Covenental nomism and Pauline use of Deuteronomistic History in Romans 2 and 3

By Paul Wyns

Introduction

Modern Pauline scholarship is in a state of flux between more traditional based views and that of the New Perspective on Paul.[1] Within that debate Romans 2 and 3 play a crucial role. N.T. Wright calls Romans 2 *"the joker in the pack"* [2] and James Dunn observes that Romans 2 has, "caused more difficulties than any other chapter for commentators, particularly because it seems to envisage final justification as depending on human deeds rather than on faith, and because its argument seems to depend on a far too sweeping indictment of Jews at large. The key is to note that the chapter is framed, on the one side, by a typically Jewish attack on Gentile lifestyle (Rom 1:18-32) [3] and, on

[1] Reformation dominated understanding of Paul's theology contrasts law and grace in a doctrine of justification by faith. In this view Paul's opponents are legalistic Judaizers. The New Perspective on Paul can be traced back to Sanders seminal work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) where he views the Pauline opposition as supporting *'covenantal nomism.'* Rather than demanding perfect works-righteousness *'covenantal nomism'* regards the law as the basis of the covenant. According to Sanders, "the intention and effort to be obedient constitutes *the condition for remaining in the covenant*, but they do not *earn* it" (Sanders, 180, emphasis his). If Sanders assessment of the first century setting is correct, then Pauline objections are not, per se, against using the law as a vehicle for self-justifying works, but against deployment of law as a badge of privilege and as a sign of Jewish exclusivity. (Nationalization of the law, particularly with reference to circumcision and dietary requirements, enforcing exclusion and privilege and a feeling of superiority over the Gentiles).

[2] N.T. Wright, *The Law in Romans 2* (*Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 131-150.

[3] Romans 1:18-32 is not an attack on Gentile lifestyle – it is based on the golden calf apostasy and orgy at the giving of the law, more on this anon.

the other, by a protest that Jewish privilege has been undermined (Rom 3:1). What is in view in Romans 2, therefore, is almost certainly the very sense of Jewish privilege and distinctiveness which was so clearly echoed in Romans 1." [4] S.J. Hafemann remarks, "Even adherents to the "New Perspective" on Paul, who have worked hard to renew our understanding of Paul within the Judaism of his day, have often not taken the Jewish matrix of Paul's own thinking seriously enough as the decisive conceptual source for Paul's thinking. Moreover, at the heart of the debate concerning the Law and justification in Paul's thought is Paul's understanding of redemptive history (cf. Gal 3-4; 2Cor 3:7-18; Rom 3:21-16; 9-11), which itself can only be solved by a renewed study of Paul's use and understanding of the OT within the larger question of the relationship of Paul and his gospel to Israel as the old covenant people of God." [5] It is the intention of this article to *"take the Jewish matrix of Paul's own thinking seriously"* in order to discover the OT roots of Romans 2 and 3.

Working Hypotheses

This article proposes that Romans 2 and 3 can only be properly understood against the Deuteronomistic History (with the accompanying Psalms) that records the Davidic covenant and David's subsequent fall from grace. It has already been suggested that the background to Romans 1:18-32 is the golden calf incident [6] – this places Romans 2 and 3 firmly within an argument that examines the failure of Israel to keep the law covenant. A simplified overview would look something like this:

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[4] J.D.G. Dunn, *Letter to the Romans,* (*Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, D.G. Reid, Leicester, England: Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 838-850

[5] S.J. Hafemann, *Paul and his Interpreters*, Ibid, 678

[6] As far as I am aware this approach to Romans 1 was first propounded by H.A. Whittaker, in his reassessment of the chapter. The golden calf was a copy of the cherubim (cf. Rom.1:23 citing Ps.106:20) for the sexual immorality see Ex.32:6 (the people rose up to play). As always apostasy begins with a core of truth (the cherubim was changed into an object of idolatry). H.A. Whittaker, *Bible Studies, An Anthology*, (Biblia, 1987), 305-308.

Rom 1 – Jewish National failure to receive the Law
–background the golden calf incident, Jews sinning like Gentiles
Rom 2/3 – Jewish Institutional failure (monarchy) to keep the law
– background David's sin against a "faithful" Gentile
Rom 4 – The Law cannot justify – both Jew and Gentile saved by faith
-background Abraham **and David** (vv.6-7)

