ is vividly portrayed in Qumran literature in a manner that closely parallels Paul’s conviction of the inadequacy of the flesh.<sup>80</sup> Kuhn notes that ‘In the Qumran setting, the “I” represents the human existence as “flesh” in the sense of man’s belonging to the sphere of the power of the ungodly’.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the member of the Qumran community faces the same dilemma that Paul portrays: he is both ‘flesh and sin’ and ‘the elect of God’.<sup>82</sup>

Closely affiliated with Paul’s use of σάρξ is an implicit description of the *yêtzet hârâ’*<sup>83</sup> Rabbinic tradition traces the origin of the *yêtzet hârâ’* to the fall, though it becomes explicit in 1 Sam. 16.14 where we read

77. C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968), p. 176.

78. A.C. Thiselton, ‘The Meaning of σάρξ in 1 Corinthians 5:5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of Logical and Semantic Factors’, *SJT* 26 (1973), pp. 204-228 (227).

79. See W.D. Davies, ‘Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Flesh and Spirit’, in K. Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1958), pp. 157-82, 276-82 (162).

80. Notably 1QH 1.21-23, 3.24-26, 4.5-40; 1QS 11.6-10.

81. K.G. Kuhn, ‘New Light on Temptation, Sin, and Flesh in the New Testament’, in Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, pp. 94-113, 265-70 (103).

82. 1QS 11.7-10.

83. This doctrine may, in fact, be explicit in Paul’s phrase νόμος τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἐν τοῖς μελεσίν μου. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 26, suggests that φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός (Rom. 8.6) is an almost literal translation of *yêtzet hârâ’*.

concerning Saul that ‘an evil spirit (רוח רעה) from the LORD tormented him’. The Dead Sea Scrolls, in their doctrine of the two spirits in humanity,<sup>84</sup> could also be alluding to Hebrew sources, though a distinct development to that seen in Paul.<sup>85</sup> In Paul, numerous phrases, particularly in Romans 7, may reflect the *yêtzet hâra’*. The distinguishing feature of Paul’s understanding of the *yêtzet hâra’* is that he locates it in the flesh. It is in this feature that Paul’s doctrine of the *yêtzet hâra’* most markedly resembles that of Qumran.

Paul’s certainty concerning the relationship between law and sin in Israel is reflected in the personal tone of Rom. 7.14-25. His cry for the deliverance from sin must be understood, not merely in terms of salvation (for God’s salvation is in view throughout ch. 7), but in terms of deliverance from the flesh that is the seat of the *yêtzet hâra’*—from which there is no escape in the present life. Paul perceives the death cycle even in the Christian life. Indeed, the Christian life is characterized throughout Paul’s writings by the weakness, suffering and death which, as Dunn observes, ‘is the necessary concomitant to the experience of the Spirit in the present, and an indispensable part of the process of salvation’.<sup>86</sup> Whereas 7.7-13 spoke of Israel’s ongoing condition, 7.14-25 dramatically reflects the tension so acute for Israel between the ages. The focus is unswervingly upon the Torah. And, in discussing why ‘the holy law cannot by itself function in the Christian life’,<sup>87</sup> Paul has the Jewish Christian in view whose special interest is still in living to the Torah.

Although in Rom. 7.14-25 Paul isolates the law from the Spirit to a certain extent, his language does not suggest that he is viewing the law, or indeed himself, independently from the Spirit. Though it is true that, in 7.14-25, Paul recognizes that “‘I of myself” am unable to measure up to the law of God or gain victory’,<sup>88</sup> the dilemma is more profound. It is the recognition that, *even with the advent of the Spirit in the life of Israel, the death cycle remains unbroken—indeed, it is accelerated*. The Jew who rejoices in the law is described, not ‘looking back, from his Christian understanding, to the situation of himself, and other Jews like

84. Note, e.g., 1QS, *passim*.

85. See Davies, ‘Flesh and Spirit’, p. 182.

86. J.D.G. Dunn, ‘Rom. 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul’, *TZ* 31 (1975), pp. 257-73 (269).

87. Oostendorp, *Another Jesus*, p. 86.

88. Longenecker, *Paul*, p. 112.

him, living under the law of Moses<sup>89</sup> — as if that law is now obsolete — but with Christian *identity* and, with that, the Christian solution.<sup>90</sup> Israel is in the throes of death, but in that death there is new life. For though sin has used the law to bring death, Christ has used death to bring life. Paul expands this thought in ch. 8, where he describes Israel's present condition and future hope in the Spirit. In 7.14-25, however, the life of Israel under the law is examined under the revealing light of the Holy Spirit.

