

## **Reading Paul in a Jewish way:**

### **"Oh be joyful all you peoples, with God's people" (Rom 15:10) - Who are the people? An Ecumenical Discussion**

©Mark D. Nanos (Oct. 12, 2015, Revised from presentation at Kirchentag, Stuttgart, June 5, 2015, Centre for Christians and Jews)

To speak of reading Paul *in a Jewish way* can allude to the fact that I am a Jewish person engaged in historical research on Paul and his communities, factors that shaped the origins of what became Christianity. As a historian, I believe the perspective I bring to the research can be useful to others who are interested in reassessing Paul's original voice and the influence its interpretive trajectory continues to have on Christians, and as a result, on Jews. The more important allusion, however, is that this can signal the idea that *Paul* wrote to his assemblies in a Jewish way. I do not mean simply to signify that Paul was *from* a Jewish ethnic and religious background, as commonly held. I mean that Paul continued to *practice* Judaism--and, moreover, that he continued to *promote* it to those who became followers of Jesus Christ, non-Jews as well as Jews.

Yes, you read me correctly: my view of what it means to read Paul as a Jewish figure is very different from the traditional and still prevailing perspectives on the apostle, which approach him as one who converted from Judaism to join a new religion, Christianity, and become its most famous missionary. I maintain instead that Paul remained *within* Judaism, called to declare Israel's message of the dawning of the awaited time of restoration through Jesus to the rest of the nations *also*.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See my "Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul's Judaism?" pages 117-60 in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. M. D. Given (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010); and co-edited with Magnus

When approached in this way, it becomes possible to understand the communities that Paul founded and to which he wrote these letters were practicing Judaism, functioning as subgroups of the larger Jewish communities in each of these locations. Upholding this perspective in no way involves questioning that he believed Jesus was the Messiah. In his time, the very idea of a Mashiach--a Hebrew term for one whom God "anointed" as king--would have been an inscrutable concept outside of Jewish communities and their hope for God's eventual rule over all humankind. Later, it meant believing in "Christ," the Hellenized and Latinized ways of designating the Hebrew word Mashiach, and it eventually became a part of Jesus's proper name instead of an honorific title. When the designations "Christian" and "Christianity" arose late in the first or early second century, these were ways to refer to a particular Jewish subgroup identity, and that sub-identification remained salient for decades; it highlighted the focus, however strange or questionable, of a *messianic*-centered branch of Judaism. In time, however, Christian identity and behavior was understood to be very different from that of Judaism, from what Jews believed and practiced.

In short, Christianity and Judaism became two very different religions over the centuries, so much so that it became, and for many people still is, inconceivable that Paul practiced and promoted Judaism. Yet it is widely recognized by New Testament scholars that there was no such thing as Christianity during Paul's time, so he could not have converted from Judaism to join something called that. This logically points--as ironic as it may be--to Paul remaining within and thus representing Judaism, even if a small sect thereof, one that in time became estranged from other sects of Judaism and eventually turned into something different from and opposed to Judaism per se.

---

Zetterholm, *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015). For a full listing of publications, see [www.marknanos.com](http://www.marknanos.com).

The present conundrum is readily witnessed in scholarship on Paul. Specialists regularly observe that Paul never addressed anyone as a Christian or referred to himself as one in his extant letters. However, the implications of this insight are mitigated almost immediately. How? Paul continues to be described as a Christian, as are those to whom he wrote, whose groups are called Gentile Churches and whose religion is called Christianity. Yet Paul wrote to people he called non-Jews, and he discussed non-Jews and Jews, or those from the (rest of the) nations, the *ethnē*, and those from *the* nation, *Israel*--and he included himself among the latter. He further distinguished between those who followed Jesus and those who did not. His interpreters have not adopted this constraint. Yet this practice would highlight a cross-cultural separation between the reader and the subject, arguably a very helpful step towards reading Paul in a more historically accurate way even if highlighting a seam between his intended audience and the modern reader. But should not even the devotional reader want to hear Paul first (what "exegesis" should represent), and then seek to interpret (hence, this practice is called "hermeneutics") what that means thousands of years later in the different cultures and languages of him or herself?