Davidic background to Romans 2 and 3

N.T. Wright has already called to notice the importance of David to Romans; ".....we must also notice Romans 1.3-4, the one Pauline passage outside the Pastorals which mentions David specifically as Jesus' ancestor. Of course this passage has been routinely marginalized, and treated as if it were a mere throwaway introductory line, designed to curry favour with Jewish Christians in Rome for whom such ideas were still important while for Paul, of course they were not. But there are four arguments which tell very strongly against this. First, we know from many of Paul's letters that his opening passages are often carefully crafted with an eye to what he wants to say in the rest of the letter. It seems very unlikely that he would place in such a prominent position an explicit statement of something he regarded as at best inadequate and at worst misleading. Second, what Paul says about Jesus as the letter develops, not least in chapters 6-8, can be seen as drawing out the implications of this opening statement, not simply of the passage more usually said to be thematic, namely 1.16-17. Third, Paul seems to be alluding to various biblical passages (Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7 come obviously to mind) which we know as messianic proof- texts in Qumran. Fourth, at the letter's thematic conclusion in 15.12, Paul quotes Isaiah's prophecy about 'the root of Jesse.' Again, unless we are to say that Paul chose to end his longest and most carefully structured theological argument with a quotation designed to put his readers on exactly the wrong train of thought, we find ourselves compelled to the view that he really does see the argument of Romans framed by, and hence by implication consisting in, an exposition of the Messiahship of Jesus and its meaning and effects." [7] Although N.T. Wright does not

[7] N.T. Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives*, (SPCK, 2005), 44. N.T. Wright probably based his observations on C.G. Whitsett's article, "Son of God, Seed of David: Paul's Messianic Exegesis in Romans [1]:3-4," *JournBibLit* 119 (4,'00) 661-681.

realise the full import of his observations he intuitively recognises the covenantal connections and messianic implications of the introductory mention of David. Pauline theology employs a paradigmatic approach to the problem of covenantal nomism with David and Abraham functioning in typical fashion or employed normatively to his developing argument. The following comparison table will give an overview to be discussed in detail anon.

Romans 2	**Deuteronomistic History AND Psalms**
NKJ **Romans 2:1** Therefore **you are inexcusable, O man,** whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.	NKJ **2 Samuel 12:7** Then Nathan said to David, **"You *are* the man!**
NKJ **Romans 2:2** But we know that the judgment of God is **according to truth** against those who practice such things.	**Truth** is a technical term denoting the covenant promises
NKJ **Romans 2:3** And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?	NKJ **2 Samuel 12:5** So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "*As* the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die!
NKJ **Romans 2:4** Or do you despise the riches of **His goodness**, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?	NKJ **Psalm 51:1** To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.
NKJ **Romans 2:14-15** for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them)*	**URIAH THE HITTITE** NKJ **2 Samuel 11:11** And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? *As* you live, and *as* your soul lives, I will not do this thing."
NKJ **Romans 2:16** in the day when God will judge **the secrets of men** by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.	NKJ **2 Samuel 12:12** 'For **you did *it* secretly**, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' "
NKJ **Romans 2:17-21** Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a **light** (Uriah's name means light) to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?	NKJ **Psalm 51:12** Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit. NKJ **Psalm 51:13 *Then* I will teach transgressors** Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.
NKJ **Romans 2:22-23** You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples (commit sacrilege) You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law?	NKJ **2 Samuel 12:9** 'Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife *to be* your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.

NKJ **Romans 2:24** For "the name of God is **blasphemed among the Gentiles** because of you," as it is written.	NKJ **2 Samuel 12:14** "However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to **the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme**, the child also *who is* born to you shall surely die."
NKJ **Romans 2:29** but *he is* a Jew who *is one* **inwardly**; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.	NKJ **Psalm 51:10 Create in me** a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Romans 3	
NKJ **Romans 3:4** Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged." (when you judge??)	NKJ **2 Samuel 7:28** "And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant. NKJ **Psalm 51:4** Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight -- That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge.
Romans 3:10-18	Quotes taken from the Psalms – the wicked is based on Doeg the Edomite who on behalf of Saul persecuted David. Parallels with the Jewish establishment and Edomite Herodian king persecuting Christ- Doeg committed sacrilege and slew the priests at Nob.
NKJ **Romans 3:27** Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. **By what law?** Of works? No, but by the law of faith.	NKJ **2 Samuel 7:19 "** ***Is*** **this the manner (law)** of man, O Lord GOD?"

Detailed Exegesis of Romans 2 and 3

NKJ **Romans 2:1** Therefore **you are inexcusable, O man,** whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

N.T. Wright begins his own exegesis of Romans 2 with the remark that, "....one of the peculiarities of Romans is the number of times when it is by no means clear, to contemporary readers, who Paul is talking about at given points in the letter.....it is acute at the end of Romans 2" (Wright,2001,131-150). The singular 'the Jew' is a rhetorical device often employed by Paul to address all Jews, however, he commences this section of his argument with what could be considered the more generic **ἄνθρωπε (man)** were it not that Paul deliberately prefaces *anthrOpe* with the interjection **ὦ** for emphasis – **'O man'** giving it the effect of an exclamation – suggesting equivalency with the accusation levied at David; **"Thou art the man."** A particular man is here in view, namely the

man who is in a position to pass juridical sentences,[8] yet neglects to pass judgement on his own law breaking behaviour. As king of all Israel, David was in the privileged position to pass judgement on the hand of the law; in Pauline theology he functions as a type of the nation, given a unique status, and placed in a privileged position over the Gentiles by reason of the holy law covenant that was vouched safe to them. The nation (like the king) had a special responsibility to act as ministers (priests and kings) to the surrounding Gentile nations.

