

ARTICLE

Ethnic Ethics: Paul's Eschatological Myth of Jewish Sin

Stephen L. Young 

Department of Language, Literatures, and Cultures, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina, USA

Email: stephen.l.young@gmail.com

This paper received the Paul J. Achtemeier Award for New Testament Scholarship from the Society of Biblical Literature in 2020.

Abstract

Paul's letters depict gentiles and Jews with different characteristics of sin. This article focuses on Paul's rhetoric about Jewish shortcomings and argues that he has an eschatological myth of Jewish sin: it is the period in the Jewish deity's plan when he has hardened his people into disobedience and disloyalty. While scholars have traditionally tried to connect Paul's ideas about Jewish sin to deficiencies of historical Jews, Paul's claims are primarily animated by his Jewish eschatological scheme and competitive rhetorical needs. Paul re-emerges as a Jewish writer within his competitive social landscape wherein ethnic differentiation was an expected way of imagining the human and divine realms.

Keywords: Jewish sin; Paul; ethnicity; eschatology; myth; *pistis*

1. Introduction: Ethnic Differentiation in Paul's Letters

Like other ancient Mediterranean writings that focus on gods, or cult or philosophy, Paul's letters participate in Greek and Roman rhetorics of ethnic difference. The point is not just that categories of Jew and gentile permeate these texts. Rather, Paul's writing on topics traditionally considered as 'universalist' – the high God, his promises, what Christ accomplishes and how initiates participate in Christ's *pneuma* – is animated by ancient ideas about kinship, patrilineal descent and people groups.¹ The growing 'Radical New Perspective' or 'Paul within Judaism' movement relates to this ethnic redescription. One of its basic claims is that when Paul dissociates keeping the Jewish law from following Christ, his arguments are ethnically specific: he speaks to gentiles.²

¹ For example, P. Fredriksen, 'How Jewish is God?: Divine Ethnicity in Paul's Theology', *JBL* 137 (2018) 193–212; C. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (LNTS; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010); S.K. Stowers, 'What is Pauline Participation in Christ?', *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities* (eds. F. Udoh, S. Heschel, M. Chancey, and G. Tatum; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 352–71.

² Examples of proponents of this movement who relate their arguments to ancient ethnic ideas: P. Eisenbaum, 'A Remedy for Having Been Born of a Woman: Jesus, Gentiles, and Genealogy in Romans', *JBL* 123 (2004) 671–702; P. Fredriksen, *Paul, The Pagans' Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); S.K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); M. Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). S. Emanuel further amplifies this approach in combination

This movement creates an opportunity to think about ethnicity more widely in Paul's mythmaking.³ Like other ancient Mediterranean writers, he presumes that different *ethnē* and their deities have different characteristics, histories, customs and cultic relations.⁴ My argument here is that this ethnic sensibility likewise permeates his mythmaking about sin. Paul's primary ethnic axis is Jews versus the *ethnē*, or gentiles.⁵ Commentators already hold that Paul can distinguish between Jewish and gentile sin, often via common readings of Rom 2.12 and 5.13–14 with which I, perhaps unexpectedly given my interests in this article, disagree.⁶ But we can be more specific about gentile versus Jewish sin: for Paul, these two distinct ethnic groups have different histories of sin that explain their respective sins' distinct characteristics.⁷

This article focuses, in particular, on how Paul writes about Jewish sin. Interpreters have generally assumed that his sparse claims on the topic reflect his experiences with or general observations about actual Jews. And these observations have traditionally been expected to reveal a deficient Judaism as a background or foil for a Christian Paul.⁸ Such approaches obscure that Paul wields a myth of Jewish sin that is driven by his convictions about where things stand in the Jewish God's plan for history, the Jewish intellectual reservoirs he inhabits and his competitive rhetorical needs. Recognising the ethnic distinctions in Paul's myths of sin helps us both re-understand classic passages in his letters and re-situate him as a Jewish writer within his social landscapes. These were competitive landscapes wherein ethnic differentiation was an expected way of imagining the human and divine realms.

2. Not Idolatry, Passions, and Failed Minds for Jews

Any argument that Paul has ethnically inflected ideas about sin faces an obvious objection. According to long-established interpretive traditions in the field, Rom 5.12–21 offers

with metacritical interrogation of how 'Paul the Jew' often functions in NT scholarship to render Paul more ethnically palatable (*The Apostle Paul on Jews, Gentiles and Who Gets Saved* (Minneapolis: Fortress – Forthcoming)).

³ The category of mythmaking focuses on how claims about gods, origins and the nature of things can make some contested practices, social hierarchies or ideas—but not others—seem natural. When it comes to the study of sin in Paul's letters, thinking about mythmaking brings important comparisons with wider Greco-Roman materials, ideologies and forms of religious-philosophical competition into focus. See S.L. Young, *Paul Among the Mythmakers: Sins, Gods, and Scriptures* (Studies in Religion in Antiquity; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press – Forthcoming).

⁴ Fredriksen, 'Divine Ethnicity in Paul's Theology'; Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 43–66.

⁵ While Paul sometimes uses specific ethnic terms (e.g., 'Greeks') instead of *ethnē*, these often function as part of Paul's 'oppositional ethnic thinking' of Jews vs. everyone else, and often Greeks are representative gentiles (Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 48–9, 51).

⁶ It is the significant majority view to read Rom 2.12a's 'all who have sinned apart from the law' as a reference to gentile sin and 2.12b's 'all who have sinned under the law' as a reference to Jewish sin, understanding ἀνόμως in 2.12a to mean 'apart from' or 'without' the Mosaic law (e.g., J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 135–37; J.A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) 305–6, 307–8; R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) 210–11; T.H. Tobin, 'Controversy and Continuity in Romans 1:18–3:20', *CBQ* 55 (1993) 298–318, at 308–9). Following the dominant use of ἀνόμως in Greek literature as meaning wicked or lawless (in the sense of unrestrained or evil), I instead understand Paul to be writing about those 'who sinned wickedly' (ἀνόμως ἥμαρτον) versus those who sinned in more restrained ways within the framework of the law. The distinction is not between Jews and gentiles. For a detailed argument to this effect, see Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 134–40. See below for discussion of Rom 5.13–14.

⁷ Others have suggested this point: B. Rainey, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Xenophobia in the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 2019) 233–5; S.K. Stowers, 'Paul's Four Discourses about Sin', *Celebrating Paul: Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.* (ed. P. Spitaler; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 2011) 100–27, at 118. I offer a more fully integrated mapping of Paul's myth of Jewish sin.

⁸ On the prevalent drive to separate Paul from a deficient Judaism, see P. Eisenbaum, 'Paul, Polemics, and the Problem of Essentialism', *BI* 13 (2005) 224–38, at 225–31; M. Thiessen, 'Conjuring Paul and Judaism Forty Years After Paul and Palestinian Judaism', *JJMJS* 5 (2018) 7–20, at 9–11.

