

# Paul and Ethnicity: A Socio-Historical Study of Romans

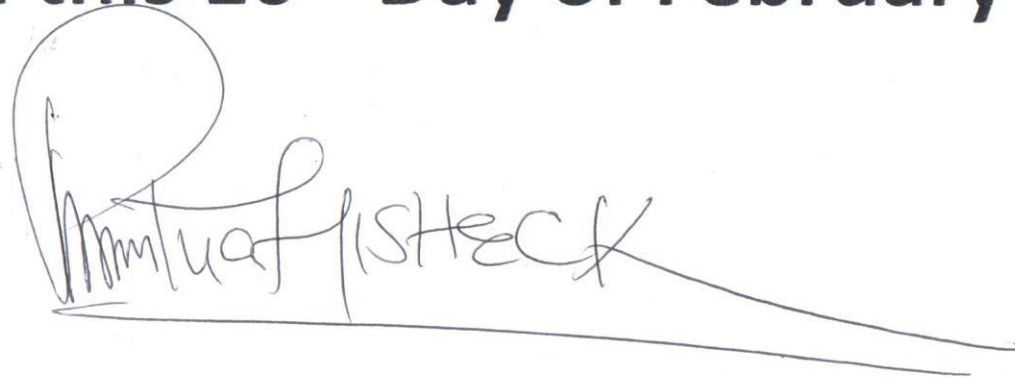
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Dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Masters of Arts in New Testament at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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**Signed this 10<sup>th</sup> Day of February 2014**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Misheck Mutua Mbevi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**MISHECK MUTUA MBEVI**

## **1.2. Acknowledgements**

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people who have contributed in one way or another to the process of getting this study where it is now. But first, I want to thank God for his grace, mercy and strength that he has accorded me to pursue this course. I also thank my dear wife Augusta and the kids Ndanu and Baraka for their continuous support, love and patience that they have expressed all through the process. Many thanks also to my supervisors: Dr. David Seccombe, Dr. Aldred Genade and Jonathan More for their patience and guidance. Their observations and criticisms in the process of research and writing were of great help. I also want to thank the George Whitefield College Bursary Trust Fund Committee for financial assistance, without which it would have been impossible to pursue the course. Thanks also to friends and partners who have supported us as a family during our stay in Cape Town. Many thanks to the members of GWC Postgraduate Fellowship for the many conversations we had regarding my research and writing. Finally, thanks to Wayne Barnes and Eric Stoneman for proofreading and editing the work and Carel Pienaar for translating the 'Abstract' into Afrikaans.

## Abstract

Despite the fact that the majority of scholars agree that Paul's letter to the Romans was written to address the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide in Rome, there is still a continued failure to follow through with the avenues that this position opens up for the study of Romans. Traditionally, Paul's letter to the Romans has been read as a theological tractate, a reading that assumes an ideational or theological interpretation of the letter to the exclusion of Paul's ethnic rhetoric present in the letter and how it might have related and even addressed the tangible relations between real-world Judeans and Gentiles in first century antiquity. This study investigates just that: how might Paul's ethnic rhetoric have addressed the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide in Rome. After the introduction, the study reviews the current state of scholarship with regard to Paul and ethnicity in Romans. This then is followed by an elaborate socio-historical exploration of Judean-Gentile ethnicities and relations in ancient antiquity and the specific Roman context into which Paul's letter was addressed. The impact of those relations to the origins of the early Christian movement in Rome and significant points of coherence between the socio-historical context and Paul's letter are also established. Having established the socio-historical context, Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 is probed for how it might have addressed the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide and realised unity among them.

**[Key words and concepts:** Paul; Romans 1-4; ethnic, ethnicity, ethnic conflict; socio-historical interpretation; Judeans (Jews); Judaism; Gentiles; diaspora]

## Opsomming

Ten spyte van die feit dat meeste akademici saamstem dat Paulus se brief aan die Romeine geskryf is om die skeiding tussen Joodse en nie-Jood (heidense) etniese groepe aan te spreek, is daar 'n gebrek aan studies wat hierdie benadering ten volle ontwikkel in die brief aan die Romeine. Paulus se brief word tradisioneel gelees asof dit 'n teologiese traktaat is – 'n interpretasie wat aanneem dat dit hoofsaaklik konsepsioneel en teologies georiënteerd is en die etniese retoriek teenwoordig in die brief uitsluit. Dit gee verder nie genoegsame aandag aan die effek wat hierdie brief op die verhoudings tussen Joodse en nie-Jode groepe in die eerste eeu gehad het nie. Hierdie studie fokus spesifiek daarop: hoe Paulus se etniese retoriek die skeiding tussen Joodse en nie-Joode etniese groepe in Rome aangespreek het. Na die inleiding hersien die studie die huidige stand van vakkundigheid ten opsigte van Paulus en etnisiteit in die brief aan die Romeine. Daarna word 'n dieptestudie van die sosio-historiese konteks van Joodse en nie-Jood etniese groepe en verhouding tussen hulle in die antieke tydperk gedoen, asook die spesifieke konteks van Rome waarheen Paulus se brief gestuur is. Verder word die impak van Joodse en nie-Jood verhoudings op die oorsprong van die antieke kerk in Rome en die punte van ooreenstemming waar die sosio-historiese konteks en Paulus se brief oorvleuel, ook vasgestel. Nadat die verskeie punte van ooreenstemming vasgestel is, word Paulus se etniese argumente in Romeine 1-4 bestudeer om te bepaal hoe dit die etniese skeiding tussen Joodse en nie-Jood groepe aangespreek het en eenheid bewerkstellig het.