NKJ **Romans 2:2** But we know that the judgment of God is **according to truth** against those who practice such things.

Paul follows **(v.2)** with the remark that God's judgement **is according to the truth.** Truth is OT terminology [9] for the covenant promises to the patriarchs. Dunn comments; "Paul has in view a Jewish rationalization which could justify or excuse in itself what it condemned in others" (Dunn,1993,845) In this section Paul is contrasting hypocritical human judgement under the law covenant (in this case typified by David) with divine judgement which occurs on the basis of faith in the covenant promises (truth). Paul's next observation is about the inescapable consequences of such hypocrisy (v.3) – the fact that a man (or nation) is granted a position of privilege (administering the holy law covenant) does not excuse them of the consequences of sin – *"You shall surely die"* (Gen.2:17).[10]

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[8] Compare the Ironic compliment delivered to David by Joab's proxy: "Your maidservant said, 'The word of my lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so *is* my lord the king in discerning good and evil. And may the LORD your God be with you.' **"2 Samuel 14:17**

[9] Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob *and* the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old. KJV **Micah 7:20**

[10] Ultimately the *"knowledge of good and evil"* (ability to pronounce moral judgement) is the sole prerogative of God (who is perfect) – and upon those whom he bestows his Spirit (i.e., Jesus had that authority). The desire to be like the Elohim is at the root of the problem.

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of **His goodness**, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

God's goodness (v.4) is expressed in his grace, which was revealed to Moses; "I will make my goodness pass before thee.....and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex.32:19). Paul is already anticipating the question of election in Rom 9:15. Paul's mind is soaked in OT metaphor – divine goodness and truth find their concrete expression in the promised Messiah – the final unique self-revelation promised to the patriarchs. God keeps mercy (preserves mercy) for thousands...of generations....until Messiah. And it is the divine prerogative to forgive whomsoever he will (and *that* on the basis of *faith* in the promise not through the law). It was only the experience of personal sin that brought this lesson crashing home on David, as expressed in Psalm 51. That Paul has this in mind cannot be doubted as he quotes Psalm 51 in Romans 3:4 and the penitentiary Psalm 32:1-2 in Romans 4:6-8: "Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

NKJ **Romans 2:5** But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Refusal **(v.5)** to accept God's goodness (his covenant mercy manifested in the messiah) results in the unrepentant sinner remaining under the law – the inevitable consequence is condemnation on the day of judgement.

NKJ **Romans 2:6** who "will render to each one according to his deeds":

Everyone **(v.6)** will get what they deserve – Christian Jews *and* Christian Gentiles, unbelieving Jews *and* unbelieving Gentiles – those under the law and those outside the law – the consequences of sin are universal and God will "reward" everyone according to their actions. This seems to completely contradict the Pauline gospel of justification by faith alone; the emphasis on works has exegetes in a quandary. It is such an embarrassment that many exegetes would prefer to place the complete chapter in parenthesis, or to dismiss it completely. Paul explicitly quotes the Jewish theologoumenon in order to combat Jewish hypocrisy that allowed justification or excuse for itself, what it condemned in the Gentiles.

NKJ **Romans 2:7** eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;

At the heart of the Pauline gospel (v. 7) is the phrase, ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ this is literally rendered (YLT); *"in continuance of a good work"*. However, it is an assumption to regard this "*good work"* as a human work. An alternative understanding is to regard the "good work" as the redemption that God wrought in Jesus Christ. This alternative is supported by the echo with Genesis, where it is stated that God saw everything that he had made and saw that it was good; this is described as a good work (Gen 1:31, 2:2). Thus, in the New Creation the believer continues this good work with "works of faith" (1 Thess 1:3) and not "works of law" (Gal 3:2).

NKJ **Romans 2:8** but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness -- indignation and wrath,

Here Paul contrasts those who **obey truth (v.8)** with those who obey unrighteousness. Truth is a metaphor for the covenant promises – to "obey the truth" is to obey Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of the truth (covenant promises); *"I am the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6). The ellipsis must be supplied in the remainder of the phrase – to obey unrighteousness is to obey [the law that causes] unrighteousness – "for without the law sin was dead" (Rom 7:8). In Pauline theology the law becomes an instrument of God's wrath and man's unrighteousness.

NKJ **Romans 2:9-13** tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;

Dunn comments; "Paul attempts to undermine the confidence of those who think that because they have the Law they are advantaged in the judgement over those without the Law. On the contrary, Jewish teaching is precisely that doing the Law is more important than merely hearing it; the argument is *ad hominem.* The pride and the presumption of "the Jew", by virtue of possessing the Law, becomes explicit in Romans 2:17-24. The intention of the forthright indictment of the typical Jewish interlocutor is not to condemn all Jews out of hand, but rather to argue that when the typical Jew breaks the Law in his presumption he undermines the whole basis of his privileged position" (Dunn,1993,845).