Paul's universal account of human sin through Adam, and this narrative underlies 1.18–32's sketch of general human moral, cultic and cognitive corruption.⁹ This is why 3.9 can declare 'for we have already established that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.'

Two points are relevant for clarifying my argument. First, I take Rom 1.18–32 to have only gentiles in view. Paul reuses culturally available mythological plotlines about the decline of civilisation in a Jewish idiom to sketch the corruptions of gentiles.¹⁰ This sketch aligns with Paul's version of Jewish polemical tropes about gentile nations elsewhere in his letters. He often lists gentile vices and specifies their fleshly passions, cognitive failures and perversions in cult ('idolatry').¹¹ Just as Wis 13.1 configures gentiles as foolish 'by nature' (φύσει) and expounds at length on their cultic corruptions (Wis 13.1–14.31), for Paul they are idolatrous sinners φύσει (e.g., Gal 2.15): this is their hereditary condition.¹²

But Paul never writes in these ways about Jews.¹³ In the apparent exception, 1 Cor 10.6–8, he clarifies the relevance of depicting ancient Israelites as idolaters who had excessive desire and engaged in *porneia*: 'But these things came to pass for them as a figure/pattern (τυπικῶς), but they were written for our admonition, on whom the end of the ages has come' (1 Cor 10.11). Such claims rhetorically concern, at least in this context, the Corinthian gentiles.¹⁴ Furthermore, Paul only imagines Israelite idolatry in the past. Like the writer of *Judith* (8.18–20; see also 5.18–19), he does not represent Jews of his historical era as idolaters. They still have zeal for God (Rom 10.2). While Paul writes of Jewish ignorance and failure in knowledge (Rom 10.2–3, 19; see discussion below), he reserves cultic, moral-psychological and cognitive corruption for gentile sin, not Jewish. Romans 1.18–32's vivid images of gentile corruption thus cannot explain how Paul has already explicated not only gentile, but also Jewish sin by 3.9.

Second, while Paul's discussions of Adam posit a primal origin of universal human plights, what he writes about Adam's significance for subsequent people suggests exploring ethnic difference. In Rom 5.12–21, Adam catalyses the spread of sin and death. In 1 Cor 15.20–49, Paul associates Adam with death, but not sin. In both cases, it is noteworthy that the dominant elements in Paul's portrayal of gentile sin are absent. In other words, a notable difference obtains between the passion-dominated, idolatrous and cognitively corrupt landscape of sin in Rom 1.18–32 versus the import of Adam for the spread of sin

⁹ For several examples that read Rom 5.12–21 together with 1.18–32 to posit a narrative of Adam's transgression behind what is taken as a sketch of general human sin in 1.18–32, see Dunn, *Paul the Apostle*, 91–92; D. Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (WUNT 79; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994) 34–43; M. Hooker, 'Adam in Romans I', *NTS* 6 (1959) 297–306; J. Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen 1,26f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen* (Göttingen: V&R, 1960) 317–18; J. Linebaugh, *God, Grace, and Righteousness in Wisdom of Solomon and Paul's Letter to the Romans: Texts in Conversation* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 111–15.

¹⁰ On Paul's reuse of civilization-decline materials, see Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 83–125; Young, *Paul Among the Mythmakers*, Chapter 2, 'Make Gentiles Masculine Again: The Gender of Decline and Salvation'. Debate about whether Jews are included in Rom 1.18–32's sketch of sin remain active (see the preceding note for scholars who say yes). For a recent argument that only gentiles are in view, see Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 47–52; see also Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 86–97; D. Swancutt, 'Sexy Stoics and the Rereading of Romans 1.18–2.16', *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (ed. A.J. Levine and M. Blickenstaff; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2004) 42–73, at 43–47, 59–67.

¹¹ 1 Thess 1.9–10; 4.3–5; Gal 4.8–9; 5.16–26; 1 Cor 5.9–10; 6.9–11; 12.2; see also Eph 4.17–19 from Ps-Paul. For discussion of these features of gentile sin in Paul, plus interrogation of how vice lists work, see F. Ivarson, 'Vice Lists and Deviant Masculinity: The Rhetorical Function of 1 Corinthians 5:10–11 and 6:9–10', *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (eds. T. Penner and C.V. Stichele; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 163–84; J. Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 15–112.

¹² Rainey elucidates connections between Paul's depictions of gentile idolatry, his ethnic framework for them and the idea that gentiles are thus sinners by nature or heritage (*Xenophobia in the Bible*, 229, 232, 234–35).

¹³ Stowers, 'Paul's Four Discourses', 125–6; Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 47.

¹⁴ So, P. Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 26–7.

and death in 5.12–21. The former concerns the sinful degeneration of gentile peoples, and the latter concerns all humanity subsequent to Adam, thus Jews and gentiles. This leads to a crucial, neglected point. Even though Paul intensifies his discussion of sin and death in Rom 5.12–21 via the language of death (5.14, 17) and sin (5.21) reigning (ἐβασίλευσεν), his writing about Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 does not move beyond the generalities of death and sin because they are among the few passages in his letters that address the history of misery at a general enough level to include both Jews and gentiles. If Paul's histories of sin are ethnically specific, this makes sense. Gentiles are idolaters who are dominated by their passions, but Jews are not. If Paul's focus on human misery in Romans 5 is broad enough to include both Jews and gentiles, its characteristics must remain general enough to accommodate their different histories of sin.

Paul can thus offer a myth of Adam's transgression to explain general human sin and death while not using it to explicate the varied ethnic specifics of sin. Part of the issue here is that even in Rom 5.12–21, Paul's rhetorical focus remains on gentiles. Thus, his historical scheme in which Adam's transgression catalysed sin and death for all people can contextually transition into Romans 6–8's refocus on gentiles, their total moral failure and the Jewish God's *pneumatic* remedy for their passions through Christ. Paul can make connections between distinct discourses about sin without conflating them.¹⁵ The combination of a general history of human sin (i.e., through Adam) and assertions about specifically gentile sins (i.e., idolatry, domination by passions, corrupted minds) thus prompts the question: what, for Paul the Jew, is Jewish sin?

3. Romans 9–11 and Paul's Eschatological Myth of Jewish Disobedience

Romans 9–11 provides Paul's clearest reflections on Jewish sin, though here he prefers the terminology of Israel.¹⁶ As many interpreters have noted, throughout this section of Romans Paul uses the interrelated grammars of disobedience and failures in loyalty or belief to classify Israel's sin.¹⁷ Thus in Rom 9.31–2 Israel did not reach a 'law of righteousness' because they did not pursue it ἐκ πίστεως. When Paul writes of Israel's stumbling stone in 9.32–3, he contrasts them with whoever trusts (ὁ πιστεύων). In 10.16 they have not all obeyed (ὕπηκουσαν) the Gospel, and Paul mobilises Isaiah to gloss this with, 'Lord, who has trusted (τίς ἐπίστευσεν)'—presumably also having Jews in view given how he continues writing in 10.18. In Rom 10.21, Israel has been a disobedient people (λαὸν ἀπειθοῦντα). Some among Israel find themselves broken off because of their distrust (ἀπιστία) in 11.20, though in 11.23 God will graft them in again if they do not persist in distrust (ἐὰν μὴ ἐπιμένωσιν τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ). Paul's programmatic claims about Israel's plight in 11.30–2 feature the language of disobeying (ἀπειθέω) and disobedience (ἀπειθεία). He also coordinates Jewish disobedience with failures in their knowledge (10.2–3, 19) and with them being hardened (11.7, 25; see also 9.18).