**[Sleutel woorde en konsepte:** Paulus; Romeine 1-4; etniese groepe; etniesheid; etniese konflik; sosio-historiese interpretasie; Jode; Joodse geloof; nie-Joode/heidene; verstrooiing/diaspora]

## Abbreviations

### Old Testament (OT) books

Gen	Genesis	Ex	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus	Deut	Deuteronomy
Jos	Joshua	Judg	Judges
1 Kgs	Kings	Neh	Nehemiah
Ps	Psalms	Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah	Dan	Daniel
Hab	Habakkuk	Zeph	Zephaniah

### New Testament (NT) books

Matt	Mathew	Mk	Mark
Lk	Luke	Jn	John
Rom	Romans	1 Cor	1Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians	Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians
2 Tim	2 Timothy	Tit	Titus
Phm	Philemon	Heb	Hebrews
Jms	James	Rev	Revelation

### Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

<i>Jub</i>	Jubilees	<i>Sir</i>	Sirach
<i>Macc</i>	Maccabees	<i>Jud</i>	Judith
<i>Bar</i>	Baruch	<i>Esd</i>	Esdra
<i>Ezek</i>	Ezekiel	<i>Tob</i>	Tobit
<i>Wisdom</i>	Wisdom of Solomon		
<i>Ps. of Sol</i>	Psalms of Solomon		
<i>Apo. of Abr.</i>	Apocalypse of Abraham		

## Philo

<i>Special Laws</i>	On the Special Laws
<i>Rewards</i>	On Rewards and Punishments
<i>Flaccus</i>	Against Flaccus
<i>Virtues</i>	On the Virtues
<i>Questions</i>	Questions and Answers on Genesis
<i>Embassy</i>	The Embassy to Gaius
<i>Abraham</i>	On Abraham
<i>Moses</i>	The Life of Moses

## Josephus

<i>Antiquities</i>	Judean Antiquities
<i>Apion</i>	Against Apion
<i>War</i>	Judean War
<i>Life</i>	Life of Josephus

## Gentile sources:

Petronius	<i>Frag</i>	Fragments
Strabo	<i>Geo</i>	Geography
Cicero	<i>Flaccus</i>	Pro Flacco
Juvenal	<i>Sat</i>	Satires
Tacitus:	<i>Annals</i>	The Annals of Tacitus
	<i>Histories</i>	The Histories of Tacitus
Suetonius:	<i>Tiberius</i>	Tiberius
	<i>Claudius</i>	The Deified Claudius
Dio Cassius:	<i>History</i>	Roman History
Paulus Orosius:	<i>Pagans</i>	History Against the Pagans

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# CHAPTER I: Introduction

## 1.1. The motivation of the study

Race and ethnicity are significant social concepts and phenomena in today's world. Both concepts describe social phenomenon that are difficult to comprehend. Historical efforts to encapsulate them continue to stumble, yet, they have remained formidable forces in societies, past or present. Both have been utilised to mobilize people and people groups to pursue common goals, whether good or bad. They have been used to resist evil and hegemonic imperialism, but also used to advance animosity, violence and genocides. According to Brett (1996:1), many social theorists writing in the 1950s and 1960s expected the politics of ethnicity and difference to linger for a while, but then to be absorbed by the ideals of western modernity and civilisation. Such aspirations have proved to be just a dream. Race and ethnicity remain important factors in socio-historical and cultural analysis. Indeed, throughout the world, ethnic identities continue to be aggressively re-asserted. Bergmann & Crutchfield (2009:147–149) rightly observe that “ethnic conflict is a worldwide phenomenon... Racial and ethnic conflicts persist on every continent, except Antarctica as far as we know; indeed, such conflicts are a central feature of contemporary social life and have been for centuries in places where heterogeneous populations live, or people from different ethnic or racial groups come into contact.”<sup>1</sup>

Africa alone is home to several thousands of distinct ethnic groups. A review of the history of these people groups exhibits a continent of diverse ethnic beauty, but also a people torn by ethnic rivalries, intolerance and violence. As Orji (2007:37–38) rightly posits, the history of the African continent emerges as a confluence of tension and conflict, and therefore it continues to be in search of authentic and genuine communities of freedom, cohesion and reconciliation. Here in South Africa, despite the enormous change that has happened since

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<sup>1</sup> The two concepts “race” and “ethnic group” are difficult to distinguish in modern parlance. Perhaps the most frustrating ambiguity in the study of both concepts is that the one involves an overlap with the ideas of associated with the other. For some scholars, racial identity is that which originates from biological lineage and kinship, and ethnic identity is what provides the cultural equivalent to racial identity (Denzey, 2002:489). However, until recently many of the people groups described today as “ethnic group” were defined as ‘race’ or ‘nation’ in reference to people-groups who share common belief, origin or heritage. In addition, in modern time, the historical and scientific validity of “race” has been questioned and many socio-anthropologists prefer ‘ethnic group’ to ‘race’ (Banton, 1983:64–65; Sechrest, 2009:32). Some scholars, however, insist that socially and culturally, the two concepts remain relevant and therefore should not be replaced. For example, owing to the fact that race remains current in our everyday lives, Buell (2005: x; 13–21; cf. Sechrest, 2009) contends that it should be used “precisely because of the damage this modern concept has wrought and continues to wreak. If we want to get beyond race, we have to grapple with how it informs historical interpretation even when it is excluded.” This dissertation acknowledges the complexity associated with the meaning of the two concepts. However, unless citing another source, ethnicity will be my preferred terminology.

the end of the apartheid regime in 1994, the dream of a 'Rainbow Nation' remains uncertain. As Marger (2012:369, 393) observes, "Racial and ethnic categories, though officially abolished, remain potent dividers. The rigid segregation of apartheid has ended, but racial stereotypes and attitudes and patterns of intergroup relations have been only marginally changed."