NKJ **Romans 2:14-15** for when Gentiles, **who do not have the law, by nature** do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them)*

Paul changes tack **(vv.14-15)** by referring to Gentiles who act out of conscience – "*who show the work of the law written in their hearts."* This is the **New Covenant** language expressed by Jeremiah (31:33) as reserved for the glorious future *of Israel* (and inaugurated by the Messiah). But now it is employed by Paul to describe *faithful Gentiles.* Within the paradigm that Paul has established the faithful Gentile is represented by Uriah the Hittite.

N.T. Wright understands **φύσει** (*phusei,* nature) in the phrase "*do by nature the things of the law"* as a substantive particle followed, rather than proceeded by its modifying dative – the phrase (according to Wright) should read..... *"for when the Gentiles, who by nature do not have the law, yet they do the things of the law"* ..... By nature, that is by birth, they are outside the covenant, not within the Torah. "And yet they do the things of the Torah." (Wright, 2001, 146) He is most certainly correct in this reading of the Greek as it parallels the use (as he himself points out) in verse 27; "And shall not the circumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law." The normal assumptions about "natural law" that exegetes bring to the table are therefore wrong. Paul employs the phrase "by nature" as a description of the natural state of the Jews – i.e. born into the covenant and circumcision from birth (circumcised 8th day) and the natural state of the Gentiles (born outside the covenant) it has nothing to do with "natural law." In Paul's typology, the Gentile is Uriah the Hittite, who has cast his lot in with Israel. His concern for the ark (dwelling in a tent) mirrors David's concern for the ark.

Here was no ordinary, idol worshipping, lascivious Gentile – but a man of integrity – not a mercenary or a hired gun.[11] Yet, this man was "by nature" outside the covenant

[11] It is perhaps useful to quote Alter's commentary in full; *Shall I then come to my house to eat and drink and to lie with my wife?* Uriah now spells out all that David left unsaid when he urged him to go down to his house. The crucial detail of sleeping with Bathsheba comes at the very end. Menakhem Perry and Meir Sternberg, in a pioneering Hebrew article in 1968 (revised by Sternberg for his English book of 1985) raised the provocative issue of deliberate ambiguity (comparing the strategy of this story with the two mutually exclusive readings possible for Henry James's short story "The Turn of the Screw"). In their view,

(Torah) – contrast David, "by nature" privileged, yet plotting and scheming his Gentile servants downfall. What a powerful lesson to the Jews of Paul's day! Particularly, if the pastoral motif for writing the epistle was in order to *"commend Jews to Gentiles and Gentiles to Jews in the Church of Rome"*. (Whittaker, 1987, 304) The apostle concludes with an observation about the conscience, which functions either as justifier or accuser (of the Gentile before God). In this Paul once again anticipates the role of the conscience that he develops in 14:14 and particularly the qualifier in 14:22b, *"Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves."* This was uttered as a warning to Gentile Christians who might think their understanding and morality superior than their "weaker" Jewish Christian brethren, especially regarding dietary requirements and Sabbath keeping. In Paul's gospel the motivation behind the action was all important – both for Jewish *and* Gentile Christians. Paul could be, *"all things to all men"* – not because he was a hypocrite – but because he understood both the value and meaning of the law (and respected it) and the importance of the messianic covenants. For him they were not in opposition, merely different operations of the one God. However, if Gentile Christians deliberately exercised their freedom in Christ against their consciences' (or in order to deliberately antagonize their Jewish Christian brethren) then they would be condemned, as surely as any law breaker would.

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there are two equally viable readings. If Uriah does *not* know that David has cuckolded him, he is the instrument of dramatic irony – the perfect soldier vis-à-vis the treacherous king who is desperately trying to manipulate him so that the husband will unwittingly cover the traces of his wife's sexual betrayal. If Uriah *does* know of the adultery, he is a rather different character – not naive but shrewdly aware, playing a dangerous game of hints in which he deliberately pricks the conscience of the king, cognizant, and perhaps not caring, that his own life might soon be forfeit. More recently, Moshe Garsiel has proposed a reconciliation of these two readings: when Uriah first arrives from the front, he is unaware of what has occurred; but after the first night with his comrades at the palace gate, he has been duly informed of the sexual betrayal, so that in his second dialogue with the king, he cultivates a rhetoric of implicit accusation. Garsiel observes that when Uriah swares emphatically by David's life (verse 11), he does not add the deferential "my lord the king." R. Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel,* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1999),252

NKJ **Romans 2:16** in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Paul picks up the Davidic typology again, **(v.16)** with the law-breaking Jew being judged openly in the same manner that David's secret sin was openly exposed (2 Sam. 12:12; 16:22).

NKJ **Romans 2:17-21** Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a **light** (Uriah's name means light) to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?

