

IS SONSHIP IN ROMANS 8:14–17 A LINK WITH ROMANS 9?

George C. Gianoulis

THE SONSHIP OF BELIEVERS IS AN IMPORTANT THEME in Romans 8. Paul used the honorific title υἱοὶ θεοῦ twice (vv. 14, 19), τέκνα θεοῦ three times (vv. 16, 17, 21), and υιοθεσία twice (vv. 15, 23). These terms all define the status of believers before God, that is, those who have new life in the Spirit. In Romans 9 υιοθεσία is used once (v. 4), τέκνα with and without the genitive four times (vv. 7, 8), υἱοὶ θεοῦ (v. 26), and σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ once (v. 7). This sonship motif denoting the status of believers is an important connective link between chapters 8 and 9.

A SURVEY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF ROMANS 1–8 TO 9–11

The relationship of chapters 1–8 to chapters 9–11 has been widely discussed in commentaries, essays, and monographs. It has long been assumed that Romans 1–8 is the doctrinal core of the letter and that Romans 9–11 is an exegesis or a postscript in which Paul dealt with lingering questions derived from the doctrinal core of the letter. It has been rightly observed that no grammatical connection is made in 9:1 to provide an orderly transition of thought from chapters 1–8. This gives the impression that Romans 9–11 is a separate section of the letter unrelated (or only loosely related) to Romans 1–8. Sanday and Hedlam write, “A new point is introduced and the sequence of thought is gradually made apparent as the argument proceeds. Perhaps there has been a pause in writing the

Epistle, the amanuensis has for a time, suspended his labors. We notice also that St. Paul does not here follow his general habit of stating the subject he is going to discuss (as he does for example at the beginning of Chapter iii), but allows it gradually to become evident."¹

Dodd regards chapters 9–11 as a separate treatise, possibly available to Paul in a manuscript he had used on previous occasions to address the perplexing issues of Israel's unbelief.²

Beare, whose assessment of Romans 9–11 is similar to Dodd's, says, "We have left out of consideration three chapters (9–11) of this letter because they do not form an integral part of the main argument. They are a kind of supplement in which Paul struggles with the problems of the failures of his own nation, the people of God, to respond in faith to the gospel of Christ."³

Other scholars make a greater effort to relate "the Jewish question" of the middle chapters to the doctrinal core of the letter. For example Bornkamm regards chapters 9–11 as a question of justification by faith alone.⁴ He says these chapters are a further explication of the theme stated in 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."⁵ Bornkamm's convictions about Romans are readily apparent from the title of his essay, "Paul's Last Will and Testament." The great theological themes of Romans are elevated above the situation of Paul's writing to the church in Rome to become a timeless deposit of universally valid truths.⁶ For Bornkamm the center of Paul's missionary preaching is justification by faith alone, and the Jewish issue of Romans 9–11 is basically tangential to that theme.

Kümmel concurs with Bornkamm's characterization of Romans as a testament of Paul. He also agrees with Bornkamm's method that shows how Paul's theological thought in Romans is

¹ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 12th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 226.

² C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), 148–49.

³ F. W. Beare, *St. Paul and His Letters* (New York: Abington, 1962), 103.

⁴ Günther Bornkamm, "The Letter to the Romans as Paul's Last Will and Testament," in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl Donfried (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), 27.

⁵ All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

derived from earlier letters without any reference to the believers' circumstances in Rome.⁷

Other scholars regard the character of God, specifically His faithfulness to His people, as an important connective theme between chapters 1–8 and 9–11. Beker asserts that the cohesiveness of Paul's argument in Romans revolves around Israel's priority and the universality of the gospel for the Gentiles. Israel's priority is evidenced by the Old Testament and by their final restoration at Jesus' second coming. Because of Israel's priority Paul needed to confirm the faithfulness of God, which Beker regards as an indispensable dimension of the righteousness of God.⁸ God's righteousness is a key term for the Romans letter, and according to Beker it has a consistent apocalyptic meaning signifying God's eschatological saving power. The term embraces God's promises to Israel and the full realization of His promise in "the apocalyptic hour" when Israel and the Gentiles will experience God's final salvation.