The same lack of historical clarity, with significant implications today, results from referring to the communities to which Paul wrote as "Churches." In later centuries, this became a term of reference for gatherings of Christians and for their institutions and structures. You are, for instance, celebrating "Church Council" (Kirchentag), which could hardly be confused with the practice or celebration of Judaism. In Paul's time, however, the word "*ekklēsia*" simply meant "assemblies" or "gatherings," and it was used for Jewish and non-Jewish gatherings and associations. It is thus historically more helpful to speak of Paul's assemblies. Likewise, the use of "Gentile" and "Gentiles" in English is misleading, especially

when coupled with "Churches" in the common referent, Paul's "Gentile Churches." At dispute is not whether there were non-Jews in the assemblies that Paul founded and to which he wrote letters; indeed, I am among those convinced that these non-Jews were the target audiences of his letters. It is historically most probable that these non-Jews joined Jewish communities and learned to practice righteousness according to Jewish cultural norms that were derived from the interpretation of Torah over the centuries. To help us think with Paul in his context, I recommend that we speak of "Paul's Christ-following Jewish subgroup communities" and "assemblies."<sup>2</sup>

If you to try talking about Paul and the people of his assemblies in these terms, you will immediately become aware of the kinds of shifts in thinking that are provoked when "substituting" (in an irony of reverse anachronistic terms), for example, Jews and non-Jews for Jews and Christians, Christ-following for Christian, and Jewish subgroup assemblies for Gentile Churches. These shifts help us recognize, for example, that it was the identity issues of belongingness and the associated behavioral norms *for non-Jews* within the Christ-following *Jewish* subgroups that provoked Paul's letter writing! The problems arose for these non-Jews, and thus for Paul and the other Jews involved in these groups, precisely because they remained non-Jews yet at the same time had begun to re-identify their loyalties from the gods of their own people to the God of the Jews, of Israel. Such a radical change for them naturally involved many adjustments to their habits and behavioral norms: they began to stand out as abnormal on usual Jewish guest terms for non-Jews among themselves, and all the more on usual Greek or Roman and other local ethno-religious cultural terms among their families and

---

<sup>2</sup> See my "Paul's Non-Jews Do Not Become 'Jews,' But Do They Become 'Jewish'?: Reading Romans 2:25–29 Within Judaism, Alongside Josephus," *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting (JJMJS)* 1.1 (2014): 26-53; <<http://www.jjmjs.org/>>.

neighbors and civic leaders. We might regard the issues the leaders such as Paul sought to solve by appealing to Jewish Scriptures and traditions, mirroring later Christian rhetorical invective, as "the *Gentile* problem" of the early Jewish followers of Jesus--such as Paul.

Since other Jewish groups and assemblies included non-Jews, what made this movement so distinctive among other Jewish movements of the time, and especially where the non-Jews who joined it were concerned? Although it is clear from literary and material evidence that Jewish groups welcomed interest in Judaism by non-Jews, including various levels of communal integration, most would have apparently expected those interested in being guests to continue to practice family and civic cult when not among the Jewish communities--after all, they were not Jews and thus not permitted by Roman law to refrain from honoring the gods, unlike Jews, and any such confusing of identity and concomitant expectations would have posed a threat to the continuation of their special Jewish communal exemption.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, at least in some groups, if certain non-Jews expressed interest in full membership, they would have been steered toward undertaking the rites involved in proselyte conversion (*erga nomou*), by which they could become Jews, members of Israel.<sup>4</sup> But this option was not to be advocated in the Jesus-following groups according to Paul: they were to proclaim instead the arrival of the end of the ages, a time when the rest of the nations would turn back to the One Creator God of all humankind, of all the nations, who until then

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.185-267; 19.299-306; *J.W.* 2.285-308; Philo, *Embassy* 132-34. The fact that these rights, granted since Julius Caesar, were sometimes contested locally, bears witness to the importance of internal policing of the conditions upon which the exemptions turned, namely identification as Jews (not merely non-Jew guests, however welcome) and thus with a long-standing tradition of avoiding cult to other gods and human leaders such as was Caesar.