Paul condemns those, **(v.v. 17-21)** who boast in the law, yet honour it only in the breach. These *"have a form of knowledge and truth in the law"* – Paul denounced the attitude that compromised the truth (covenant promises) and practiced a reductionism that allowed the truth to be compressed into law – for the rhetorical Pauline "Jew" the law had replaced the messianic hope. Not so for David, as he realised that the law could not save him – *"For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it"* (Ps. 51:16) – no sacrifice under the law could atone for murder and adultery. The Jews should have been a **light** [12] to the surrounding Gentile nations – but instead of illuminating darkness they were law breakers like David. The difference is that David was repentant when confronted with his sin and came to the realisation that he could only become a teacher once he had experienced divine grace: "***Then*** I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You." (Ps 51:13). Unlike the "Jew" who taught the Gentile the law from the top of an ivory tower (while himself breaking the law), David, could teach **from experience the meaning of grace** (not law) and divine forgiveness – because not only had he had seen the **risen Christ** (2 Sam 7 and Ps 110), now and *only now*, did he understand what the covenant promise truly meant – **the truth had set him free.** David could only expect condemnation under the law; it was faith in the redemptive work of the promised messiah that saved David.

NKJ **Romans 2:22-23** You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples (commit sacrilege –see 3:10-18 below) You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law?

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[12] Paul obviously intends to subliminally remind the reader of Uriah אוּרִיָּהוּ (the Hittite) whose name means, **Yahweh is my light (flame)**

The charge of stealing and adultery **(vv.22-23)** is in keeping with the David thematic – the charge of committing sacrilege is more difficult to place. Perhaps it is the occasion when David ate the showbread. If that is the case Paul is emphasizing the same point as Jesus in Matthew 12 namely, that his action was **not lawful** [13] (even though on this occasion it was justifiable).

NKJ **Romans 2:24** For "the name of God is **blasphemed among the Gentiles** because of you," as it is written.

The same accusation of blasphemy **(v.24)** was levied against David by Nathan the prophet. Through his hypocrisy David had made the divine name a mockery in the eyes of the Gentiles – so much for Jewish moral superiority and their so called holy law.

NKJ **Romans 2:25-29** For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even* with *your* written *code* and circumcision, *are* a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

The last section emphasises the Spirit not the letter, the inward not the outward; the same sentiment as David's penitentiary prayer in Psalm 51:10. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me".*

Romans 3

NKJ **Romans 3:1-8** What advantage then has the Jew, or what *is* the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged."But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is* God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And *why* not *say,* "Let us do evil that good may come"? -- as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

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[13] "How he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?" (Matthew 12:4)

Dunn comments, "Such an uninhibited attack on Jewish self-confidence in Israel's privileged status before God raises problems which Paul cannot ignore –particularly in relation to Israel's election and thus also to God's faithfulness to the people he chose" (Dunn,1993,845).

If the circumcision covenant and possession of the law did not grant the Jew a privileged position (in contrast to the Gentiles) – then what is the point in being Jewish? What advantage does election bring? Paul answers that being Jewish has many advantages, not least that they received **the oracles.** The oracles of God refer to God's self-revelation in the Old Testament and particularly to the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7. It is essentially a continuation of the David thematic that Paul began in Romans 1:3-4 as an introduction to his epistle. Paul's answer to the question of Jewish election is that it was not the law that made them elect, but the fact that God had chosen their race through which to reveal himself, particularly through the ***"seed of David after the flesh.....declared to be the son of God by the resurrection"*** (Rom 1:3-4). In 2 Samuel 7 David sat before the ark and saw a vision of the risen Christ, a vision that he described in Psalm 110. It was the fact of the resurrection that declared him to be the Son of God; *"Thou art my son; this day I have begotten thee"* and at that point he also became the universal Lord of the Gentiles also – *"Ask of me and I will give you the Gentiles for your inheritance"* (Ps 2:7-8). So it was the covenant promises concerning the messiah that conferred special status to the Jews – not the law. But what if some Jews did not believe the covenant promises – if they demonstrated their unbelief by rejecting Christ? Does this nullify the covenant and make divine faithfulness ineffectual? Of course not! **Let God be true and everyman a liar.** Clearly Paul has **2 Samuel 7:28** in mind: *"And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and* ***Your words are true****, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant."* The unfaithfulness of some of the Jews could not undermine the faithfulness of God. God's words are true and the word made flesh is the expression of that truth. In contrast all men are liars (Jew and Gentile) and human unbelief and law breaking only justifies divine judgement. Once again Paul turns to David in order to make the point. Greg Herrick explains, "The quotation from Ps 51:4 is taken almost verbatim from the Greek OT (Ps 50:6 LXX), with only minor modifications. In Psalm 51 David humbly cries out to God for forgiveness because of his sin with Bathsheba. The point of v. 4 is that David admits he is a sinner against God and *therefore God is proved right when he speaks and justified when he judges.* Paul says that even *the* king of Israel, David

himself, who enjoyed an excellent overall reputation in first century Judaism, had to be judged for his sin. Thus God is *true* to bless and to punish no matter who the offending party is. The Jew, then, who thinks that God is unjust and unfaithful when he makes promises to his people on the one hand, and then judges them for sin on the other, is sadly mistaken. In fact, this state of affairs actually proves that God is true and that men are liars". [14]

The next verses **(vv. 5-8)** are a correction of a false theodicy. Paul says that although *it is true that our unrighteousness magnifies and makes visible the sterling character of God*, it does not follow in any way, shape, or form, that we should not therefore be judged as a sinner. We most certainly should be, and indeed we will be.