The righteousness of God as understood by Beker is part of a complex of ideas including God's faithfulness (3:3), God's truth (3:7; 15:8), and God's mercy (11:31–32; 15:9). These terms underscore the importance of God's faithfulness to Himself and His redemptive activity consonant with His faithfulness.⁹ With this understanding of the righteousness of God Romans 9–11 becomes an integral part of Paul's argument. In other words the gospel cannot have any authentic validity apart from the people of Israel because the theological issue of God's faithfulness (3:3) and righteousness determine the truth of the gospel.

Others, without necessarily stressing an apocalyptic framework, have also underscored the faithfulness of God as a unifying theme between Romans 1–8 and 9–11. Barrett maintains that 8:38–39 represents the close of one division of Romans and that 9:1 begins another. While maintaining the separation between these two sections, he nonetheless regards the character and acts of God as a unifying theme. "But the connection between chapters i–viii and chapters ix–xi is much closer than is sometimes recognized; for chapters i–viii are not so much concerned with an 'experience of salvation' as with the character and deeds of God who is the source of salvation, and chapters ix–xi are not at all concerned with Paul's

⁷ W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 313.

⁸ J. C. Beker, "The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

patriotic sentiments but with the character and deeds of God who elected the Jews and now calls the Gentiles.”¹⁰

Also Dunn underscores the character of God, that is, God’s faithfulness and righteousness, as a connective theme between Romans 1–8 and 9–11. He does not view chapters 9–11 as a post-script to chapters 1–8. The argument in Romans 9–11 hinges, he says, on God’s faithfulness and grace. “It is precisely the righteousness of God [that is] testified to by law and prophets (3:21). The promise of God to and through Abraham (chapter 4) into which the nations have entered; that it is the business of the law (2:15), the circumcision of the heart (2:29), the law of the Spirit of life (8:2) which has been realized and come to fulfilled expression in the nations’ obedience to the gospel. The nations have begun to experience the grace and faithfulness of God which was once Israel’s special privilege.”¹¹

In chapters 9–11 Paul went back to unanswered questions raised in chapter 3 about God’s covenant righteousness to Israel and His faithfulness in light of Israel’s unfaithfulness.¹² Dunn’s point is well made and certainly the question of God’s covenant faithfulness raised in 3:3 is an important thematic link with chapters 9–11.

Dahl also stresses that Paul was dealing with the question of God’s faithfulness to His people. Dahl observes that Paul did not always progressively develop his argument but has a penchant for dropping a particular undeveloped theme and bringing it up later. In recognizing Paul’s style of argumentation, chapters 9–11 become a response to the questions he raised in 3:1–5.¹³

Stendahl takes a different approach. He regards Romans 9–11 as the very heart of the letter, giving perspective to the previous eight chapters. Stendahl has argued that justification by faith does not stand at the center of Paul’s thought.¹⁴ Instead what is of utmost concern for Paul is the nation of Israel and specifically the Jewish-Gentile issue. For Stendahl chapters 9–11 are the climax of Romans since they deal with the relationship of the church and

¹⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 175.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (Dallas: Word, 1988), 530.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Nils Alstrup Dahl, *The Future of Israel*, Studies in Paul (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 139.

¹⁴ Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 1, 25, 27.

Jewish people. Paul's main focus is on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, not on justification or predestination.

Donfried acknowledges that scholars currently recognize as a major concern the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the divine plan of salvation in chapters 9–11. Therefore there seems to be consensus that those chapters are central to Paul's main argument.¹⁵

DIVINE SONSHIP IN ROMANS 8 AND 9

An important thematic link between Romans 8 and 9 is the divine sonship of believers. The main emphasis in chapter 8 is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The word "spirit" occurs twenty-one times in that chapter, and most of these references clearly refer to the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

In the middle section of chapter 8 Paul spoke of the divine sonship of believers. He wrote that those who are being led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (υἱοὶ θεοῦ, v. 14). The "sons of God" status of believers underscores the meaning of "you will live" (ζήσεσθε) in the preceding verse (v. 13). The passive verb "are being led" (ἄγονται) emphasizes the activity of the Spirit (v. 14). Paul then stated in verse 15 that the Roman Christians did not receive the spirit of slavery but received the Spirit of sonship (υἰοθεσία).¹⁷ This is attested to when they cry Ἄββα ὁ πάτηρ, and this attestation of the fatherhood of God is by the Spirit. Paul stated that the Spirit assures believers that they are children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ, v. 16).