<sup>4</sup> I have argued that this is the situational context that Paul confronted in Galatians, in *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

had been recognized only by the people of Israel. Because of this "chronometrical" claim,<sup>5</sup> the non-Jews joining these Jewish subgroups had to abandon other gods and associated "sinful" behavior and turn to the One God and righteousness as outlined in Jewish communal terms, based upon interpretations of Jewish communal texts and traditions, not least the Tanakh, or Old Testament.

You could say that Paul and his fellow Jesus-following-Jews maintained a kind of exclusivistic position that it was no longer appropriate for these non-Jews to become Jews. They must remain non-Jews, members of the other nations turning to the God of Israel as their own God. Isaiah 11:6-10 provides metaphorical terms that are particularly relevant, not least because in a text we will explore, Romans 15:12, Paul cites verse 10 (!): these non-Jews must remain the wolves eating alongside the Jewish lambs, to stay with Isaiah's metaphorical terms, exemplifying the hoped for utopian *shalom* among those who remain different, yet now equal and no longer defined as enemies (cf. Isa 65:17-25). These Jewish groups were to demonstrate the gospel's propositional claim that the awaited time had begun among themselves. No, it had not arrived in full; but with the resurrection of Jesus, of which they were persuaded, it had dawned.

One can argue whether the sun has risen during the first light of the morning, and so too about this claim. It did not seem to many others that the awaited time had arrived. It still looked like night, and still does to many, who still await the time when God will reign, when

---

<sup>5</sup> The term "chronometrical" is intended to offer a shorthand way to repeat the point that it is the time-oriented claims and policies of this group that are so central to its purpose and the conflicts into which it got initially with other Jews and Jewish groups. The issue was not so much the ideas that they upheld, which other groups might also subscribe to variously for when the proper time has arrived, but the claim that now the "time" of the arrival of the awaited age had been initiated with the age-to-come event of the resurrection of Jesus, and thus that today was the proper time for those ideas to be implemented in the Jewish communities.

injustice will end, when all will be healthy and well fed, when there will be war no more. But for Paul and his fellow followers, that time had begun, and it was paramount that these assemblies exemplified this reality as a witness to Israel of the beginning of her awaited liberation from the oppression of other nations and powers with the full restoration to God's rule, which would involve the reconciliation of the rest of the nations too. This propositional policy to remain different yet to regard each other as equal was confusing for the non-Jews who now joined Jewish communal subgroups, not least when they found that their new self-identifying claim to be part of the people of God was not always welcomed on the terms that they believed applied to themselves as non-Jews who were so entitled because of the resurrection of Jesus. It was all the more confusing to anyone--Jew or non-Jew--who was not persuaded of those claims.

Paul wrote the letters that we study to this day, including the language we are to consider from Romans 15, to address the confusion such propositional claims created for these non-Jews, and the associated judgments, resentment, and reactions. When looked at from this perspective, one can understand why Paul wrote, and what he hoped to communicate, in very different ways than traditionally conceptualized. This is nowhere more evident than in how to approach the question of why Paul forbade these non-Jews to become circumcised, and thus to remain non-Jews even though they had begun to practice Judaism, a Jewishly defined way of life.

The traditional reasons given for Paul's opposition to these non-Jews becoming Jews depend upon universalizing to *everyone*, that is, reading as if equally applicable to Jews viewpoints that he expressed to Christ following *non-Jews* about themselves. This is fundamental to the widely held view that Paul was against Jewish identity and behavior per se,

that is, for Jews as well as non-Jews who turned to Jesus; thus, for *everyone*. Yet good historical practice requires scholars to interpret rhetoric contextually, and, in this case, Paul signals that he is discussing the topic of Jesus-following non-Jewish adults becoming circumcised, not Jewish parents with respect to their infant sons. The traditional views are also based upon later Christian assumptions that Paul considered Jewish practices like circumcision and Torah-observance inferior, wrong, or passé, whether because of supposed pride, ethnocentrism, or even the practical limitations that continuing these practices would have created for bringing the nations into the people of God.