While the subject of ethnicity, its meaning and how it impacts the society, is a subject of flourishing research within the social sciences, attempts to integrate it within biblical studies is something that has just begun to capture the imagination of scholars. This is despite the fact that ethnicity was an important issue in the formative years of early Christianity. In fact, the issue was so important that it threatened to tear apart the early church a few years after its conception (Sim, 1996:171, 177). But as Lee (2009:142) posits, "Dominant interpretation has attempted to transcend ethnicity by making Christianity 'all inclusive', thus ethnicity-neutral. Allegedly, ethnicity is irrelevant to normative, historical, objective, value-free criticism; a corollary is that ethnic concerns constitute the idiosyncrasies of a few ethnic scholars" (cf. Buell & Hodge, 2004:236–237; Barreto, 2010:2).

Within the African context, a call to integrate ethnic and biblical studies has recently been sounded by Nyende (2009; 2010). According to him, African biblical scholarship should rise to the occasion and begin addressing ethnicity *via* biblical studies. He particularly proposes three ways in which this can be done: first, through what the Bible *teaches directly*. Here the Bible is scrutinised for what it says about ethnicity and bringing such teaching to bear on ethnic issues. The second is through the *example of the Bible*, where focus is directed on the ways in which biblical authors addressed ethnicity themselves in their own time and day in order to use them as models for our own struggle to address ethnic issues. In other words, the logic and spirit of the biblical author is put to use for contemporary times. The third way is through the *theologies of ethnicity*, where the focus is on theological reflection that intersects between God and human beings (Nyende, 2010:128–135). This study is interested in the second method that Nyende proposes, albeit, partly. It seeks to find out how Paul addressed ethnicity in his own day and age, in the hope that such strategies and skills can be used by others who are seeking to address contemporary ethnic issues through the text of Romans.

## **1.2. Background to the study: Paul and ethnicity in Romans**

### **1.2.1. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles**

There is probably no other person in the entire NT who is more engaging when it comes to the kind of enquiry that Nyende proposes than Saul of Tarsus. He is perhaps the first

disciple of Jesus who began to articulate the implications of Christ's sacrificial death for the age-long Judean-Gentile ethnic divide.<sup>2</sup> Born in the diaspora, Saul grew up to become a Pharisee and zealot, who persecuted the early church, being zealous for the Judean ancestral laws and customs. Then came his encounter with the risen Christ who commissioned him as an apostle to τὰ ἔθνη. Thereafter, Saul, now Paul, moved back and forth in the diaspora, among peoples of different ethnic backgrounds and cultural heritages for the sake of his gospel ministry to the Gentiles (cf. Rom 1.14; 1 Cor 9.20-22). Yet, ethnicity was something that was so real for him. His belief about the present state of Gentiles before God in the light of the Christ-event engendered an ethnic crisis within Judaism and the new messianic movement that was now forming (cf. Acts 15; Gal 2.22-21).

Certainly, it was inevitable that the meaning and implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus would incur such a crisis. The history of the people of God hitherto was ethnically defined. However, the sacrificial death of Jesus and his resurrection had annulled that precedent. The people of God no longer comprised one ethnic group, but a multi-ethnic body consisting of both Judeans and Gentiles who had faith. Having grasped that reality, Paul endeavoured to adjust and reconfigure what Judeans considered as their unique identity so as to incorporate Gentiles who had come to trust in the Messiah as legitimate descendants of Abraham (Gal 3; Rom 4). Unavoidably, the adjustment involved redefining the very boundaries and identity markers that had defined Israelites for centuries. Like other ancient people groups, Judeans had laws, traditions and customs that defined and marked their unique ethnic identity. These were embodied in the Torah and its practices (Mason, 2007:483f). Surrounded by a vast sea of pagan Gentiles that were hostile to them in the diaspora, the law afforded them their ethnic habitus and the symbolic authority that both defined and demarcated them from the rest of the Gentiles. But for Paul, the death of Jesus on the cross had fundamentally altered that and put Judeans and Gentiles on the same level. He had come to believe that there was no distinction between Judeans and Gentiles. Relationship with God was no longer anchored on Torah praxis but on the principle of faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16, 20, 3:22).