Debate continues as to what exactly Jewish disobedience, disloyalty and unbelief consisted of in Paul's imagination. What deficient actions of some or all Jews led him to write

¹⁵ Stowers, 'Paul's Four Discourses', 100.

¹⁶ The meaning(s) of Israel in this section remains debated. Most interpreters acknowledge that it overlaps with what is commonly labelled 'ethnic Israel' and thus Jews. Paul's strategic differentiations within Israel (e.g., Rom 9.6 or his use of remnant tropes) and his category of 'all Israel' (11.26) have amplified opportunities for disagreement. For an insightful discussion, see S. Sheinfeld, 'Who Is the Righteous Remnant in Romans 9–11? The Concept of Remnant in Early Jewish Literature and Paul's Letter to the Romans', *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. G. Boccaccini and C.A. Segovia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016) 233–50.

¹⁷ For illustrations of the interrelation of trust and obedience language in Romans, see 1.5; 10.16; 16.26. On this point more widely, T. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 282–83.

in this way about them? New Testament scholars have proposed various answers: Jewish disbelief in Jesus as the Messiah, rejection of Paul's gentile mission, turning away from the gospel, ethnic pride, rejection of grace in favour of works-righteousness, persecution of Paul or other followers of Jesus or even the crucifixion of Jesus itself?¹⁸ It is important to note that these different answers begin from the same presupposition: that Paul was writing from his own experience, observations or knowledge of his fellow Jews. I propose to move in a different direction; to capitalise on different questions that highlight overlooked paths in Paul's discourse.

As a starting point, one can note the consistency with Paul's rhetoric about Jewish problems in this section of Romans: disobedience and disloyalty or lack of trust. To develop Jennifer Eyl's argument, 'Pistis is a central feature governing much of the relationship between Israelites (later, Judeans) and their god' throughout the Greek versions of Jewish texts that make up a significant part of Paul's discursive reservoir.¹⁹ It should thus not be surprising that failures in faithfulness or obedience feature when he writes of Jewish shortcomings in a part of Romans that frequently mobilises passages from these texts.²⁰ Rather than only seeking explanations from Paul's actual experiences with his fellow Jews for his rhetoric of Israel's failures in trust and obedience, the intellectual repertoires with which he innovates are a better place to start. This shift parallels an important movement in scholarship on women in ancient Jewish and Christian sources. Rather than taking passages about women as windows into social realities, a crucial move has been approaching them first as evidence for studying elite male literary activities and the rhetorics that characterise such competitive arenas. In other words, we have come to understand, as Ross Kraemer elucidates, 'that mistaking rhetorical women for real women makes for bad history'. It sets us up to misunderstand how our sources work.²¹ This methodological point is important given the dominant paths interpreters have taken to discuss Israel's misstep in Romans 9–11. It directs us to continue attending to how Paul configures Jewish failures as a rhetorical, textual phenomenon.

From the perspective of textual logic, there is a key aspect of Paul's writing about Jewish failings: interpreters have noted that he relates his claims about Israel to his discussion of gentiles. After all, Romans 9–11 is, as Jill Hicks-Keeton explains, 'the most fully developed version of Paul's thinking on gentile inclusion in his extant writings'.²² Paul's writing about gentiles thus treats their inclusion – in the God of Israel's rescue through Christ as faithful subjects of the true God – as a thread interwoven with God's plans for Israel. That is a basic point of the otherwise highly debated passage, 11.25–32.

¹⁸ For diverging examples, see R. Bell, *The Irrevocable Call of God: An Inquiry into Paul's Theology of Israel* (WUNT 184; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 136, 223–24; T.L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 219–21; Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 514–29; Garlington, *Faith, Obedience*, 32–71; L. Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987) 135–50.

¹⁹ J. Eyl, *Signs, Wonders, and Gifts: Divination in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) 172–77, quote at 172.

²⁰ On the crucial roles that reuses of Jewish texts play in Romans 9–11, see J.R. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 43–305.

²¹ R.S. Kraemer, 'Becoming Christian', *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (ed. S.L. James and S. Dillon; Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 524–38, at 529. Bibliography for this movement in scholarship about gender, women and ancient Judaism/Christianity is immense. For classic discussions, see E.A. Clark, 'Ideology, History, and the Construction of "Woman" in Late Ancient Christianity', *JCS* 2 (1994) 155–84; eadem., 'The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the "Linguistic Turn"', *CH* 67 (1998) 1–31. More recently, see, for example, A. Cwikla, 'There's Nothing About Mary: The Insignificance of Mary in the Gospel of Thomas 114', *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 1 (2019) 95–112, at 98–107; R.S. Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²² J. Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth: Gentile Access to Israel's Living God in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) 129.

Paul's claims about Jews here thus take shape in relation to his writing about the, as Elizabeth Johnson puts it, 'interdependent' futures of Israel and gentiles.²³

I propose to dwell on something implicit in this common understanding of Romans 9–11. While it is widely accepted that this passage discusses gentiles and Israel eschatologically, a related point recedes into the background: it also imagines Israel's sin in an eschatological register. By eschatological here I mean that, for Paul, Israel's disobedience relates to specific stages or periods in God's ultimate plans for Jews and gentiles in the final eras of history. Paul may thus wield an eschatological myth of Israel's sin.

Though readers often brush up against this point, they rarely make it explicit – perhaps because it seems obvious. After all, Rom 11.11–12, 15, 25–32 (see below) are straightforward in constructing Israel's stumble, rejection, hardening and disobedience as stages in the divine plan. Oftentimes, however, it is fruitful to let our historical imaginations dwell on the obvious. Such an exercise allows things previously hidden behind the veil of the familiar to emerge into view. The eschatological nature of Paul's claims can refocus our analysis of Jewish sin in Romans given how interpreters have traditionally fixated on questions that direct our gaze outside the text.

To begin where Paul ends, in Rom 11.25–32 he weaves together themes that have shaped his earlier discussion: the hardening of Israel, gentile inclusion, the salvation of Israel, election, gentile and Jewish disobedience and the determinative calling and mercy of God.²⁴ Tellingly, he frames this summation as an explication of τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο in 11.25. The terminology of mystery carried significance across multiple registers of language that Paul and his auditors inhabited. Of particular note, given the Jewish eschatological idiom of Romans 9–11, the language of mystery often marked God's secret eschatological plan in Jewish sources.²⁵ Reflecting the periodising of the cosmos' history often seen throughout other Jewish writings with eschatological interests, Paul lays out his relevant stages of history. First, 'a hardening has come upon part of Israel' until, next, 'the fulness of the gentiles has come in' (11.25). Thus the climax of the Jewish deity's plan can be, 'and in this way (καὶ οὕτως) all Israel will be saved' (11.26). Paul then claims to have excavated his temporal scheme from oracular writings, 'just as it is written (καθὼς γέγραπται)' and offers a combined quotation that includes a section of Isaiah (59.20–21) he deploys eschatologically.²⁶ In other words, the hardening of Israel is a stage in God's ultimate plan.

