

Preface

I half-jokingly describe *If You Call Yourself a Jew* as a book I accidentally wrote. With so many books written on Paul and/or Romans every year (with rumors of one recent behemoth tipping the scales at over 1,600 pages!), and with my own area of expertise centered on Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels, I never anticipated having anything original to contribute to the vibrant and sometimes bewildering discussion of Paul and Romans in the academic literature.

When I was asked to prepare a graduate-level course on Romans in 2010, I decided not to use notes on Romans that I had prepared a few years earlier, but instead to start from scratch. As I worked through the text afresh, I was surprised to discover early on that I had changed my mind on a number of significant issues, including Paul's intended audience (I now agree with Stowers, Das, *et al.* that Paul wrote for gentile readers) and the identity of Paul's interlocutor in the first half of Romans 2 (whom I now view as a gentile figure). When I came to Rom 2:17 ("But if you call yourself a Jew, if you take comfort in Torah, if you set your boast on God . . ."), the possibility occurred to me that perhaps Paul continues to envisage a gentile interlocutor *even here*. At the time the stakes seemed rather low. After all, how much difference could it make whether Paul imagined himself in dialogue with an actual Jew or a gentile who calls himself a Jew? I decided to read Paul's diatribe as a dialogue with a gentile proselyte to Judaism—a "Judaizer"—simply to see what effect it would have on my reading of Romans as whole.

I soon made two discoveries. First, I was not the first person to propose that the person whom Paul portrays as "calling himself a Jew" was not an *ethnic* Jew. Runar Thorsteinsson's monograph, *Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2* (Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003), not only *considered* this possibility but *argued* for it on the basis of the function and features of diatribe in Greco-Roman epistolographers. Thorsteinsson's work is often neglected or summarily dismissed. However, a small but growing number of commentators have taken account of it and have been building upon it to reappraise our understanding of Pauline theology and his missionary activity among gentile communities of Jesus-followers in the early Roman empire. Second,

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the shift from an actual Jew to a gentile who calls himself a Jew makes all the difference for a number of perennial problems in Romans, including Paul's dark assessment of Torah's effects in Romans 3, his first-person discourse in Romans 7, and his *apologia* of Israel in Romans 9–11.

This book, then, provides a reading of Paul's entire letter on the basis of the hypothesis that Paul constructs a dialogue with a gentile proselyte to Judaism as his interlocutor. Space constraints prevent us from providing a comprehensive, verse-by-verse commentary, but we will read through every section of the letter. In the course of the pages that follow, we will see Paul's exposition of the revelation of the righteousness of God—God's faithfulness to his covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants. Those promises climaxed in the announcement that, through Abraham and his family, "all the tribes of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3). However, Paul insists that the righteousness of God is revealed, "for the Jew first as well as for the Greek," not through Torah but through the faith[-fulness] of Jesus. Torah and the prophets provide corroborating witness for God's righteousness, but the gentile who bends his neck to Torah's yoke misses the actual mechanism for finding peace with God. Romans never claims that Torah was never intended to reveal God's righteousness or that Torah was somehow fundamentally flawed. In Torah, God set before Abraham's descendants the choice of life and blessings, on one hand, and death and curses, on the other. On any reading of Israel's history and the socio-political situation of the late Second-Temple era, Israel chose the latter. Nevertheless, Paul found in the story of Jesus, the son of David and of God, the image of complete faith in/faithfulness to God, and in the account of Jesus' resurrection to newness of life he found the image of God's complete faithfulness to his promise of life and blessings, "for the Jew first as well as for the Greek." Whereas Torah resulted in curse and death, it also anticipated the unconditional faithfulness of God for both Jew and gentile. For Paul, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the account of the outworking of God's faithfulness: the end of Torah's curses and the fulfillment of its blessings.

But now we are getting ahead of ourselves. Chapter 1 offers a rough outline of the biblical narrative of Israel's history that forms Paul's symbolic universe and provides the formative matrix for Paul's theologizing. It also briefly introduces two key components of our reading of Romans: (i) the ethnic make-up of Paul's intended audience, and (ii) Paul's reason for writing Romans. Chapters 2–15 provide our reading of Romans 1–16 as Paul's dialogue with a gentile proselyte to Judaism and his exposition of the revelation of God's righteousness. As we will see, the hypothesis of a gentile Judaizer results not only in a coherent reading of Romans but also a reading

that avoids and/or solves a number of perennial problems in the history of interpretation of Romans.

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Part of chapter 11 (“Israel and Christ, Pt. II: Torah’s *Telos*”) appeared in slightly different form in my volume, *Oral Tradition and the New Testament: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014). I am grateful to Bloomsbury for permission to include that material here.