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[14] Greg Herrick, Romans: The Gospel of God's Righteousness, online @ **http://www.bible.org/series.php?series_id=22** [cited Nov 10th 2007]. (We might add the observation that the MT has לְמַעַן תִּצְדַּק בְּדָבְרֶךָ תִּזְכֶּה בְשָׁפְטֶךָ׃ The YLT (giving a similar sense to the AV) renders this as, *"Thou art righteous in Thy words, Thou art pure in Thy judging"*. The meaning is clearly different to the Septuagint ("Thou mightiest overcome ...**when thou art judged**", we use the term Septuagint loosely see the last quarter 2007 CJBI article by J. Adey – it is possible that this is a Christian amendment?). In Paul's quotation it could mean that when Christ was judged he would overcome (be vindicated) i.e. When men accuse God of unfaithfulness (to the covenant) or of unrighteousness – God would be proven right – justified and vindicated –by upholding the covenant through David's descendant, Jesus Christ (through the resurrection). In this sense, God "overcoming" is the same as Jesus "overcoming." However, the other version of the quote has equal *theological* validity (we leave the linguistic validity to the experts). The LXX version would be in agreement with N.T. Wright's reading of (Rom 3:22) as "**the faithfulness of the Messiah,** Jesus, as the means through which the covenant faithfulness of the creator is enacted" and in his footnote: "..I think, actually, that the success of this way of reading this passage (Rom.3:22) is the best argument in favour of the subjective genitive (faith "of Christ") in some of the key passages" (Wright, 1995, 38).

Romans 3:10-18 R. N. Longenecker observes, "A recurring feature in Paul's biblical quotations, and one that points up his midrashic heritage, is the Pharisaic practice of "pearl stringing"; that is, of bringing to bear on one point of an argument passages from various parts of the Bible in support of the argument and to demonstrate the unity of Scripture. This is most obviously done in Rom. 3:10-18 (Ps.14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isa. 59:7f; Ps. 36:1)".[15] Paul has indeed quoted, like pearls on a string, a number of OT passages – they are all (with the exception of Isa.59:7f) related to David. Psalm 14 is almost identical to Psalm 53; the fact that Psalm 53 follows a psalm with an explicit historical title about Doeg the Edomite, and proceeds a psalm about Saul's hunt for David the outlaw, suggests that this psalm also belongs to the same period in David's life. The next quote is taken from Psalm 5, where the context stresses lack of faithfulness and flattery, probably reflecting David's betrayal by his counsellor Ahithophel. This is significant as Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba. After his sinful behaviour David became ill and lost authority – during this period Absalom fomented rebellion – reflected in the next quote from Psalm 140 – the reference to the "serpent" an allusion to Gen.3 *"Ye shall be as gods"* – glib promises of advancement and power for those whom Absalom sought to win over to his cause. The original quote from Psalm 10 stresses: **cursing...deceit...fraud...mischief...vanity**, all this was true of Saul and his proxy Doeg the Edomite. The stream of citations from the Psalms is briefly interrupted by a quote from Isaiah 59:7f – this is particularly interesting as the original context emphasises the shedding of innocent blood, *"we grope for the wall.....stumbling at noonday as in the night"* (v.10) – Paul has in mind his own experience, when he was blinded during his Damascus road conversion. The parallels with the nation are obvious, for although they had privileged status (like Paul, *cf.* Rom 11:1) they too were "blinded in part" (like Paul, *cf.* Rom 11:7) and persecuted the Lord's anointed. The context of the citation from Isaiah 59 is to be understood in the **Day of Atonement** language of the previous chapter; "*'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?*" (Isa.58:3). It was not God's fault. By their perversity they had bound him hand and foot. He was helpless to help them. "*Is my hand shortened at all, that I cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?"* Unfortunately the answer to these rhetorical questions was supplied by the nation's hypocrisy and stubbornness. Gentile nations found their gods *"short of hand"* (37:27mg), powerless to withstand Assyrian aggression. Now the God of Israel was also

[15] R.N. Longennecker, *Biblical Exegesis In The Apostolic Period* ,(Paternoster Press, 1995), 115