²³ For forceful articulations of these points about Israel, gentiles, and Romans 9–11, see C. Johnson Hodge, "'A Light to the Nations': The Role of Israel in Romans 9–11", *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans* (ed. J.L. Sumney; Atlanta: SBL, 2012) 169–86; Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 286–316. The point that Paul's discussion of Israel functions within a scheme of related Jew and gentile histories in God's plan is widespread: J.M. Bassler, *Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) 80; N.A. Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 143–56; Fredriksen, *Paul*, 159–64; E.E. Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9–11* (Atlanta: SBL, 1989) 143–7, 162–3 (for 'interdependence'); E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983) 193–6; Sheinfeld, 'Righteous Remnant', 41–6.

²⁴ There is debate about whether Rom 11.25 reflects on the entire preceding Olive Tree analogy of 11.11–24 (e.g., J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988) 2.677–8) or just on 11.23–4 at its end (e.g., Jewett, *Romans*, 696–7). For my purposes it does not matter since, either way, 11.25–32 weaves together these languages and themes that have structured Romans 9–11 as a whole (on this, see M. Ann Getty, 'Paul and the Salvation of Israel: A Perspective on Romans 9–11', *CBQ* 50 (1988) 456–69, at 457–64).

²⁵ For an example from Pauline studies, M. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990) 35–7, 65–8, 94–7, 117–25, 173–5. For other engagements with Rom 11.25–32 that connect its rhetoric of mystery to the passage's eschatological orientation, see Johnson, *Function of Apocalyptic*, 127–9, 162–74; T.J. Lang, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness: From Paul to the Second Century* (BZNW 219; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015) 43–6.

²⁶ On Paul's adaptation of Jewish writings in his eschatological mythmaking here, see J.R.D. Kirk, 'Why Does the Deliverer Come ἐκ Σιών (Romans 11.26)?', *JSNT* 33 (2010) 81–99; F. Mussner, 'Ganz Israel wird gerettet werden' (Röm 11.26). Versuch einer Auslegung', *Kairos* 18 (1976) 214–55, at 252–5; Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 276–98.

Paul then continues explaining that Jewish (and also gentile) disobedience are stages in his God's plan: 'For just as you (gentiles) were at one time (πότε) disobedient to God but now (νῦν δέ) have received mercy because of their (Israel's) disobedience, so they too have now (νῦν) disobeyed in order that by the mercy shown to you they may also now (νῦν) receive mercy' (11.30–31). As Paul's syntax itself thus stresses, the key contours of Israel's disobedience are temporal and their significance eschatological. Lest the reader miss that Paul renders such timing as God's, 11.32 concludes this climactic passage: 'For God has confined (συνέκλεισεν) all to disobedience (εἰς ἀπειθείαν) in order that he might have mercy on all'. Israel's disobedience is a matter of God's timing. It marks a notable stage in the divine plan for rescuing Israel and gentiles. This is an eschatological myth of Jewish sin.

The preceding discussion in Romans 11 similarly develops eschatological logic. That which Israel sought but did not reach was due to being hardened (11.7), which Paul then identifies as God's action in 11.8 by using a combined quotation from Deut 29.4 and Isa 29.10, 'God gave them ("Ἐδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς) a spirit of bewilderment, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, until this very day'. Deuteronomy 29.4 contributes most to the language of 'until this very day'²⁷ and thus permits Paul to continue the temporal encoding of Israel's failure. Romans 11.11–12 and 11.15 then relate Israel's current misstep and rejection to God's plans for gentile inclusion, with both anticipating a later era of Israel's full inclusion and acceptance. And the olive tree analogy for the divine plan in 11.17–24 coordinates Israel's lack of trust with God breaking them off to create time for gentile grafting-in. But in the end God can graft them in again. In each case where Paul writes of Israel's disobedience and hardening and lack of trust, the decisive issue is the timing in the plans of Israel's God. If one is attempting to tease out the text's own theory of Jewish sin, the logic is consistently eschatological.

Paul's eschatological theory about Israel's failures should shape how we imagine his rhetoric about Israel's disobedience, distrust, failure at reaching the law and lack of understanding in Rom 9.30–10.21. As he continues clarifying throughout that section, especially by using marked-engagements with Jewish writings about God's unfolding cosmic designs,²⁸ these are eschatological events. This point aligns with how in 9.6–29 Paul emphasises the Jewish deity's agency in hardening, selecting, calling and showing mercy (9.11, 16, 18, 23–4).

New Testament interpreters have probed Paul's understandings of Israel's misstep by speculating outside the text into his own experience or observations of contemporary Jews, and then sought to coordinate these possibilities with claims in Romans. In other words, readers have fixated on how historical Jews had actually sinned. Such fixation has resulted in overlooking two pronounced contours in Paul's writing. First, Romans 9–11 continues manifesting Paul's distinction between characteristics of gentile sin (idolatry, cognitive corruption, extreme moral failure) versus Jewish (disobedience, lack of trust and misunderstanding). Second, and related, Paul resolutely promotes divine timing and agency as the key animating feature of Israel's failure. To interpret Paul's language about hardening via questions about whether this means God imprisoned Jews in a state they chose for themselves, perhaps by refusing Paul's Gospel,²⁹ is to blur our vision

²⁷ Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 242–44.

²⁸ Getty, 'Paul and the Salvation of Israel', 466–8; Johnson Hodge, 'Role of Israel', 171, 176–80; Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 119–217.

²⁹ For example, E. Dinkler, *Signum Crucis: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament und zur christlichen Archäologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967) 241–69; C. Zoccali, "'And So All Israel Will Be Saved": Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship', *JSNT* 30 (2008) 289–318, at 301 n. 28, 306–7 n. 41. Even Bell, who critiques the position that 'God hardens Israel because Israel has hardened herself' (*Irrevocable Call*, 224–7), still orients his discussion of divine hardening around questions of human responsibility (219–33). In other words, this concern structures the *doxa* or commonsense of scholarship.

of the text's own logic. While he sometimes, like other Greek and Roman period writers, reflects on the relationships between divine and human activity,³⁰ here Paul emphasises God's action: 'in order that God's purpose, in accordance with his choice, not because of works but because of him who calls' or 'So then not from will or running, but from God who has mercy' (9.11, 16). Divine agency, choosing, hardening and confining are the pronounced features of Paul's eschatological mythmaking in Romans 9–11,³¹ though traditional questions have sometimes hidden this behind the veil of the obvious.³² It thus makes sense that Romans 9–11 lacks much attention to Israel's guilt or specific faults and, as a whole, does not indicate 'gross moral turpitude' on the part of Israel.³³ God's ultimate plan is the primary issue – not Jewish activity; and certainly not passions, cognitive corruption or idolatry. Just as elsewhere, in Romans 9–11 Paul maintains his ethnic distinctions in the histories and characteristics of sin.