### **1.2.2. Judeans and Gentiles in antiquity and the origins of Roman Christianity**

The ancient Mediterranean world was itself multicultural *par excellence*, with a great diversity of ethnic groups that embodied diverse socio-historical, linguistic and religious identities (cf. Demetriou, 2012:1–15; Hall, 1997:34f.). The Greeks viewed ethnic groups as people who

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<sup>2</sup> For the choice of the term 'Judean(s)' instead of the traditional 'Jew(s)', see the section on *Concept clarification* (1.7).

shared common laws and customs, including cults and rituals, that were thought to bond the members together. Myths of common origins, common ancestors and primordial territories were viewed as primary constitutive elements that encompassed ethnic identity. For Judeans, though their unique ethnic identity was enshrined in the Torah, it was also renegotiated, rearticulated and reinforced by the many centuries in exile, persecution and dispersion (Mason, 2007:460f; Tellbe, 2009:59–60). It is also well known that ancient ethnic groups were highly ethnocentric. The idea of biological determinism associated with modern understandings of race and nationalism might have been foreign to these people groups, but they did possess a wide range of prejudices, phobias, and hostilities towards each other. Romans did not like Greeks. Greeks did not like Romans. Both did not like Judeans. Judeans looked down on Gentiles. Even proselytes were not of equal status with native Judeans. Greeks and Romans looked down on the uncultured barbarians. Romans felt ethnically superior to every other tribe they conquered. At times those ethnocentric attitudes unavoidably degenerated into rivalry and violence (cf. Sherwin-White, 1967:1; Isaac, 2006:37; Esler, 2003:357; Morris, 1996:121–122).

The imperial capital, Rome, where Paul's letter was directed, was itself a conglomeration of immigrant groups from all over ancient antiquity, especially the eastern parts of the empire. These lived as aggregate communities adjacent to the temples of their native gods in order to keep alive their ethnic connections and socio-cultural traditions. The Roman natives were themselves xenophobic towards the immigrant groups, being wary of their religions and cults. At times this would lead to forced expulsion from the city (La Piana, 1927:233; Walters, 1993:3–5). The Roman Judean community formed one of those communities (cf. La Piana, 1927:341f.; Walters, 1993:28). In fact, Kraabel (1992:10–11) classifies them as having been “a social or sociological datum” since they were one of the many ethnic groups that were flocking into the city from the East. Together with the rest of the immigrant minority groups, they settled in a particular region of the city where at times they turned explosive and unruly. In discussing their situation, La Piana (1927:341–345) observes that their social, juridical and religious statuses was different from that of other immigrant groups. Their self-understanding and consciousness was in its entirety embedded in the Torah, which guaranteed their ethnicity. Living among pagans, they organised themselves in accordance with their own ancestral laws and customs, but also maintaining close relations with their homeland – Judea. Furthermore, while the imperial authorities allowed them to practice their own customs, the Gentile masses viewed them with amusement and at times great hostility. Consequently, as Williams (2004:34–36) notices, few individual Judeans succumbed to the pressure of cultural assimilation and accommodation, but the bulk of them “managed to

retain and develop a sufficiently strong sense of their ethnic, religious and political identity for a clearly identifiable Jewish community to become established at Rome”

That the early Christian movement in Rome sprouted from the Judean community is something that is widely acknowledged. However, exactly when and how it occurred is still unknown. In his Romans’ commentary, the fourth-century author, Ambrosiaster, preserves a tradition that links the birth of the Roman church to the Roman Judean community:

It is evident then that there were Jews living in Rome ... in the time of the apostles. Some of these Jews, who had come to believe (in Christ), passed on to the Romans (the tradition) that they should acknowledge Christ and keep the law.... One ought not to be angry with the Romans, but praise their faith, because without seeing any signs of miracles and without any of the apostles they came to embrace faith in Christ, though according to a Jewish rite” (cited in Fitzmyer, 1993:33).

Although the veracity of Ambrosiaster’s tradition has been questioned (cf. Cranfield, 1975:20) it corroborates what scholars have come to hold as a true reflection of the historical origins of the movement in Rome. In Dunn’s (1988a: xlvi) view,

It is quite likely... that among the first Greek-speaking Jews to embrace faith in the Messiah Jesus were Jews from Rome or having strong connections with Rome. Through such contacts and the normal travel of merchants and others to the imperial capital, the new faith would almost certainly be talked about in the synagogues of Rome within a few years of beginnings in Jerusalem, and groups would have emerged within these synagogues who professed allegiance to this form of eschatological Judaism.

Similarly, both Lampe (2003:11, 69) and Wiefel (1991:86) argue that the movement must have gotten its first purchase in one or several of the Roman synagogues. Consequently, its first adherents would have been Judeans, proselytes and God-fearers. But as soon as the movement began to expand and gain people from other ethnic-Gentiles, an ethnic crisis would have been inevitable (cf. Walters, 1993:60).

### **1.2.3. The letter to the Romans**

Paul’s letter, written in the early years of Nero’s reign (56-57 AD), manifests *prima facie* features that correlate with the kind of socio-historical situation described above. It is greatly interested in the ethnic relations between Judeans and Gentiles; their equality before God and their kinship. The letter ubiquitously juxtaposes “Judeans” and “Greeks/Gentiles” (1.16; 2.9-10; 3.9, 29; 9.24; 10.12; 11.14); “those without the law” and “those under law” (2.12, 15, 3.19); “Israel” and “the Gentiles” (9.30-31; 11.11-25); “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” (2.26-27; 3.30; 4.11-12); “the weak” and “the strong” (14-15); “circumcision” and “Gentiles” (15.8-9); “Jerusalem saints” and “Gentiles” (15.27). Significantly, the weighty issue of Judeans and Gentiles finds its place right at the heart of the thematic sentence of the letter:

“...the gospel... the power of God for salvation of all who believes, to the Judean first and also to the Greek” (1:16-17). This is not only a signal to the significance of the Judean-Gentile theme throughout the letter, but as Sanders (1983:30) suggests, emphasis should be placed on the second part of the sentence: “to all who believe, the Judeans first and also the Greek”: “several turns of phrase indicate that the brunt of the argument is in favour of the equality of Gentiles against the presumed Judean privilege”.