powerless **through their faithlessness**.....if not for the intervention of the suffering servant, king Hezekiah, who represented the faithful remnant (incorporative messiahship) in the nation and therefore typified his descendant Jesus Christ. Lastly, Paul concludes with Psalm 36, highlighting the defiant (fearless) attitude of the wicked. The Psalm continues (v.2) *"... For he flattereth himself in his own eyes,* ***even*** *when his iniquity is found to be hateful."* (Darby translation). This parallels the Pauline accusation of boasting in the law (2:18, 23; 3:27) even though they are law breakers (2:1) they still believe themselves to be untouchable (2:3). The liturgical setting for Psalm 36 may well have been the **Day of Atonement** (see vv. 1,2,7,8 and 9), fitting with Paul's conclusion of this section; *"Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed"* (Rom 3:25). To sum up, this complete "purple-passage" is based on the life of David (with the Isaiah exception), particularly notable is the cooperation between Jew and Gentile in persecuting, the "Lord's anointed." The persecutor Saul was a Benjamite (similarities with Saul of Tarsus) and his ally was an Edomite (like Herod). These parallels would not have escaped the apostle Paul, neither did they escape the other apostles (Acts 4:25-28). Perhaps particular resistance was felt from the Herodian party in Rome.[16] Paul is at pains to explain the rejection of Esau the father of the Edomites in Rom 9:13. Apparently Herod's Edomite heritage was a sensitive point, especially as he had done so much to favour himself with the Jews. In conclusion then, this section (based primarily on the Davidic *sitz im leben*) summarises the universality of sin, by Jew *and* Gentile and the resistance to "Truth", first by Jew and then by Gentile. Both persecuted the Lord's anointed. Both are without excuse. One is condemned under the law, the other is condemned outside the law.

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[16] It was most probably Nero who condemned Paul to death, his chief advisor Seneca was a brother of Gallio (Acts 18:12-16); moreover, his wife (previously his mistress) Poppea favoured the Jews and was probably a Jewish proselyte. Josephus recounts how Poppea pleaded to Nero on behalf of Ismael the high priest and Helcias the temple treasurer, who were held hostage at Nero's court, in order to force the Jews to demolish a wall that blocked Herod Agrippa's view of the Temple precinct. The epistle to the Romans was probably written before these events (ca., early 57), nevertheless, it testifies to Jewish influence (especially Herodian political influence) among the Roman court.
Josephus, Antiq.20. 8 .11

N.T. Wright describes the situation as follows, "Israel was entrusted with the oracles of the creator god (3:2); that is, it was to be the messenger through whom the creator's saving purpose would be carried to the world. What is the covenant god to do about the failure of his covenant people (3:2) to be faithful, on their part, to this covenant? Somehow, this god must be faithful nonetheless; and, unless the covenant itself is to be dissolved (which would evoke a very strong **μὴ γένοιτο** ["may it never happen"] from Paul) this means, logically, that there must somehow, after all, be an Israel that is faithful to the covenant, so that through this Israel the creator/covenant god can deal with the evil of the world, and with its consequences (i.e., wrath, as in 1:18ff). What is provided in 3:21-31 is just such a solution. "The works of Torah," that is, those practices which mark Israel out from among the nations, cannot be the means of demarcating the true covenant people; they merely point up the fact of sin (3:20, looking back to 2:17-24 and on 5:20 and 7:7-25). Instead, the covenant faithfulness of the creator of the world is revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus, the Messiah, for the benefit of all, Jew and Gentile alike, who believe. Rom 3:21-31 then expounds this revelation of the divine covenant faithfulness. The central emphasis of this passage, I suggest, lies not on the human faith/faithfulness, which, in place of works-of-Torah, becomes the badge of covenant membership, but on the faithfulness of the Messiah, Jesus, as the means through which the covenant faithfulness of the creator is enacted. "[17]

By what law?

NKJ **Romans 3:27** Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. **By what law?** Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

N.T. Wright remarks that, "whatever we do with 3.27, it will never cease to be cryptic" (Wright, 2001, 138). The *crux interpretum* of this chapter is **διὰ ποίου νόμου** [By what law?]. This article suggests that the phrase is taken **from 2 Samuel 7:19.** Unfortunately this requires a rarther large digression, for the Hebrew of the phrase is וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הָאָדָם transliterated as, ***wᵉzō'ṯ tôraṯ hā'ādām*** Alter translates the phrase as *'this is a man's instruction'*, but admits that *"this is no more than an interpretive guess, for the*

[17] N.T. Wright, *Romans and the Theology of Paul*, (Pauline Theology, Volume 3, ed. David M. Hay & E. Elizabeth Johnson, 1995, Minneapolis: Fortress),37-38

meaning of the Hebrew is obscure." (Alter, 1999, 234). Carl Armerding has the following to say, "The Samuel text adds the enigmatic ***wᵉzō'ṯ tôraṯ hā'ādām*** **,** translated by the NIV as 'Is this your usual way of dealing with man?' The NSRV renders it 'May this be the instruction for the people', while the RSV appears to omit it completely. The Chroniclers parallel line reads ***ûrᵉʾîtanî kĕtôr hā'ādām hammaᵉălâ*** , and is translated by the NIV as 'you have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men', by the NSRV as 'you regard me as someone of high rank' and is again ignored completely by the RSV. [18] Regarding the Samuel passage, one commentator[19] agrees with S.R. Driver [20] that 'all proposed emendations of the MT here, whether or not based on the parallel in 1 Chronicles 17:17 ("You have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men"), are unsatisfactory', while going on to suggest that the best proposal to date is that of W.C. Kaiser, [21] who paraphrases verse 19b 'This is the charter by which humanity will be directed.' Taking Kaiser's point, the Samuel passage highlights the Davidic Covenant, with its messianic implications, as the foundation for all subsequent working of God in history. 2 Samuel 7 becomes, with the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen.12,15 and 17), the universal 'charter' by which Yahweh will confirm the universal promise of blessing ('to all nations') already articulated through Abraham."[22]

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[18] **C. Amerding, Footnote:** R. Braun, ad loc. in *1 Chronicles*, follows RSV, and labels all proposed emendations unconvincing both of the Chronicles and the Samuel passages.