In Paul's sketch of Jewish sin, Israel is disobedient and ignorant and unfaithful because 'now' is the penultimate stage in their God's plan when he has hardened, caused to stumble or confined most of them for the purposes of gentile inclusion in his coming kingdom. Such mythmaking situates Paul among other writers who associate with Jewish texts and sometimes feature a stage of climactic Jewish sin in their eschatological schemes.³⁴ Since Paul writes as though the death, resurrection and subsequent actions of Christ under God signal the turning of the ages (e.g., 1 Cor 10.11; 15.22–8; Gal 1.3–4), it makes sense that it would be the time of Jewish sin. Very soon (e.g., Rom 13.11), however, the next stage or period of history will come and all Israel will be saved.³⁵ We may be able to probe further for how Paul imagines Israel's disobedience and whether he coordinates it with actions of Jews in his own time.³⁶ But such concerns should follow rather than be permitted to obscure the eschatological myth of Jewish sin that Paul promotes in Romans 9–11.

³⁰ For example, Phil 2.12–13; see also Rom 11.20–4. For wider discussion, see J.M.G. Barclay and S.J. Gathercole, ed., *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and his Cultural Environment* (LNTS; New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

³¹ For examples of appropriate recognition of God's agency in hardening within the passage's logic, see Bassler, *Navigating Paul*, 80; Fredriksen, *Paul*, 160; Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 92, 140, 143–4; Getty, 'Paul and the Salvation of Israel', 459, 463–6; Johnson Hodge, 'Role of Israel', 175, 179, 183; Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 300–16; Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 50–6, 240–51.

³² See Dahl's related point from over forty years ago, 'Even interpreters who have recognized that the theme of Romans 9–11 is God's dealings with Israel in the past, the present, and the future have often failed to liberate themselves from the common dogmatic approach. As a result, the analysis of the composition is dominated by questions about God's election and Israel's responsibility' (*Studies in Paul*, 142).

³³ Respectively, Getty, 'Paul and the Salvation of Israel', 459, 465; M.V. Novenson, 'The Self-Styled Jew of Romans 2 and the Actual Jews of Romans 9–11', *The So-Called Jew in Paul's Letter to the Romans* (ed. R. Rodríguez and M. Thiessen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016) 133–62, at 159–60.

³⁴ For several examples, *Jub* 23.16–22; *1 En* 93.9; *Sib Or* 3.68–9; *T.Mos* 7.1–8.5; *T.Lev* 14.1; *T.Dan* 5.4; 6.6; *T.Ash* 7.5; 4 *Ez* 5.1–10; 7.133; *2 Bar* 1.3–5. Miryam Brand also notes the prominence of imagining the sub-eschatological era as a period of climactic sin and evil in ancient Jewish sources that periodise history (*Evil Within and Without: The Sources of Sin and Its Nature as Portrayed in Second Temple Literature* (JAJS 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 279).

³⁵ Given my interest in the fact that eschatological logics structure Romans 9–11's rhetoric about Israel's problems (as opposed to the specifics of those logics), I have avoided the usual interpretive minefields, such as how to understand 11.26's 'and in this way all Israel will be saved'. For two insightful and elegantly simple approaches, see Johnson Hodge, 'Role of Israel', 174, 180–5; Sheinfeld, 'Righteous Remnant', 45–6. For a detailed discussion that tracks the traditional history of debates on 11.26, see J. Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel: Jews, Former Gentiles, Israelites* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023) 271–322.

³⁶ Just as, to stick with the parallel drawn above with movements in the field on the study of women and gender, Kraemer allows that some rhetoric about women 'might be rooted in historical reality' ('Becoming Christian', 529).

4. Romans 2.17–24's Eschatological Resonance and Paul's Delegitimizing of Fellow Jewish Competitors

In Rom 2.17, Paul commences writing about the one who calls himself a Jew and, in 2.21–3, critiques this figure as a thief, adulterer, perpetrator of sacrilege and transgressor of the law. This passage is an obvious candidate for probing how Paul has explicated that Jews are also under sin alongside gentiles, as he claims to have done in 3.9.³⁷ I offer three brief points about how Paul characterises the sins of some Jews here.

First, Paul does not claim to attend to the shortcomings of all Jews in Rom 2.17–24. Instead he signals other Jewish teachers of gentiles who advocate observance of their ethnic laws in a way with which he disagrees. These possibly fictive or hypothetical teachers are characters in this part of the letter's 'speech-in-character'.³⁸ This makes sense of the consistent association of the Jewish figure with language of instructing, teaching and guiding.³⁹ It also speaks to an important point about 2.17–24 that interpreters have made over the past several decades: if one treats the passage as an empirical description of all Jews in Paul's time, it makes little sense.⁴⁰ Instead of conjuring all Jews and their deficiencies for the audience, Paul paints a picture of a competing Jewish teacher of gentiles whose hypocrisy and general transgression of the law undermine his legitimacy. Attending to Paul's competitive rhetoric rather than looking outside the text for empirical Jews who match his depiction, even if he may have other real Jewish teachers of gentiles in mind,⁴¹ then facilitates following his own logic.

Second, the textual images of Jewish sin in Rom 2.17–24 continue manifesting Paul's ethnic distinctions. He accuses the Jewish teacher with the verbs of κλέπτω, μοιχεύω, and ιεροσυλέω in 2.21–2. The first two charges come in syntactic pairs with the thing taught against being the thing hypocritically done (e.g., 'The one who proclaims not to steal, do you steal?'). But the third charge differs. Where we might expect, 'The one who abhors idols, do you engage in idolatry?', Paul instead writes, 'The one who abhors idols, do you commit sacrilege?' As Brian Rainey has argued, Paul disrupts his own structure of pairs because he would not characterise Jews of his time as idolaters.⁴² Sacrilege (ιεροσυλέω) could offer a more general charge of impiety that aligns with Paul's following

³⁷ R.M. Thorsteinsson has argued that this figure is, instead, a gentile who adopts Jewish laws (*Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell, 2003) 196–221). Though a minority interpretation, it has been taken up and elaborated on, e.g., Fredriksen, *Paul*, 156–7; R. Rodríguez, *If You Call Yourself a Jew: Reappraising Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014); Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 54–5, 59–64. This article is not the place to engage with Thorsteinsson's arguments. Suffice it to say that I appreciate them and agree with his emphasis on a gentile-encoded audience for Romans, though I still understand the figure about whom Paul writes in 2.17–24 as a competing Jewish teacher of gentiles (for limited critique, see Stowers's review in *JTS* 56 (2005) 561–5).