Paul then progressed in his argument that as children of God believers are also heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Paul's conviction (λογίζομαι) is that this present order of things with its sufferings cannot be compared with the glory that is to come (v. 18). Creation (most likely Paul had in mind subhuman life) is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God (v. 19). At the time of revealing, creation will be set free from bondage to obtain

¹⁵ Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), lxx. R. David Kaylor says of Romans, "My thesis is the fundamental conviction underlying all of Paul's theological expression is that in Christ God is acting to bring all humankind, Gentile and Jew, into one community of the new covenant" (*Paul's Covenant Community Jew and Gentile in Romans* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1988], 111).

¹⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 172.

¹⁷ Υἰοθεσία is translated "sonship" here rather than "adoption" because the noun in this context stresses an existing status rather than an initial act.

the liberty of the children of God (τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 21). The adoption of believers as sons is further defined eschatologically by the redemption of their bodies (v. 23). Christians wait in hope as children of God (vv. 24–25) for the public proclamation, or revealing, of their status as adoptive sons at the time of the redemption of their bodies.

In this section of Romans Paul juxtaposed the honorific title “sons of God” with “children of God,” making no distinction between the two. By using this special title that belonged to Israel Paul redefined who the people of God are. As Moo observes, “So, when Paul says that believers who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons, he is also saying that believers are now God’s people, they become what Israel used to be. One begins to see why Paul has to clarify the situation of Israel, as he does in Romans 9–11.”¹⁸

THE HONORIFIC TITLE “SONS OF GOD” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

To understand the meaning and significance of the title “sons of God,” its use in the Old Testament needs to be examined. “Sons of God” is used there in reference to divine beings, the king, and Israel. Its use of Israel is of greatest relevance for this discussion.

In the Old Testament God is rarely called “Father” and Israel is only occasionally called “son.” A reason for this is certainly Israel’s rejection of the Near Eastern religious understanding of sonship.¹⁹ This understanding was that humans were born of a mother-goddess or propagated by the deity from divine blood. In Egypt the Pharaoh was viewed as the offspring of the sexual union between the supreme god Re and the queen. In the Babylonian religion (or religions) humans and gods were viewed as descending from the same stock although humans were distinguished from the gods by mortality and other temporal weaknesses.²⁰

The language used by the Israelites evoked strong familial overtones. McCarthy says, “The semitic languages reflect the profound feeling about the nature of society as essentially familial. For instance, a true son is indeed a son of this city (his place of origin, whatever it be) in a real sense. It gives being to him as individual; he is the special man that he is in great part because he is from

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 136.

¹⁹ T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 144–47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

this time or place. The city has a function much like that of a parent.”²¹

Likewise Yahweh's covenant with Israel evokes strong images of a familial relationship. In Exodus 4:22 God referred to Israel as His firstborn son. Israel's relationship to Yahweh as son was not through physical generation but through God's free act of election made concrete through contractual agreement, that is, the Mosaic Covenant. Although Israel's sonship was contractual, it should not be conceived as hollow in meaning and nonessential to the nation's self-understanding. To the contrary, it was a relationship with Yahweh brought about through the Sinai Covenant.

Deuteronomy includes numerous references to Israel as God's son, all of which are found in the context of covenant. The Lord carried His son in the wilderness wandering (1:31); the Lord disciplines His son as a man disciplines his son (8:5); Israel is solemnly declared to be children of God (14:1);²² and Israel is warned against the practice of pagan funeral rites (14:2). In the Song of Moses (chap. 32) the people are no longer God's children because they have acted corruptly toward God (v. 5). Israel had forgotten the God who gave them birth (v. 8). God rejected them because His sons and daughters angered him (v. 19). They are called a perverse generation, children who have not been faithful to God (v. 20).