These conclusions are of critical importance: the answers are an integral part of traditionally negative Christian characterizations of Jews and Judaism, including so-called Jewish Christianity as distinguished from Pauline or Gentile Christianity;<sup>6</sup> they represent implicit when not explicit denigrations of the Jewish other from which many Christians of good will would like to find better alternatives. I submit that he upheld it to be just as important that Jews remain Jews, and thus observe Torah, the "Guidance" God had given to Jews for how to live rightly, which is why it logically follows that Paul remained a Torah-observing Jew.<sup>7</sup> The traditional conclusions also exemplify the problem of zero-sum thinking, of proceeding as if one's own success depends upon the failure of the other, of requiring a negative binary comparison to the other's ostensible inferiority to highlight one's own supposed superiority.

---

<sup>6</sup> E.g., see the insightful work of Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Studies in Jewish History and Culture 20; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> See my "The Myth of the 'Law-Free' Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4 (2009): 1-21; <<http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol4/iss1/4/>>.

The alternative that I propose is to learn to read Paul *within Judaism*. This cross-cultural exercise offers Christians positive ways to conceptualize and discuss Jewish identity and behavior as a part of their own historical origins, and not simply as the *background of* or the *context of* Jesus or *of* Paul or *of* the origins of Christianity, as if related but essentially different. The various differences that emerged and later led to defining them as different religions need not be qualified in contrastive value-laden terms to make sense of them, including how and why they came about as each group sought to establish self-esteem and access to limited goods, entirely normal social processes by which differences are often turned into warrants for discrimination.<sup>8</sup> There are many other benefits too, including the ideal of allowing Paul to be Paul, as far as we are able, and the ideal of working from the notion of God's unlimited resources, so that, going forward with full awareness of what we have learned from the tragic past, which all too often reflects the privileging of the interests of "our group" against those of "their group," we can work toward a future in which we no longer live as if "they" need to lose for "us" to win.

### **Why Non-Jews Remain Non-Jews Yet Fellow Members of the People of God**

In Romans 3:29-31, Paul raises the question of whether God is *only* the God of the Jews. This formulation is based upon the assumption that Paul's audience shares with him the conviction that God is obviously still the God of Jews; the question is whether non-Jews must become Jews to share in this standing as the people of God. Paul argues in a very Jewish way that this God is *also* the God of the nations. He reasons that this is because God is *one*. One could

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

instead reason that it is because everyone is human, so from the oneness of humanity, which would be a very Greek way to proceed. But Paul argues in reductive, binary terms that everyone fits into in one of two categories: either one is a Jew, a descendent of the ancient tribes of Israel, or one is from the nations other than Israel, a non-Jew. He makes his case by turning to the logic of the Jewish prayer, the *Shema Israel*: "*Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad*"; in English, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one [or: the Lord alone]"; in German, "Höre, Israel, der HERR ist unser Gott, der HERR allein" (Luther transl.).

This ideologically charged prayer is repeated twice a day, and it was developed in a direction similar to the one Paul argues here by later Jewish scholars who did not share Paul's convictions that this time had arrived, even partially. For example, roughly halfway between Paul's time and our own, the famous Jewish scholar known as Rashi explained the repetition of "The Name" (*Haššēm*, a rabbinic circumlocution for the tetragramaton, the four letter Hebrew word translated as Lord or Herr) in the Shema as follows:

The Lord who is our God now, but not (yet) the God of the (other) nations, is destined to be the One Lord, as it is said, "For then will I give to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent" (Zeph 3:9). And (likewise) it is said, "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; on that day shall the Lord be One and His name One" (Zech 14:9).

When the awaited day arrived it would be a time when people from all of the other nations would join alongside of Israelites declaring praise for the One God, similar to Paul's own language in Romans 15, and this expectation is tied to the prophecy of Zechariah.

Rashi, like Paul, did not see the collapse of the distinction between Jews and non-Jews with the arrival of that awaited time, but their joining together as with one voice to the One

God. The difference between Rashi (along with many other Jews) and Paul (with his fellow Christ-followers) was not one of principle, of theology related to the awaited reign of God on earth or the joining of those from the nations alongside of Israel to honor God, so that all are on the same winning team so to speak, but to the *timing* of that eventuality. Most would agree that such a day *will* come; that is a Jewish expectation. Paul upheld the chronometrical claim that this day *had* come, dawned at least with the resurrection of Jesus, and thus this utopian way of life was to be embodied by the assemblies of followers of Jesus.