³⁸ Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 143–53 (e.g., 'a polemical construction of "missionary" opponents. This Jew is one of Paul's competitors for gentiles', at 150). While demurring about the Jewish identification of the teacher, Thorsteinsson similarly explicates the diatribal, speech-in-character textures of the passage (*Paul's Interlocutor*, 123–50, 196–204).

³⁹ Johnson Hodge, 'Role of Israel', 171–2, 178–80. The concentration of instructional language within these few clauses is striking: ὁδηγός, παιδευτής, διδάσκαλος, διδάσκω (x2), κηρύσσω. Presumably φῶς τῶν ἐν σκότει (2.19) in the midst of this language carries an instructional valence alongside its allusion to Israel's role as a light to the nations and blind (e.g., Isa 42.6–7; 49.6; 1 En. 105.1; Wis 18.4; Sib. Or. 3.194–5; see Jewett, *Romans*, 225).

⁴⁰ Influentially, see Sanders, *Paul*, 124–5.

⁴¹ See Thorsteinsson's similar points (*Paul's Interlocutor*, 129–30).

⁴² Rainey, *Xenophobia in the Bible*, 234.

claim that the teacher dishonours God by transgressing the law and causing his name to be blasphemed among the nations.⁴³

Third, in Rom 2.23–4, Paul uses Isa 52.5 (Greek) as an oracular encapsulation of his assertions about the competing Jewish teacher's sin: 'For as it is written, "the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you"'. More is happening here than Paul zeroing in on a passage from Isaiah to illustrate general Jewish sin. Isaiah 52.5 derives from a passage in this prophetic writing that Paul uses to depict eschatological events. In Rom 10.14–17, he draws twice from this passage to discuss disobedience, the trust that reverses it, and how such rescue comes through Christ (Isa 52.7 and 53.1 in Rom 10.15–16). Then in Rom 15.21, Paul again adapts from this spot in Isaiah (52.15) to imagine his eschatological efforts to bring about gentile inclusion.⁴⁴ In other words, Paul encodes Jewish transgression of the law in Rom 2.21–4, which transitions into claims about some Jews being unfaithful (ἠπίστησάν τις) in 3.3, with the same literary resources he uses for eschatological mythmaking. One can imagine Paul treating Isa 52.5 as the stage of Jewish sin immediately preceding God's ultimate rescue that he finds spelled out in the following sentence: 'Therefore my people shall know my name in that day, because I myself am the one who speaks: I am here, like season upon the mountains, like the feet of one bringing good news of a report of peace, like one bringing good news of good things, because I will make your salvation heard, saying to Zion, "Your God shall reign"' (Isa 52.6–7 Greek). This is not that speculative of a suggestion given that in Rom 10.15 Paul treats Isa 52.7 as an oracle about the end-times rescue that he claims Israel's God is enacting.⁴⁵

Romans 2.17–24 emerges as another locus of Paul's eschatological myth of Jewish sin. To understand the text as such does not require taking it as Paul's ideas about 'typical Jews'.⁴⁶ Regardless of whether he has actual competing Jewish teachers of gentiles in mind, we can attend to his theory of Jewish sin in the passage. The Jewish teacher of 2.17–24 is not dominated by passions, corrupted in mind or an idolater like the gentiles of 1.18–32.⁴⁷ His transgression of the law (2.23) – a characteristic that aligns with Romans 9–11's emphasis on disobedience – is a manifestation of the penultimate stage in God's plan that Paul finds in Isa 52.5, which immediately precedes the ultimate rescue. In this way Paul's imagination of Jewish sin aligns with other Jews who wrote about Jewish disobedience to the law in the context of eschatological schemes (e.g., *Jub* 23.16, 19; 4 *Ez* 7.19–24, 68–72; 9.31–7; 14.29–30; 2 *Bar* 19.3–8). Whether or not the addressees of Romans could follow the specifics of Paul's adaptation of Isaiah in Rom 2.23–4, this passage in Romans reflects Paul's eschatological theory of Jewish sin. And this reading of Rom

⁴³ Thiessen (*Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 61) and Thorsteinsson (*Paul's Interlocutor*, 213–18) both largely equate ἱεροσυλέω with idolatry to argue that the three charges of Rom 2.21–2 are a typical collection of vices that Jewish writers attribute to gentiles. But this precisely misses how Paul has disrupted the potential pairing that would have specified idolatry. Thus Thiessen's claim that Wis 14.23–7 'contains the same collocation of theft, adultery, and idol worship that Paul refers to in Romans 2' (*Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 61) to characterise gentiles requires taking Wis 14.27's εἰδώλων θρησκεία as an equivalent to Rom 2.22's ἱεροσυλέω. Paul's rhetoric severs such an equivalence for 2.22 by not following ὁ βδελυσσόμενος τὰ εἰδωλα with a verb of idolatry, as his preceding syntax would lead us to expect. The absence of idolatry, and its unexpected replacement with ἱεροσυλεῖς, in the second half of 2.22's last pairing should get to have a voice in our analysis.

⁴⁴ On Paul's adaptations from this part of Isaiah, see Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 170–80, 329–36.

⁴⁵ See Wagner's argument that Paul read this section of Isaiah as a coherent oracle of judgment and salvation (*Heralds of the Good News*, 176–8).

⁴⁶ Contra Thiessen, who associates such a reading with taking the Jew of Rom 2.17–24 as a 'typical' or 'representative' Jew, images of which have (horrifyingly) 'stirred the imaginations of numerous Christian interpreters' into claims that 'all Jews in the first century were involved in one or all of these immoral activities' – an approach Thiessen rightly critiques (*Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 54, 59–60).

⁴⁷ So, Stowers, 'Paul's Four Discourses', 125; Swancutt, 'Sexy Stoics', 46.

2.17–24 combines with 3.3a to clarify how Paul can write in 3.9, ‘for we have already established (προηγουσάμεθα)⁴⁸ that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin’.

5. Historical Periods and Divine Agency in Paul’s Mythmaking about Sin Elsewhere

Paul’s myth of Jewish failure reflects the same historical literary strategies he deploys elsewhere to elaborate on sin. For example, his narrative of decline in Rom 1.18–32 sketches stages within the history of gentile sin. There was an early cosmic period in which gentiles knew God (1.19–21a), but then they corrupted their cultic engagement (1.21–3) and Israel’s God responded by handing them over (παραδίδωμι) to their passions with further resulting impurity and shaming of their bodies because of their iconic cultic error (1.24–5). God’s infliction of moral-psychological corruption continues in 1.26–32, with past degeneration shading into Paul’s address of his contemporary gentiles in 2.1. Romans 1.18–32 thus does not have a flat vision of gentile sin, but a history marked by different stages or periods in their decline.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Paul emphasises the Jewish God’s agency in the decline. God hands them over to (i.e., inflicts) further cognitive and moral-psychological corruption as an expression of his wrath.⁵⁰