The bulk of the body of the letter is directed towards this end. In it Paul puts his rhetorical intelligence to work as he redefines both Judean and Gentile ethnic identities and their mutual relationships in the light of the sacrificial death of Jesus. He devastatingly indicts both, establishes their equality (2.18-3.20), and proclaims the availability of God’s righteousness to both on similar terms - faith in Jesus - for there is no longer any distinction between them in the light of the final judgment. Righteousness, a significant attribute of Judean ethnic identity, is now available outside the boundaries of Judean law. In fact, since God is the God of Judeans as well as Gentiles, at the *eschaton* he will confer righteousness to the “circumcised” and “uncircumcised” alike (3.21-31). Both terms - περιτομή (circumcision) and ἀκροβυστία (uncircumcision) - were ‘ethnic slurs’ that Judeans and Gentiles hurled at one another (Marcus, 1989:77; cf. Barth, 1974:254–259). Moreover, Abraham the ancestor of Judean ethnicity is so radically redefined that he emerges as the ancestor of both Judeans and Gentiles who have faith in Jesus. His story is told in such a manner that Gentiles in Christ can claim physical kinship with Judeans under his patriarchy (4.1-25).

Furthermore, in a section that has remained enigmatic to scholarship (chapters 9-11), the sense of love and commitment that Paul has for his own kinsmen is remarkably demonstrated. He portrays himself as a man of great sorrow and distress desiring the salvation of his own people, Israel (cf. 9.1-3; 10.1; 11.1). He maintains that Israel has a special calling and relationship with God, for to them belongs the adoption, glory, covenants, the law, temple service, the promises, the fathers, and from them, *not the Gentiles*, the Messiah has come (9.4-5). Furthermore, the hardening that is upon them is only temporary, awaiting the fullness of the Gentiles, and then, “All Israel will be saved”. From the gospel perspective they are enemies, but from the perspective of God’s election they are dearly beloved for the sake of the patriarchs. God’s gifts and callings for them are irrevocable (11.1f). However, Paul insists that righteousness is *only* available through the confession of Christ and not those ethnic claims. He emphasises that whoever believes – Judean or Gentiles - will not be disappointed; for the same Lord is Lord of all (9.30-33; 10.9-13).

Importantly, in the same section, Paul cautions the Gentiles against bigotry or behaving arrogantly towards the Judeans. He warns them that they are only a wild shoot grafted on

Israel's root. They are an alien branch that has been brought in to share in the ethnic heritage of Israel. They do not support the root, but rather the root supports them and therefore can easily be broken off. So they should not be arrogant, but should fear, for if the natural branches have not been spared, God will not spare them if they fail to continue in his kindness (11.1-32). Paul picks up again the theme of warning Gentiles against an attitude of arrogance towards Judeans in 14:1-15:13. He rhetorically designates the mainly Gentile group οἱ δυνάτοι and the Judean group ὁ ἀσθενῶν, and single out the observance of special days and kosher laws, practices that were fundamental to Judean ethnicity (cf. Barclay, 1996a), as what was causing conflict between them. The Judean group scrupulously kept practices, but the Gentile group viewed them as no longer binding. Paul calls both groups to stop judging one another on the basis of these practices. Then, in what many commentators view as the climax of the letter (15:7-13) (cf. Wright, 1991:235; Talbert, 2002:321), he summons both Judeans and Gentiles into mutual acceptance by invoking the consequence of Christ's ministry to the circumcision (Judean) group: to confirm the promises God made to their fathers, so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy (15.8-9). Then he effectuates this appeal by summoning Israel's scriptures (Ps 18:50, 117:1; Deut. 32:43 & Isa 11:10) that bear witness to the eschatological union of Israel and Gentiles (cf. Wagner, 1997:475).

### **1.3. Problem statement**

While the story of Romans may sound straightforward from the brief analysis above, that is not all there is. For when scholars demand to know the exact reason why Paul penned the letter, a plethora of divergent answers is offered. Wedderburn (1991:1) epitomises this frustration when he rightly says: "Why Paul wrote Romans is still something of an enigma. There is as yet no consensus as to why Paul should write precisely this letter with these contents to this church at this moment in his, and its, history." A few lines down he reiterates: "That there should be so much disagreement over the purpose of Romans is disconcerting in a letter that has perhaps received more learned attention and research than almost any other piece of literature in human history" (Wedderburn, 1991:2).

The debate about the purpose of Romans occupied the minds of many scholars in the latter half of the twentieth-century culminating in what is now called "The Romans Debate" (cf. Donfried, 1991; cf. Das, 2007). Longenecker (2011:92–93; Kruse, 2012:6-11) summarises the dominating and opposing views into two: there scholars who argue that Paul's purpose(s) for writing Romans must have originated primarily within his own self and ministry consciousness (i.e. his purpose was missionary in nature). Hence, he wrote to introduce himself to the Romans, to seek partnership for his ministry to Spain, to defend himself against false accusations and criticism, to affirm his apostolic authority to another Gentile

congregation(s), to set out a summary statement of the gospel, and so forth. Then, there are those who argue that Paul's purpose in writing Romans must have originated from the Roman situation itself (i.e. Paul's purpose was pastoral in nature). Hence, he wrote to address specific local problems that existed among the followers of the Messiah in Rome – whether doctrinal or ethical.