[19] **C. Amerding, Footnote:** Footnotes to EBC, ad loc. (CD-ROM edition)

[20] **C. Amerding, Footnote:** S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Books of Samuel*, p.277, as cited in EBC.

[21] **C. Amerding, Footnote:** W.C. Kaiser, 'The Blessing of David, The Charter for Humanity' in J.H. Skilton (ed.), *The Law and the Prophets* (Nutley: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), p.311. EBC (ad loc.) examines the language of the passage in light of proposed Assyrian and Hebrew vocabulary, and concludes that Kaiser's contention is not without merit.

[22] C. E. Armerding, *Did I ever ask for a house of Cedar?,* (Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology, ed. T.D. Alexander & S. Gathercole, Paternoster Press, 2004),40-41

For good measure we add the observation made by H.A. Whittaker; "…. 'The manner of man.' This detail is a trial for interpreters. In Chronicles (literally): "Thou hast caused me to see according to the law of the man of the ascent." In Samuel just "the law of the man." The word "ascent" applies always to the temple or to the Songs of Degrees, sung in the temple. Perhaps there is an ellipsis: "caused me to see (Thy Glory, in the sanctuary)." And perhaps David was marvelling that he was permitted to sit and pray in the sanctuary."[23]

*Placing the phrase ------**By what Law**-------Romans 3.27 in context*

So far we have suggested that the Pauline phrase is based on 2 Samuel 7:19, but investigation demonstrates that the original is cryptic/difficult/obscure and that the parallel in Chronicles is even more ambiguous. A linguistic/semantic approach can only take us thus far as all the interpretations are paraphrases (often guesses) of the author's original intent.

If Paul did indeed base his challenge in 3.27 on Samuel (as the Davidic thematic in Romans 2 and 3 suggests) then Paul *acts as our interpreter.* Paul has distilled the phrase to its bare essence. The point is that David was not allowed to sit before the ark as he was not a priest or even a Levite - *"Who am I, O Lord GOD? And **what is my house**, that You have brought me this far?"* (v.18) So, the law could not bring him into the presence of Yahweh (in fact the law could only kill him for sitting in front of the ark), the law could not grant him a vision of the risen Christ and the law could not give him the superb covenant promise that he received (more importantly the law could not forgive him after he sinned –only condemn and punish). The law was very limited in what it could achieve. It became an instrument of wrath because it highlighted weak, sinful human nature. David's question still stands – (the author's paraphrase of 2 Samuel 7:17): Is it in the law [that] the man [can sit before you]? Or perhaps, Where in the law [concerning] the man (the ellipsis must be supplied). David is therefore, either referring to himself; or more likely, to the vision that he saw (described in Psalm 110) – when **the** (promised) **man** sat down at the right hand of God – **By what Law?** There is *no law* that could

[23] H.A. Whittaker, Samuel, Saul &David, (Privately published, Great Britain,1993: available from *"The Christadelphian"*, Birmingham), 262

achieve this – only **the man** who had fulfilled and buried the law could resurrect the covenant. Now the cryptic parallel in Chronicles becomes clear – it is a crude attempt at harmonisation and explanation -*"Thou hast caused me to see according to the law of the man of the ascent."* The exalted man....the one who ascended to sit in the presence of Yahweh...was Jesus Christ. David no longer saw according to the *"law of sin and death"* but according to *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that made me free from the law of sin and death"* (Rom.8:8). Yes, David saw it, **but he only understood it after his sin with Bathsheba.**

By What Law? Of Works? No : but by the law of faith.

Romans chapter 3 concludes with reference to the *shema*; God is one **(v.30)** and he is the God of one unified people – faith (not law), operates as the mechanism of justification. Has faith then voided the law? Certainly not. Faith establishes the law. [24]

Conclusion

N.T. Wright remarks, "Even where the consensus has been challenged, the challenge has not so far penetrated so far as a fresh contextual exegesis of the chapter." (Wright, 2001, 131). We hope that this article has opened up a range of fresh possibilities with regards to the New Perspective on Paul and if nothing else that it highlights the relevance of the Old Testament in understanding the theology of Paul.

[24] One God, one unified people - Jew *and* Gentile (universalism on the basis of faith) – Dunn comments, "Since it is also (properly speaking) a Jewish universalism, it does not contradict the terms of the initial offer of that grace to Israel; that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ stands opposed to the Law characterized by the works of Jewish prerogative, but confirms the Law as calling for the obedience of faith" (Rom 3:31). [Dunn,1993,846]