### 5. Conclusions

The available evidence concerning Jews in Rome indicates a remarkably close tie with the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea. In fact, *at the time that Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, Roman Judaism could be seen as a microcosm of mainstream Judaism rather than being aligned with the 'Judaisms' of the diaspora.* The Jews in Rome had been subject to Roman persecution from early on as a result of their proselytizing activities. Though the initial form of Christianity in Rome, as in Jerusalem, was Jewish, Gentile Christians would have taken over as the dominant force in Roman Christianity when the Jews were expelled from Rome under Claudius for proselytizing. With the return of the Jews under Nero, however, the Christian church would have consisted of large numbers of both Jews and Gentiles. *The critical issue of concern for the Jews in such a setting would be the doctrine of freedom from the law.*

Paul's discussion of the law in Romans 7 is, therefore, directed to mainstream Judaism. He does not waiver from this topic, nor does he compromise his argument by using νόμος to mean anything other than 'Torah' throughout this passage.<sup>91</sup> His aim was not to confront, but to persuade. Paul's language in Romans 7 is steeped in Jewish references and underlying Jewish imagery. *In essence, Paul makes an appeal to the Christian Jew who, as the natural heir of the salvation history of Israel, had found that, even at the turn of the ages, the conflict between*

89. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 448-49.

90. Seifrid's point (*Justification by Faith*, pp. 236-37) is not entirely out of place here: 'The fundamental distinction between the believing Paul and the ἐγώ is not temporal, i.e. the ἐγώ is not what Paul once was: it is what he still is, intrinsically considered'.

91. Correctly, Wright, 'Romans and the Theology of Paul,' p. 50; Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 199.

*the continued demands of the Torah and one's own continued vulnerability to sin and death does not appear to have been resolved. For conciliatory purposes, in Romans 7 Paul discusses salvation history by means of familiar Jewish terms and images in order to persuade those with a mainstream approach to the Torah of the superior value in the way of the Spirit. Paul defends the Jewish understanding of law, indeed, through it, 'binds the whole letter into a cohesive and powerful restatement of Jewish covenant theology in the light of Christ'.<sup>92</sup>*

As might be argued for Paul's ministry as a whole, the rhetoric of Romans 7 is 'good on paper'. The success of Paul's presentation in Romans 7 must be judged, like his ministry, by other measures than some of the early results. Dismissing Paul's effectiveness as the Apostle to the Gentiles because the bulk of his churches, established in Asia Minor, were already in disarray by the end of the first century is clearly shortsighted. Similarly, Paul's clear vision of the salvation history of the Jewish people is not invalidated simply because ethnic considerations overwhelmed his argument. Indeed, it may be argued that Paul himself fed into that controversy by taking his message outside of the synagogue and into the Gentile population. Nonetheless, no counter-argument has supplanted the case made in Romans 7 for a common understanding of God's law and its continued function in salvation history. The dissolution of Jewish Christianity, though apparently not forestalled by Paul's rhetoric, was certainly not made inevitable by the differing approaches to the law found in the Gentile and Jewish segments of the Roman Church. The point that Paul makes in Romans 7 has universal implications. The new age does not change the manner in which God acts, which has always been through the same grace by which the law was transmitted—a grace that finds its full eschatological expression in the gospel of Christ.

92. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, p. lxxii. Ironically, however, as Paul makes this case, he relies on the christological position that may well be at the heart of the split. See Porter and Pearson, 'Why the Split?', pp. 115-18.