However, the two seemingly divergent approaches are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, many scholars now understand Romans to have been written to serve various reasons. This is the argument of Wedderburn (1991:140–142) himself; hence the title of his book: *The Reasons for Romans* (cf. Bruce, 1991:175–194; Walters, 1993:93–94; Schreiner, 1998:19; Kruse, 2012:9-11). Furthermore, in an extensive study of Paul's purpose in writing Romans, Lo (1998:417–419) concludes:

Paul's purpose in writing the letter is oriented to pastoral, apologetic and missionary concerns. It is pastorally oriented, because Paul was concerned about problems of the Roman Christians and tried to solve them. It is apologetic, because he defended the right of the Gentile Christians to be God's people without becoming Jews and the right of the Jewish Christians to maintain both Jewish and Christian identities... It is also oriented to missionary concern, because Paul had his Spanish mission in mind and tried to canvass the Roman Christians to be involved in his mission plan by the letter.

Significantly, Donfried (1991:103) proposes a methodological principle for approaching Paul's letter, which this study considers suitable in the light of the debate concerning the purpose of Romans. He posits:

Any study of Romans should proceed on the initial assumption that this letter was written by Paul to deal with a concrete situation in Rome. The support for such an assumption is the fact that every other authentic Pauline writing, without exception, is addressed to specific situations of the churches or persons involved. To argue that Romans is an exception to this Pauline pattern is certainly possible, but the burden of proof rests with those who wish to demonstrate that it is impossible, or at least not likely, that Romans addresses a concrete set of problems in the life of Christians in Rome.

While the concrete issue(s) that Paul sought to address in Rome continues to be debated, it is clear that one is now the most preferred amongst scholars. According to Das (2007:10), "The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed one approach becoming increasingly popular in the commentaries: Paul was hoping to alleviate ethnic tensions that had arisen between followers of Christ of Jewish origin and those of Gentile background regarding Mosaic observances." In fact, Schreiner (1998:19) observes that currently this is the majority position: "Paul wrote... to resolve the conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome" (cf. Minear, 1971:1–35; Dunn, 1988a: Ivi–Iviii; Wedderburn, 1991:64–65; Wiefel, 1991:85–101; Campbell, 1992:21–22; Walters, 1993:84–92; Kruse, 2012:7-11). Certainly, such a position

coheres well with both the ancient Mediterranean Judean and Gentile ethnic situation and the text of Romans itself as briefly described above.

Yet, despite the increased popularity of this position, there is a continued failure to follow through with the avenues that this position opens up for the interpretation of Romans. While many scholars acknowledge that there was an ethnic conflict Rome, and while many agree that Paul sought to address it, there is a continued failure to explore the deliberate ways through which “Paul’s ethnic rhetoric” achieved that particular goal. By “Paul’s ethnic rhetoric” it is meant how Paul construes ethnicity and ethnic identity as shaping the attitude, feelings, and actions of Judeans and Gentiles, and the deliberate social and rhetorical strategies which he employs in order to address and resolve the ethnic tensions (cf. Stanley, 1996:123-124). For many scholars, discussion on ethnicity in Romans is only to be found in the paraenetic section of the letter (chapter 12-16), particularly chapters 14-15. But even that is controverted (cf. Karris, 1991:66; Childs, 2008:171).

A major reason for such failure is that Romans is characteristically interpreted as a theological exposé with little or nothing to offer with regard to the social-historical issues that Paul and the Roman believers faced. Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) is famously known to have characterised Romans as a *christianae religionis compendium* in his *Loci Communes Theologici* (1521). In his commentary on Galatians, J.B. Lightfoot (1865:48) contrasts Romans to Galatians saying: “To the Romans he (Paul) writes at leisure, under no pressure of circumstances, in the face of no direct antagonism... The matter, which in the one Epistle (Galatians) is personal and fragmentary, elicited by the special needs of an individual church, is in the other (Romans) generalised and arranged so as to form a comprehensive and systematic treatise.” Along similar lines, Nygren (1944:7–8) states: Romans “impresses one as a doctrinal writing, a theological treatise, which is only externally clad with the form of a letter... it is true that Romans does not deal, or deals only in slightest degree, with the conditions within the Roman congregation.” For Bultmann (1951:190), Romans is Paul’s “basic theological position... more or less completely set forth”. Similarly, for Matera (2010:3), Romans stands out as the most foundational writing for Christian anthropology, doctrine of sin, justification, pneumatology, eschatology, and as the “*locus classicus* for the Augustinian and Calvinistic teaching on predestination”. Even scholars who maintain a close relationship between the letters’ contingency and the universal scope of its message find it difficult to relate how the concrete issue at hand played in Paul’s rhetorical argumentation of the whole letter. Moo (1996:20), for example, argues: “It would be going too far to say that the specific problem in Rome gave Paul a good excuse to write about this widespread tension ... The major part of the body of Romans, chap. 1-11, develops by its own internal

logic: Paul's focus is on the gospel and its meaning rather than on the Romans and their needs."