In Rom 5.12–21, Paul similarly periodises the history of misery for humanity, etching temporal contours into his myth of Adam’s catastrophic effects. These stages are marked in particular by the law of Moses.⁵¹ Romans 5.12–21 does not portray an undifferentiated idea of sin. Sin, instead, has a history that divides into different periods, with the qualities or significance of sin differing between each period. Immediately after writing that ‘and thus death spread into all men, with the result that all sinned’ (5.12), Paul interrupts his own sentence. He specifies that ‘for up to the law sin was in the cosmos, but sin is not reckoned when there is not law. But death ruled from Adam even to Moses, even upon the ones not sinning similarly to the transgression of Adam’ (5:13–14). Paul’s writing about Adam in Romans 5 thus distinguishes three periods in sin’s history. First, the period of Adam and transgressing⁵² a divine command. Second, people before Moses sinning in the absence of a divine command. And third, people subsequent to Moses and the law

⁴⁸ In keeping with his approach that does not find Jews in Rom 2.17–24, Thorsteinsson has intriguingly argued that προηγουσάμεθα ‘refers not to what Paul himself had previously said in his letter but to what had previously been stated in the Jewish scriptures about all being under sin’ (*Paul’s Interlocutor*, 235–6, quote at 236; see also Novenson, ‘Self-Styled Jew’, 152). But for arguments taking προηγουσάμεθα as referring to earlier in the letter, see, e.g., Dunn, *Romans*, 1.148; Jewett, *Romans*, 258.

⁴⁹ For argument about such periodisation of gentile sin in Rom 1.18–32, plus discussion of how this approach can orient scholarly gaze away from usual questions like whether Paul promotes a ‘natural theology’ in 1.19–20 (since those verses pertain to an earlier period before gentile decline), see Young, ‘Make Gentiles Masculine Again’.

⁵⁰ As has been noted, the three aorist uses of παραδίδωμι with God as the subject structure 1.18–32, highlighting God’s agency; e.g., B. Brooten, ‘Romans 1:18–32: A Commentary’, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 219–302, at 231; Jewett, *Romans*, 166–69; U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (EKKNT 6; 3d Ed.; Zurich: Benziger, 1987) 113–14. Combined with 1.18 introducing the passage as an illustration of God’s wrath, the effect is emphasising God’s agency in gentiles’ decline into corruption; e.g., H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (HThKNT 6; Freiburg: Herder, 1977) 58–60; Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 92–4.

⁵¹ This is a dominant view among interpreters; e.g., Jewett, *Romans*, 370–9; E. Jüngel, *Unterwegs zur Sache. Theologische Bemerkungen* (Munich: Kaiser, 1972) 145–72.

⁵² As illustrated by Rom 4.15 and 5.13–14, Paul strategically distinguishes between sin (ἀμαρτία) versus transgression (παράβασις) of a revealed divine command, and aligns this with his distinction between sin that is-not versus is counted against people, depending on the presence of the law; e.g., E. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus. Exegetisch-Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Rom. 5:12–21 (1 Cor. 15)* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962) 189–92; Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 132–4.

transgressing revealed divine commands.⁵³ Paul periodises sin and death in relation to events from Jewish lore.⁵⁴

In Gal 3.15–25, Paul also deploys a periodising, stages-of-history scheme for discussing sin, the law and the coming of *pistis*. One can note Paul's temporal rhetoric. The law 'was added because of transgressions, until (ἄχρις) the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made' (3.19). Before (πρό) the coming of *pistis* 'we were guarded under the law, being confined until the coming of *pistis* would be revealed (εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι)'. 'The law was our guardian until the Christ came' (γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν). But now we are no longer (οὐκέτι) under a guardian' (3.23–5). Furthermore, as with disobedience in Rom 11.30–2, divine agency is behind the confining (συγκλείω) in Gal 3.22. This confining also has an eschatological purpose. Just as God 'confining (συνέκλεισεν) all to disobedience in order that (ἵνα) he might have mercy on all' in Rom 11.32, in Gal 3.22 'the writing confined (συνέκλεισεν) all under sin in order that (ἵνα) the promise from the faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given to those who trust'.⁵⁵ The similar syntax and diction is striking: a divinely associated agent confines (συγκλείω) all (τοὺς πάντας and τὰ πάντα) to either disobedience or sin so that (ἵνα) God's rescue might befall (aorist subjunctive) whomever Paul has in view.⁵⁶

Though Paul's responsibility for the passage is debated, 1 Thess 2.14–16 arguably discusses the sin of some (not all) Jews eschatologically.⁵⁷ Just as other Jewish texts imagine that there will be a climactic limit or apex of sin (e.g., Gen 15.6; Dan 8.23; *Jub* 14.16; 2 Macc 6.12–16; 4 Ez 12.25), 1 Thess 2.14–16 claims that the Jews in view there are filling up the measure of their sins (εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας πάντοτε) with the result that God's wrath has come upon them in a way leading to the completion or consummation of his anger (εἰς τέλος).⁵⁸ Rather than being an eruption of Christian anti-Judaism within 1 Thessalonians, in this passage Paul, like other Jewish writers, criticises some of his contemporary (competing or opposing) Jews by deploying eschatological rhetorics. Notably for my argument, this reading aligns with the idea that Paul's writing about Jewish sin stresses divine agency and dwells not primarily on the specifics of their sin but an eschatological framework for it.⁵⁹

⁵³ Some see a narrowing of focus on Israelite / Jewish sin in Rom 5.14 given Paul's emphasis on 'transgression' (i.e., of Mosaic law) after Moses (e.g., Dunn, *Romans*, 1.276). Extracting an implication about general Jewish sin from Rom 5.14 seems to blur Paul's point of illustrating how 'death spread to all men on account of which all sinned' (5.12) – thus Jews and gentiles (on this translation of ἐφ' ᾧ in 5.12, see J. Fitzmyer, 'The Consecutive Meaning of ΕΦ'Ω in Romans 5.12', *NTS* 39 (1993) 321–9). Since Paul repeatedly clarifies that gentiles know and are also subject to Mosaic law (Rom 6.14–15; 7.1, 4–6; see Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 112, 113–17, 134–40), it is not surprising to find him using language about the law, Moses and transgression to cover a history of sin and death that is general enough to include both Jews and gentiles (despite the position he takes in his *Romans* commentary referenced above, Dunn elsewhere goes in similar direction with Rom 5.14; see *Paul the Apostle*, 97).

⁵⁴ Notably, 2 *Bar* 15.5–19.8 similarly distinguishes between different stages in the history of sin and periodises around Adam, Moses and the law.

⁵⁵ Though I opt for a subjective-genitive rendering of ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, it is not necessary for my argument.

⁵⁶ Readers commonly make such connections between Rom 11.32 and Gal 3.22 (Dunn, *Romans*, 2.688–9; Jewett, *Romans*, 711; Stowers, 'Paul's Four Discourses', 115–16). The relevance of Psalms 30.9 and 70.50, 62 (Greek) as linguistic resources for the divine agency of confining (συγκλείω) is also often suggested (see Dunn and Jewett references above).

⁵⁷ On the passage referring to some, and not all, Jews, see A. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 169–70, 174.