Deuteronomy has been called the biblical document of love and covenant par excellence.²³ The love depicted in Deuteronomy is akin to that seen in vassal treaties between an overlord and a vassal.²⁴ Love was part of the vocabulary of international treaties. McCarthy says, “It is [my contention] . . . that the very ancient concept of Israel as Yahweh's son is very close to or identical with the Deuteronomic conception articulated in terms of treaty or covenant and should not be separated entirely from it.”²⁵ As love was important in the vassal–overlord relationship, it was also important in

21 D. McCarthy, “Israel, My First-Born Son,” *The Way* 5 (1965): 185.

22 “There is little to be gained by pressing a distinction between ‘children’ and ‘sons of God’” (C. F. D. Moule, “Children of God,” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick [Nashville: Abingdon, 1962], 1:559).

23 W. L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 82.

24 R. E. Clements, *God's Chosen People: A Theological Interpretation of the Book of Deuteronomy* (London: SCM, 1968), 25–29.

25 D. McCarthy, “Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship between Yahweh and Israel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): 145.

the father-son relationship of international treaties. Among the Mari letters the term “son” was used when there was a close relationship between vassal and overlord. It was not used in parity treaties for obvious reasons.²⁶

Two passages in Hosea in particular relate sonship to covenant. The first verse, 1:10b, reads, “In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” The words “you are not my people” refer to the breaking of the covenant because of Israel’s whoredom in turning away to another god, Baal.²⁷ And the promise of restoration of the covenant is signified by the expression “sons of the living God.”²⁸ As the “living” God He has power over life (6:2; 13:14). Israel’s future is dependent on the life-giving power of Yahweh, who alone is the source of life.²⁹

The second Hosea passage relevant to sonship is 11:1. “When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Hosea spoke of the covenant in terms of a father-son relationship, and he combined it with the Exodus tradition (Exod. 4:22).³⁰ Yahweh’s love for Israel is not based on the theology of Baalism, as if Israel were the natural progeny of Yahweh. Instead Israel was seen as an adopted son, linked with Yahweh’s redemption purpose (“And out of Egypt I called My son”). In this context sonship is a metaphor of the covenant itself.³¹

²⁶ F. C. Fensham, “Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant,” *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. H. Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 125.

²⁷ “He is bitterly opposed to Baalism, but he takes over its own imagery and language as weapons with which to fight it” (H. McKeating, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, Cambridge Bible Commentary [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971], 73).

²⁸ Herbert W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 27.

²⁹ A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949), 105–7.

³⁰ A “child” can be an infant recently weaned (Exod. 6:2) or a young person who is still a dependent (Gen. 18:7; Jer. 1:6–7). Yahweh loved Israel as a young dependent child (Wolff, *Hosea*, 197–98). Douglas Stuart observes, “The use of אהב is closely connected with covenant fidelity in Deuteronomy (6:5; 7:8, 13; 10:15; 23:6) and is virtually a double-entendre in its deployment here. It means to have deep affection for, but also to be ‘loyal to,’ as in the Amarna letters where ‘love’ is proclaimed for the Pharaoh by his vassal kings and vice versa (e.g., the letters of Tusratta to Amenophis III). Hosea’s covenantal concerns and use of language similar to Deuteronomy make it probable that v 1 carries the sense as well” (*Hosea* [Dallas: Word, 1987], 178).

³¹ J. L. Mays, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 153.

Other Old Testament passages in which the father-son relationship of Yahweh and Israel is evident include Deuteronomy 8:5; Isaiah 1:2; 30:9; Jeremiah 3:19, 25; 4:22; 31:9; and Malachi 1:6.³²

In summary Israel's sonship was closely associated with covenant and may be considered a metaphor of covenant itself. It has been noted that Israel's sonship in covenant contexts, particularly in Deuteronomy, was shaped and influenced by treaty foundations. Yahweh was viewed as a father in the sense of an overlord and Israel as a son in the sense of a vassal. As son, Israel was to revere and obey the commandments of Yahweh. Thus the honorific title "son(s) of God" was pregnant with meaning for Israel, signifying the unique relationship Israel had with Yahweh as the people of the covenant.