Paul's logic is this: If, following the resurrection of Jesus, all who worship the One God are Israelites or become Israelites, then God is still only the God of one nation, not of all the nations, just as has been the case in the so-called present age. But if the non-Jews who turn to Israel's God do so while remaining non-Jews, not as members of the nation Israel, then they worship the God of Israel as the one God of all the nations *also*, just as is expected upon the arrival of the awaited age. Thus he wrote to non-Jews to join as one *alongside* of Jews (whether followers of Jesus or not) in the praise of God as One, as foretold. They were to practice Judaism, that is, to behave in ways designed by and for Jewish communities to live, but they were not allowed to become Jews, the adult males were not to be circumcised to represent the completion of the rite of passage to Jewish identity. By retaining their identity as non-Jews but behaving as if no longer non-Jews, they would exemplify the arrival of the day that they proclaimed in their assemblies.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> For fuller discussions of this dynamic for Paul, see my *Mystery of Romans*, 179-201; and "Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the Shema," in *Celebrating Paul. Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.* Edited by P. Spitaler (CBQMS 48. Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2012), 62-80.

Paul's letters are full of instruction about how to live on behalf of the other, without discrimination among themselves or toward those who were not part of their subgroups, all the while retaining many distinctions among themselves, including gender differences, occupational differences, and ethnicity in terms of being a member of Israel or from the other nations, that is, whether Jew or non-Jew, which he often called simply Greek. As Paul put the matter in Romans 13:8-10, to live according to Torah, to God's Guidance, is to live according to Love. In God's design, contributing to the success of the other person or group is integral to experiencing the success of one's own, as counterintuitive as it may be. And, especially relevant for this session, he draws on this unlimited sum logic explicitly throughout Romans to instruct Jesus-following non-Jews in the positive ways that they are to think about and behave toward non-Jesus-following Jews.

### **Toward Reading Romans 15:10 With Paul's Audience in Rome**

As we turn now to our text in Romans 15, I trust you will see that what I have been setting out shapes what we should expect Paul to be explaining in very different terms than those created by the traditional presuppositions. The text is a citation among several others Paul selects to support his argument in Romans 15:7-13 (NRSV):

<sup>7</sup>Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

<sup>8</sup>For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup>and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”;

<sup>10</sup>and again he says, “**Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people**”;

<sup>11</sup>and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”;

<sup>12</sup>and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

<sup>13</sup>May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

For verse 10, the program uses a German translation: "Freut euch, ihr Völker, mit Gottes Volk"; and an English translation: "Oh be joyful all you people, with God's people." Luther translated it slightly differently: "Freut euch, ihr Heiden, mit seinem Volk!" The Greek reads: *eufránthēte, **étnē**, metá tou **laou** autoú.*

Notice the distinction that arises from the Greek alternating between two words here, which I have highlighted in bold: first, the *étnē*, and second, the *laos*. Luther also brought out a distinction between them, but his choice for *étnē*, "heathen," which was a later Christian moniker used to refer to non-Christians, can be misleading, not least because this connotation turned Paul's original contextual meaning on its head. Although Luther distinguished Jews from Heathens, it is likely that for many of his readers since, Jews who did not become Christians and turn from Judaism might be imagined when encountering the epithet "heathens." The German and English translations used in the program avoid this connotation, but they unfortunately blur the distinction retained in the original languages, and thus risk undermining the contextual distinctions to which Paul was pointing with these citations when read in "a Jewish way." I suggest the translation: "**Be joyful, nations, with God's people.**"

Paul did not invent this statement: he was citing an ancient text from the Torah portion of the Bible! This fact alone brings into question the logic inherent in the frequent refrain that for Paul the role of Torah, of Law, had ended in Christ. Rather, Torah anticipates and instructs the followers of Christ to whom he wrote, or it should. The text cited in verse 10 is Deuteronomy 32:43, which is from the so-called "Song of Moses"; that itself could be relevant to why Paul chose it. The Septuagint Greek version of Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX) that we have is

slightly different than Paul's citation: *eufránthēte, ouranoí, áma ovtō*: "Be joyful, o heavens, together for them" (NRSV), and the Hebrew Masoretic text is also different: *har'niynû gôyim amô*; "O nations, acclaim his people" (JPS). We can see that the general theme is that the people other than Israelites are enjoined to rejoice "with" or "for" or possibly "to" the Israelites.