⁵⁸ For this argument, Malherbe, *Thessalonians* 170–1, 176–7; Stowers, 'Paul's Four Discourses', 117–20.

⁵⁹ See Malherbe's explicit comments along these lines (*Thessalonians*, 170, 176).

The sketches of sin in Rom 1.18–32, 5.12–14, Gal 3.15–25 and 1 Thess 2.14–16 reflect the eschatological literary strategies of periodising and promoting divine agency that Romans 9–11 features in its myth of Jewish disobedience. Galatians 3.23 even raises the eschatological revelatory volume by featuring ἀποκαλύπτω in its temporal scheme just as Romans 9–11, and especially 11.25–36, feature linguistic resources from the revelatory repertoire.⁶⁰ Though some of these passages concern gentile or even general human sin, they indicate the ordinariness for Paul of wielding his ethnic literary culture's eschatological frameworks for sin. It is not surprising that his ideas about Jewish lack of trust, disobedience or misunderstanding then reflect such eschatological ideas.

6. Ethnic Specificity, Competition, and Paul Among other Jewish Teachers and Writers

Identifying Paul's myth of Jewish sin permits us to put a variety of pieces together. He does not attribute idolatry, corrupted minds and domination by passions – the characteristics of gentile sin – to Jews. Paul instead focuses on their disobedience, transgression of the law and misunderstanding. This distinction in characteristics of sin coordinates with Paul having different myths of gentile versus Jewish sin. If Jewish sin boils down to God's timing, then passions and idolatry and corrupt minds are not the issue. Instead, God's cosmic plan is determinative, and it plays out in Jewish rejection of Paul's authority and message, a rejection he bemoans (e.g., Rom 9.1–5).

I have urged attention to Paul's textual logic as opposed to fixation on usual questions like 'What exactly did Jewish sin consist of for Paul?' Having interrogated his own rhetoric, we can follow it and suggest that Paul signals to Jewish disobedience or lack of trust in (his interpretation of) what their God was doing through Christ.⁶¹ This would also be an efficient strategy for Paul to delegitimize competing Jewish teachers of gentiles who urge them to keep the law in ways that diverge from his message, which helps explain Paul's focus on Jewish failures as teachers of gentiles (Rom 2.17–24).⁶² Such an approach situates Paul among other Jews who wrote about the sin of their fellow Jews to delegitimize teachers, experts or leaders they deemed competitors (e.g., *Book of the Watchers*, *Jubilees*, *Epistle of Enoch*, 4QMMT).⁶³ Thus in Paul's rhetoric, rather than being true guides who wield expertise in the God of Israel's plans, and thus knowledge for how gentiles can gain access to his powers, his fellow Jewish competitors instead lack trust, are disobedient, do not understand and transgress the very law they are

⁶⁰ See fn. 25.

⁶¹ See Fredriksen, *Paul*, 160–1; Novenson, 'Self-Styled Jew' 159–60; Thiessen, 'Conjuring Paul', 15 n. 25, 19–20.

⁶² On Paul's criticism being of Jewish teachers urging gentile observance of the law, Johnson Hodge, 'Role of Israel', 178–9; Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 298–9, 302–11.

⁶³ For similar approaches to these writings, see S. Fraade, 'To Whom It May Concern: 4QMMT and its Addressee (s)', *RevQ* 76 (2000) 507–26; M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 20–8; eadem, *A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 53–84; A.Y. Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 214, 217, 219–20, 239–40; eadem., *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 64–5, 98–116. Reed in particular (*Demons*, 200–240) critiques influential 'reductive' 'symbolic' interpretations of fallen angels in the *Book of the Watchers* that correlate them primarily with foreign-empire or human referents. She instead proposes a potential 'negative exempla' approach that still respects these angels' existence in the cosmic-histories of the myths in the *Book of the Watchers*: the scribes responsible for the text systematised, listed and categorised these divine beings while weaving myths (e.g., *1 En* 15.1–16.4) that locate the origins of trouble with some divine beings in ways that also delegitimize potential rival Jewish experts to 'appropriate' their authority / expertise over spirits for their scribal repertoire.

teaching about. These rhetorical jabs are particularly significant since Paul also configures *pistis* as a technology for gentile access to the Jewish deity's benefits,⁶⁴ and he represents these Jews as failures in *pistis*.

Paul's myth of Jewish sin also situates him recognisably in his social and intellectual landscapes wherein ethnic differentiation was an expected way of imagining the human and divine realms. Approaching Paul in this manner makes him a literate Jew among others who drew on resources from their intellectual repertoires to write about God's ultimate plans. While some interpreters have sought to explain Romans 9–11 in terms of 'influence' from 'Jewish apocalyptic' scenarios seen in other sources, this misses the point. Yes, other Jewish writers deployed eschatological schemes in which the consummation of God's rescue awaited Israel's repentance, and thus presumed Israel's sin. But the issue is not 'influence' on Paul. We do not need to identify a precise precursor for his eschatological scheme that he could have 'borrowed' while possibly changing the order of an item within it, as though he was 'borrowing' or being 'influenced' by something from the outside.⁶⁵ Paul was one among these Jewish writers who engaged in textual mythmaking by mobilising shared ethnic resources such as earlier Jewish writings, myths about their God's cosmic plans and their interpretations of cosmic timing. Many of the templates and sensitivities (e.g., the assumption of the high God's determinative agency, God delaying the consummation of his plan to allow more time for progress or periodising history) in these intellectual reservoirs are also themselves examples of Jews participating in wider Mediterranean ways of imagining how the cosmos works.⁶⁶ Paul's ethnically varied eschatological mythmaking is thus another example of literate Jews participating in characteristic ways that Greek and Roman period writers construed the politics of the cosmos. In other words, Paul's ethnic ethics – his eschatological myth of Jewish sin – make him an intelligible actor in his social and intellectual environments.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

⁶⁴ See J. Eyl, *Paul's Use of Fidelity Among the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, Under Contract); S.L. Young, 'Paul's Ethnic Discourse on "Faith": Christ's Faithfulness and Gentile Access to the Judean God in Romans', *HTR* 108 (2015) 30–51.

⁶⁵ For an influential example of an argument about such 'apocalyptic traditions' and their 'influence' on Paul here, see D. Allison, 'Romans 11:11–15: A Suggestion', *PRS* 12 (1985) 23–30, at 27.

⁶⁶ For example, see Vergil's *Fourth Eclogue*; Plutarch's *On the Delay of Divine Vengeance*. For an example of re-describing Paul and other 'apocalyptic' Jewish writers in this manner, particularly by interrogating widely shared 'premises and assumptions about the cosmos, the gods, and political relationships in the world of divinity', see E. Wasserman, *Apocalypse as Holy War: Divine Politics and Polemics in the Letters of Paul* (AB; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) 2–3, 10–11 (for quotation), 134, 163, 190, 204–7.

Cite this article: Young SL (2024). Ethnic Ethics: Paul's Eschatological Myth of Jewish Sin. *New Testament Studies* 70, 235–248. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688523000462>