SONSHIP IN THE LITERATURE OF FORMATIVE JUDAISM

In the intertestamental period (200 B.C. to A.D. 100) both rabbinic Judaism and Christianity emerged. During this time, references to Israel's sonship to God are often found in eschatological contexts (*Sibylline Oracles* 3:702–5; *Jubilees* 1:25–26; *Psalms of Solomon* 17:30; and *Assumption of Moses* 10:3). As in the Old Testament, sonship is connected with the theme of discipline. God as a father disciplines His son (*Psalms of Solomon* 18:4; *Wisdom of Solomon* 12:19–21). In addition, sonship is linked with the plight of the just man, who represents Israel in the *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:18. Even though the just man suffers at the hand of the wicked (vv. 13–14), God will ultimately vindicate him.

The Jewish romance *Joseph and Asenath*, a missionary tract, focuses on the conversion of Asenath, a prototype of all proselytes.³³ Through Asenath's conversion she is counted among the sons of God (21:3–4). Sonship status is accorded to Gentiles through their conversion to Judaism. Ultimately the title "sons of God" and related terms—such as "my firstborn son" (*Jubilees* 2:20; *Psalms of Solomon* 18:4), "sons whom God loves" (*Wisdom of Solomon* 16:26), "sons of the almighty living God of heaven" (3 Macc. 6:28), "sons of the Most High, Most Mighty, living God" (Additions to Esth. 16:16), and "daughter of the Most High" (*Joseph and*

³² On the covenant motif in Malachi 1:6 see Fensham, "Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant," 131.

³³ Christoph Burchard thinks that in *Joseph and Asenath* the conversion aspect has been overemphasized. He prefers to view the work as literary syncretism ("Joseph and Asenath," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charlesworth, 2nd ed. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985], 186–87).

Asenath 21:4)—express Israel's unique relationship with God as the people of God, an elect and covenant community.

SONSHIP BY ADOPTION

In the New Testament the term *υιοθεσία* is found only in the Pauline corpus (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). The term can be traced back to the second century B.C.³⁴ Before that there were equivalent phrases such as *υιον τιθεμαι* and *υιον ποιεομαι*. Liddell, Scott, and Jones state that the meaning of the noun stems from the verbal form *υιοθετεω* ("to adopt as a son") and the verbal adjective *υιοθεστος* ("adopted as a son"). Thus the meaning of the noun is adoption.³⁵

Scholars debate whether the background of the term *υιοθεσία* used by Paul is from Greek law,³⁶ Roman law,³⁷ or the Old Testament.³⁸ It is generally assumed that adoption was not practiced among the Jewish people because the word *υιοθεσία* is not found in the Septuagint and lacks a corresponding term in the Hebrew Old Testament.³⁹ Rossell challenges that position,⁴⁰ citing examples from the Old Testament which he believes support the idea of

³⁴ W. V. Martitz, "υιοθεσία," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 8 (1972), 397.

³⁵ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1846.

³⁶ T. Rees, "Adoption," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (1915), 1:58; and W. M. Calder, "Adoption and Inheritance in Galatia," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1930): 373.

³⁷ Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 459.

³⁸ W. H. Rossell, "New Testament Adoption, Graeco-Roman or Semitic?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952): 233–34; see also M. W. Schoenberg, "*Huiiothesia*: The Word and the Institution," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 15 (1963): 122–23.

³⁹ It has been argued that adoption was not practiced by Jews because they had two legal devices to perpetuate the family line. The first assumed that the father's seed was more important than that of the mother, who had lesser status. If the wife was not fertile, it was perfectly acceptable for the husband to mate with a servant to perpetuate the family line. This is illustrated by Abraham fathering a child with Sarah's handmaid Hagar in Genesis 16. The critical factor was not whether the child was legitimate (assuming marriage) or illegitimate, but whether the child was ceremonially acceptable. A second device in Jewish law to continue the family line was the institution of levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–10). The brother of the deceased had the responsibility of marrying his brother's wife in order to produce a male heir for family succession (Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption," 460–61).