Certainly, Romans is a theological document at its core, and there is therefore nothing wrong with analysing the text theologically. As Beker (1990:4–5) rightly puts it, "the occasional character of the letters does not suggest that they retain only an occasional value. The letter form, with its combination of particularity and claim to authority, reflects the way Paul does theology." However, theological expositions, as Esler (2003:4–5) observes, "focus on the ideational dimensions of religious life (generally to the exclusion of its many other aspects)." On a similar note, Darboune (2004:21–22) observes that a "theological exposition is addressed to an audience interested in ideas. It is not concerned with readers as persons, or with relating the ideas to them in their situation. Accordingly, in the mainstream exegesis very little account is taken of Paul's audience". Both Stendahl (1963:205–208) and Stowers (1994:13–14) critique the tradition of reading Romans, almost to the exclusion of its original context and meaning, as one that abstracts and disconnects Paul's rhetorical argumentation from its socio-historical context(s). Whereas, for example, Paul uses terminologies like Judean, Gentile, Greek, righteousness, law, works of the law, circumcision, and so forth, in relation to concrete social issues, these are generalised or metaphorised so that they become universal principles that speak to all humanity. Watson (2007:51) makes a similar conclusion after a review of the mainstream reading of Romans:

One problem that arises again and again in different forms is the relation between Paul's historical situation and his theology. The Lutheran or neo-Lutheran reading assumes that the permanent essence of the Christian gospel is to be found in Paul's teaching about justification and the law, which no doubt arose in a concrete historical situation but which must now be interpreted existentially, in relative abstraction from its historical origin.

Furthermore, Tobin (2004:82–8) rightly observes that reading and interpreting Romans along theological themes reflect concerns of later vital theological controversies that are rooted in Reformation concerning Pauline doctrines of righteousness, faith, salvation and so forth. While this does not necessarily make such interpretations wrong, it makes one question whether the theological themes do not obscure the original meaning of the Roman text. Because these themes have been so central, yet so controversial over the centuries, they tend to constrain efforts to trace Paul's argument in a manner that is consistent with his own context and that of his addressees. To extrapolate from Tobin, such controversies not only deflects us from Paul's ethnic rhetoric vis-à-vis its historical particularity, but also deflects us from the implications of Paul's rhetoric for our own social problems, yet besieged by similar constraints, as was the case in the early church. Paul's theology did not develop in a social vacuum. His theologising happened as he responded and reacted to a concrete historical

*Sitz im Leben* (Campbell, 2006:10–11).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, “it is essential to distinguish clearly between Paul’s interests in writing to his communities about contemporary first century issues and our modern concerns of self-understanding and identity. Such an approach respects the integrity of Paul’s own theologising and also facilitates the relating of his theological thought to our very different concerns” (Campbell, 2005:302).

This study assumes the position of the majority of scholars reviewed above who hold that central to Paul’s purpose in writing Romans was an attempt to unify Judeans and Gentiles in Rome. However, it proposes a reading of Romans 1-4 that takes seriously first century Judean and Gentile ethnicities and relations and Paul’s ethnic rhetoric. It seeks to understand how ancient ethnicity discourse shaped the relationship between Judeans and Gentiles, how that shapes Paul’s rhetoric in Romans, and how the arguments of Romans 1-4 might have addressed the extant ethnic tensions between Judeans and Gentiles in Rome.

The central research question is: **How did Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 address the extant ethnic tensions between Judeans and Gentiles within the early Christian movement in ancient Rome in order to realise unity among them?**

To answer this question the following sub-questions are asked and investigated:

- II. What is the current state of research on Paul and ethnicity in Romans?
- III. What was the state of Judean-Gentiles’ ethnicities and relations in antiquity and how does it cohere with the epistolary content of Romans?
- IV. How did Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 address the extant Judean-Gentile ethnic divide in Rome thereby realising unity among them?

#### **1.4. Research aims and objectives**

The study aims to explore and investigate how Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 might have addressed the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide in Rome in order to realise unity among them.

The specific objectives are:

- I. To enquire into the current state of research regarding Paul and ethnicity in Romans.

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<sup>3</sup> Campbell (2006:11) uses the term ‘theologising’ to “stress that this is an activity in which Paul engages, rather than ‘theology’ with its emphasis upon conceptualization, distant from context, and tendency towards offering a static understanding of Paul’s theological thought”.

- II. To explore and investigate Judean and Gentile ethnic identities and relations within ancient ethnicity discourse and points of coherence with Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans.
- III. To investigate how Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1.18-4.25 might have addressed the extant ethnic tensions between Judeans and Gentiles in Rome thereby realising unity among them.

### **1.5. Central theoretical argument**

The central theoretical argument advanced in this study is that Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 equalises Judeans and Gentiles in predicament and the gospel, creates kinship and unites them under Abraham's fatherhood as the one people of God.

### **1.6. Methodology and procedure**

This study is a social-historical study of Romans and is done from a Protestant-evangelical perspective. Defined by Meeks (2003:2), a socio-historical study of early Christianity endeavours to understand first-century followers of the Messiah within the social world in which they belonged and to glimpse at their lives through the characteristic occasions that are mirrored in the texts. It requires paying close attention to the typical patterns of life within the immediate social world in which the movement emerged. This way, the task of a socio-historian is to explore the social context in which the early Christian movement emerged in order to "understand a particular set of phenomena"; an understanding that is analogous to an ethnographic description of a culture. "The description is interpretive... For that purpose theory is necessary, both to construct interpretation and to criticise constructions, but it must 'stay rather closer to the ground than tends to be the case in sciences more able to give themselves over to imaginative abstraction'" (Meeks, 2003:6-7).