Paul joined this citation together with three other texts. The closest link is in the preceding verse 9, which cites from 2 Samuel 22:50 (cf. Psalm 17:50 LXX, or 18:49 MT). Paul draws on these texts to interpret each other in support of the instruction he seeks to communicate, just as will later rabbis in homiletical traditions known as the Haftarah, from which sermons proceed on a set day within the annual liturgical cycle. Note that David is represented to declare that he will acknowledge the God who has delivered him from his enemies while *amongst* them.

Paul is using the verse in tandem with the citation from Deuteronomy 32:43 in the following verse to highlight that these Christ following non-Jews are to celebrate the One God of all humankind *within the midst of Jews* celebrating this same One God. The non-Jews proclaim the *mercy* shown to them as former enemies of God by joining in joyful recitation of psalms *together with Jews*, who are doing so because of God's *truthfulness* to fulfill the promises made to them. The groups remain recognizably *different*, yet, in terms of expressing gratitude to God, they do so together in *unison*. That Jews are portrayed to be giving thanks for promises fulfilled does not exclude in any way that they celebrate the mercy God has demonstrated toward themselves as well, which is certainly recognized, for Israelites were quite aware that they had not lived up to the ideals to which they agreed.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Paul's use of these texts logically suggests these non-Jews rejoice in God's steadfast faithfulness to fulfill promises

---

<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that in the next sentence, 2 Sam 22:51 (Ps 17:51 or 18:50), which Paul does not cite, is about God showing "mercy" to Israel through David and his seed.

made to Israelites. After all, if God was not faithful to those to whom earlier promises were made, by definition how can one expect God always to be faithful to their own group?

The same message is highlighted in the third text that Paul cites next in verse 11, which is from Psalm 116:1 (LXX; or 117:1 MT): "Praise the Lord, all the nations [*ethnē*] and extol God all the peoples [*laoi*]. Again, there is a shift from *ethnē*, "people of the nations" to the plural of *laos*, "peoples" or "tribes." Again, the first case seems to refer to those who are not Israelites, and the second to Israelites, perhaps including other tribes of Abraham's descendents. The point is that everyone from every nation is called to join together in praise to the One God and Lord of Israel as the One God and Lord of all humankind.

The fourth and final citation in verse 12 is from the prophet Isaiah 11:10 (LXX), which has a distinctive messianic message: "The root of Jesse will be [*i.e., alive*], even the one arising to be ruler of nations [*ethnōn*], unto him nations [*ethnē*] will [*look in*] hope." Jesse was the father of David, who was promised that a descendant would always reign as king. By the time of Paul, however, that had not been the case for many centuries, and thus this promise had been construed by some Jews to refer to a future descendent from the family of David who would reestablish that rule, which some called the Messiah, and which Paul understood to be Jesus. Now, as Paul brings that message to the nations, he calls them to submit to the rule of the Messiah, and to look to him for hope, just as should Jews.

## **Conclusions**

Let us now return to the surrounding argument for which these citations served as proof-texts, which represent conclusions to which Paul has been building in the preceding chapters. We can see that Paul is calling for the harmonious celebration of God by people and

groups that are by definition in some ways different, and remain distinguishably so, whether fellow members of the assemblies of followers of Jesus, or those who are not members of them but also worship the same One God. He draws on Jewish scriptural witnesses to the celebration of the inclusion of the nations in the awaited age, rather than hope for their destruction. He does so in order to instruct the *reciprocal* concern among those from the nations for the Israelites, especially those who do not share their beliefs about Jesus, and thus may contest the claims of these non-Jews to full membership in the people of God and their assemblies apart from becoming Israelites too, because they do not share their conviction that the time when that would be celebrated has arrived.

Paul's point is to learn to live in celebration of God's good will toward the other, to welcome and live *FOR* them, to live in kindness and mercy, convinced that they have received God's mercy *also*, or the hope that they will. This is usually what one celebrates for one's self and group, and hopes to receive from others and from God, rather than to be lived *AGAINST*, in judgment or in the vindictive hope that God will bring upon one or one's group condemnation.