⁴⁰ Rossell, "New Testament Adoption, Graeco-Roman or Semitic?" 233–34.

adoption (Exod. 2:10; 1 Chron. 28:6; Jer. 3:19). What is particularly important to him is Genesis 15:4, which he argues is illumined by the Nuzi Archives. At Nuzi, slaves were adopted by childless couples to serve them and mourn them at death. In exchange the adopted son was appointed heir. The Nuzi custom, according to Rossell, gives meaning to Genesis 15:4. "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."⁴¹

Whether Israel practiced adoption, Israel understood its relationship to God as being one of adoption.⁴² In Romans 9:4 Paul affirmed this basic Old Testament understanding of adoption.

SONSHIP IN ROMANS 9

Israel's self-understanding as sons of God and God's election of Israel present a theological problem. Will God remain faithful to His covenant promise even though the majority in Israel refuses to believe that Jesus is the Christ? Shreiner states Paul's theological dilemma well.

If God's promises to Israel have not come to fruition, then how can one be sure that the great promises made to the Church in Romans 8 will be fulfilled? How can a righteous God transfer his promises from Israel to the Church? Paul says nothing will be able to separate one from Christ's love and those who are justified will be glorified. But God also chose Israel, and if his covenant promises to Israel were not realized then how can one assert that they will be fulfilled for the Church of God? The fundamental issue in Rom. 9–11, then, is not the place of Israel, though that is a crucial issue. The primary question relates to the faithfulness of God.⁴³

The problem is even more complex since Paul had stated that the Law can neither justify (Rom. 3:20) nor sanctify (5:20; 7:4–6). The importance of the Torah cannot be overestimated in first-century formative Judaism. Neusner says, "To be a Jew may similarly be reduced to a single pervasive symbol of Judaism: Torah."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., 233. Lyall objects to the use of the Nuzi text to support adoption in the Old Testament. "Mere priority in date does not imply influence when the other connections of the two legal systems are so slender. Abraham did not come from the Nuzi region" ("Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption," 463).

⁴² On adoption in the Old Testament see Martin Schoenberg, "Hyiothesia: The Adoptive Sonship of the Israelites," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 143 (1960): 261–73.

⁴³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1998), 471.

⁴⁴ Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 13.

He adds, “The most important meaning of the word Torah lies in its defining who is Israel and who is not.”⁴⁵

Paul’s Christology enables him to displace the role of Torah in his redefinition of the people of God in terms of sonship and adoption. Salvation history must be understood in view of this redefinition. Paul’s task was to integrate his Christological and pneumatological definition of God’s people with God’s fidelity to those who find their identity as His people in the Torah.

After Paul’s lament for his people in 9:1–3 he listed in verses 4 and 5 the privileges that belong to Israel. “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.” Beginning the list of privileges with sonship provides a connective link with 8:14–17 and anticipates the following argument from Scripture. As Guerra has observed, 39 percent of the text in Romans 9–11 is composed of Scripture quotations.⁴⁶ In the development of his argument in chapter 9 Paul moved through the Old Testament, beginning with the patriarchs in verses 6–13, then progressing to the Exodus in verses 14–18, and concluding with the prophets in verses 25–33.⁴⁷

In verses 6b–7a Paul stated that God’s Word has not failed. “It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children.” There is an Israel within Israel, a holy remnant called according to the promise. In addition, not all of Abraham’s progeny (Ishmael and Esau, for example) belong to Israel. However, Paul spoke of Israel in the narrow sense of “the children of the promise” in contrast to Israel in the wider sense of “the natural children.” It is important to recognize that even though he made this distinction, he still regarded Israel in the wider sense as brothers (v. 3) and still acknowledged the natural privileges of Israel (3:2, 9:4–5). The definition of Israel in a narrow sense is not unique to Paul. The Qumran community made the distinction between those who are obedient in Israel and those who are not (CD 5:11–6:21).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Jacob Neusner, *Major Trends in Formative Judaism* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983), 101.

⁴⁶ Anthony J. Guerra, *Romans and the Apologetic Tradition: The Purpose, Genre, and Audience of Paul’s Letter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 269.

⁴⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 256.