How that is to be lived out in real terms, when facing the struggles of life and family and neighborhood and national interests, in conflict situations all the more, is obviously not a simple matter. But Paul offers a kind of mantra, a way to think about living *FOR* the success of others, here represented in singing psalms of rejoicing for the success of the other in every thought and word and action--values enjoined in the Scriptures and thus central to the self-identity of the Jews who celebrate them. These non-Jews are to see themselves in the midst of Jews, celebrated and celebrating together.

Paul's instructions here, I believe, offer Christians a wonderful call to leave the judging of the eventual outcome for the other to God alone. Paul appeals to them to look to the God of

*hope*, the central topic in verse 13 that follows immediately after the citations in verses 9-12. Such hope and the good will toward others that it engenders is possible for those who believe that God is always faithful and always merciful as well as just, that God's gifts are not in limited supply, even when it may seem to be so from human perspective in the present often limited-good age.

The major theme of all of the chapters up through our texts in chapter 15, since it was introduced in the transition of 12:1, has been how to live respectful of one's fellow human beings, to seek peace with everyone in view of the times in which one who follows Jesus claims to have arrived, which is possible for those who live in the *hope* that God will provide. The "therefore" of 12:1 follows Paul's passion-filled explanation in chapters 9--11 of the intertwined destinies of the non-Jews turning to God through Jesus, and Jews. This includes Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah who are thus engaged in declaring the reconciliation to the nations, such as is Paul, and the rest of the Jewish people, whom Paul is convinced will join him eventually in that conviction and the undertaking of that task. But he seeks to explain that this will not happen before he has succeeded to reach and persuade members from the other nations to demonstrate by their righteous and gracious behavior the truth of the gospel's claim to many of his so-far-unpersuaded fellow countrymen: then, and only then, "all Israel will be restored."<sup>11</sup> Also then, and only then, will the full benefits of God's bounty be realized by the nations.

---

<sup>11</sup> I have explored Romans in *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), wherein chapter 5 discusses Rom 11, and undertaken additional research on Rom 11 in "'Broken Branches': A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? (Romans 11:11-36)," pages 339-76 in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9--11*, ed. F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); "'Callused,' Not 'Hardened': Paul's Revelation of Temporary Protection Until All Israel Can Be Healed," pages 52-73 in *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation*,

Paul seems to recognize the problem of zero-sum thinking that can emerge when celebrating the receipt of God's mercy, thinking that can lead, ironically enough, to arrogant superiority, envy, judgmentalism, dismissal of the interests of the other, replacement theology, and so on. He thus instructs how to live on behalf of the other rather than against them, and warns them of the risk to their own self-interest that will result from failure to uphold the responsibilities that their confession of faith in the one God of all humankind by definition entails: love of one's neighbor. That way of life includes hope for as well as undertaking to help the other to achieve *success*, a central connotation in the term "blessing." At the heart of the message leading up to our passage, Paul makes the point in verses 1-9 that he hopes his readers will embrace to guide their own life as they interact with the other: "For Christ did not please himself" (v. 3).

May we all experience and contribute to the experience of peace, of *shalom*, regardless of whether we share Paul's precise reasoning for doing so, including with respect to where we are on God's timeline. The ideal of living graciously towards those who are different from ourselves, of extending "welcome," of living *FOR* instead of *AGAINST* them, are principles central to Judaism, witnessed by the texts that Paul cites in support of his vision for the Jewish movement that eventually became Christianity. When Paul is read in a Jewish way: Are these not programmatic principles from which we can all learn, that we should all embrace?

---

ed. K. Ehrensperger and J. B. Tucker (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010); "Romans 11 and Christian and Jewish Relations: Exegetical Options for Revisiting the Translation and Interpretation of this Central Text," *Criswell Theological Review* N.S. 9.2 (2012): 3-21; and with co-author Philip A. Cunningham, "Implications of Paul's Hopes for the End of Days for Jews and Christians Today: A Critical Re-evaluation of the Evidence," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations (SCJR)* 9.1 (2014): 1-45; <<http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr/article/view/5793>>.