⁴⁸ For an English translation of the Damascus Document see Florentino Garcia

Romans 9:6–13 (Paul’s scriptural argument from the patriarchs) and 9:14–18 (Paul’s scriptural argument from the Exodus narratives) reinforce the idea that God has called both Jews and Gentiles (v. 24). Both groups are called by God’s mercy. (Mercy is a key word not only in the immediate context but also throughout chapters 9–11.)⁴⁹ The apostle further developed the idea that both Jews and Gentiles are called by appealing in 9:25–29 to the prophets (Hosea and Isaiah). In verses 25 and 26 Paul gave his freely rendered quotation of Hosea 2:23 followed by Hosea 1:10. Both passages affirm the calling of the Gentiles (Rom. 9:24b). Paul altered Hosea 2:23 by replacing “I will say to those called ‘Not my people’” with “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people” in Romans 9:25. The honorific title “sons of God” is found in Hosea 1:10 and Romans 9:26. The “My people” in verse 25 and “sons of God” in verse 26 clearly refer to the people of God. In Hosea both passages refer not to the Gentiles but to the northern ten tribes who, because of their sin, led Hosea to refer to his two children as Lo-Ruhamah (“not loved”) in 1:6 and Lo-Ammi (“not my people”) in 1:9. Despite the rejection and judgment of the northern ten tribes there still is the promise of a restored remnant.

God’s calling of a remnant from Israel is confirmed by the prophecy of Isaiah 10:22–23 quoted in Romans 9:26–27. God is indeed faithful since the remnant called out of Israel is part of this new community composed of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. The title “sons of God” is Paul’s way of defining this new community called of God to be people of the covenant, that is, people of God. This new status of sonship is attested experientially by the Spirit’s cry “Abba, Father” (8:15) in the lives of those who believe, and thus in the immediate context it is confirmed through prophecy (9:25–29).

The sonship of Israel, which Paul listed first among the natural privileges of Israel, is significant since it indicates that God will be faithful to His promise to Israel and that the special status of sonship will lead to the future restoration of the nation since “all Israel will be saved” (11:26).

Nanos observes that Paul composed Romans and especially chapters 9–11 with the necessity of Israel’s restoration in mind.⁵⁰ If

Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁴⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 215.

⁵⁰ “I have thus painted Paul’s intentions toward Rome on the same canvass [*sic*] as Luke, and somewhat at odds with the pattern as it is usually traced in Romans. I have found Paul to be a champion of the restoration of Israel first (not its rejection) before the gentile mission had commenced, even as did Luke. Even when the gentile

Nanos is correct, it sets up a significant tension in Paul's theology. On the one hand Paul was deeply committed to establish Christ rather than the Torah as the sole identity symbol for this new community of Jews and Gentiles who are called and now have the status of sons of God. Israel pursued righteousness based on the Law and not on faith (9:30–32). On the other hand God's faithfulness is at stake since the honorific title was an exclusive title for Israel. Perhaps that tension helps explain Paul's statement, "I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart" (vv. 1–2).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the sonship of believers in Romans 8:14–17 forms an important thematic link with Romans 9. The honorific title "sons of God" denoted Israel's special status before God as people of the covenant, that is, the people of God. In verse 14 the title is applied to all (Jews and Gentiles) in Christ who are led by the Spirit. By using this status title and also the title "children of God" and the term "adoption," Paul redefined those who make up the people of God. This new community, the church, is composed of both Jews and Gentiles in Christ. The new status of being in Christ is attested to experientially as Jewish and Gentile believers cry by the Spirit, "Abba, Father" (v. 15), and the Spirit testifies to the spirit of believers that they are "children of God" (v. 16). This new inclusive understanding of sonship, that is, the people of God, is confirmed by prophecy (Hos. 1:10; 2:23; Isa. 10:22–23) which Paul referred to in Romans 9:25–29. Paul argued in verses 6–9 that God has been faithful to Israel in the narrow sense of providing a remnant. However, God's faithfulness to Israel in the wider sense must be maintained since sonship is a natural privilege of Israel (v. 4). Therefore in the scheme of salvation history this new community, the church, brought about by God's calling can be appropriately understood only in view of Israel's future restoration (11:26). The end result is that God's covenant reliability is vindicated.

mission had begun it was still thoroughly colored by the necessity of Israel's restoration (11:11–15, 16ff.). In fact Israel continued to be Paul's unmistakable priority even through his apostleship to the gentiles" (Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 240).