However, there is a scholarly debate regarding the relationship that exists between the socio-historical and socio-scientific approaches to the NT. The debate bears lightly on this study and therefore a clarification is necessary before proceeding. According to Garret (1992:90-92), Harland (2009:3-5), and Neyrey (2010:177-178), two trends have characterised the sociological criticism of the Bible since its resurgence in the 1970's. On the one hand, some scholars confine themselves to the social and historical background and practices of the early Christianity, being less concerned with models, and taking a more descriptive and interpretive approach to the use of the social sciences. They are the socio-historical scholars. On the other hand, there are those who formally employ the scientific model-based approaches, focusing their attention on constructing, testing and applying modern theories and models to the early Christianity. They are the socio-scientific scholars.

Against a rigorous socio-scientific approach, socio-historical scholars argue that the relevant sources on Christian origins are too sparse and fragmentary to allow for any conclusive socio-scientific interpretation of the NT. They charge socio-scientific analyses of being methodologically retrojective, reducing theological concepts to matters of sociology, and minimising the historical intentions and creativity of the authors. Conversely, the socio-scientific proponents attack the social-historical approach for being typically intuitive, ethnocentric and obscure, since it does not make theoretical presuppositions explicit and open to criticism. They argue that any interpretation of data requires a theory, something that the socio-historians eschew and therefore leaving their models vague and implicit.

While some scholars view the two approaches as fundamentally different (cf. Neyrey, 2010:177), there are others who, while appreciating the differences in emphasis of the two approaches, maintain that the two are not mutually exclusive. For example, Horrell (1999:17) posits that “there is no sustainable methodological distinction between history and social science and therefore ... the distinction between historical sociology and social history is, or should become, meaningless.” Similarly, Garret (1992:90) says that “in practice, the work of relatively few scholars has matched either of these ‘ideal types’. Rather, many have held that the most promising approach is one that continues to employ old methods and questions, but that is *also* informed by the questions social scientists ask and the models they employ.” As both these two scholars observe, socio-historical methods may not ignore socio-scientific insights. This is something that Meeks (2003:6) himself is aware of. In his definition, he admits that social history cannot afford to ignore scientific theories, nevertheless, he insists that the socio-historical interpretation should engage theories suggestively: “piecemeal, as needed, where it fits”. Or as Harland (2009:5) says, “as heuristic devices, as things that help the social historian develop questions and *find* or notice things that might otherwise remain obscure”. Such will be the approach of this study, especially when engaging ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic conflict in ancient antiquity.

Furthermore, Horrell (1999:24) observes that any study of the NT is certainly a study of literature. Consequently, tools of literary exegesis are not optional: “Any responsible historical or social-scientific study must take account of the literary character of the texts which comprise the primary evidence, and must consider carefully how historical evidence can be drawn from texts that are written to exhort and persuade, often with a polemical and argumentative thrust.” Accordingly, this study treats Romans as a rhetorical text. Paul wrote Romans with the intention of convincing and persuading the Romans to embrace certain beliefs and values. Ancient rhetorical practice, as Wendland (2002:183–184; cf. Thurén, 1995:49–53) informs us, involved influencing “the thinking of an audience” through (1)

*convincing* them concerning the legitimacy of a certain belief or position that was based on logical reasoning (*logos*), and (2) moving the audience into action by *persuading* them either to change or adjust their conduct in specific ways. In an epistolary argument, the rhetorical argument involves a specific “problem” and a desire by the author to provide a “solution”. In the case of this study, if ethnic strife is what characterised Judeans and Gentiles in the early Christian movement in Rome (the problem), how might Paul’s ‘ethnic’ rhetoric in Romans 1-4 have address it (solution)?

The study proceeds as follows:

**Chapter II - Paul and ethnicity in Romans: the state of current research:** This chapter reviews the current state of research on Paul and ethnicity in Romans. As Stanley (2011:110) rightly observes, “Whatever one thinks of the ‘New Perspective’ on Paul, most would agree that it has performed a salutary service by redirecting attention to the ‘ethnic’ dimensions of Paul’s thought and writings”. The chapter, therefore, critically engages with the contribution of the new perspective and those who offer a contrary opinion. It also briefly reviews two studies of Romans that have ethnicity as their main subject. The chapter ends with a statement on the gap that this study seeks to fill.

**Chapter III – A socio-historical perspective of Judeans and Gentile ethnicities and relations in antiquity:** Drawing from socio-anthropology, this chapter establishes a definitional framework by which ancient ethnicity and ethnic conflict can be understood. It then explores and investigates Judaism as ethnic praxis in the diaspora and the Roman context and the possible ethnic tensions in which it engendered between Judeans and Gentiles. The chapter also highlights the impact of the Judean-Gentile divide on the origin of the early Christian movement in Rome and points of coherence between that particular ethnic situation and the epistolary content of Paul’s letter.

**Chapter IV: Paul’s ethnic rhetoric: equalising Judeans and Gentiles and creating kinship between them under Abraham’s fatherhood:** This is the exegetical chapter of the study. It investigates how Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 might have addressed the extant ethnic tensions between Judeans and Gentile in Rome. The chapter briefly analyses Paul’s “ethnic map” and highlights his unique position as an apostle to the Gentiles, but with a special role of bringing Judeans and Gentiles together in one new social identity. Romans 1-4 is also brought within its socio-historical context, with particular interest on the social significance of “righteousness” and the “works of the law”. This then is followed by an exegesis of Rom 1-4. Each unit is commented upon and the net effect of Paul’s argumentation to the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide extrapolated.

**Chapter V: Conclusion:** this brief chapter summarises the arguments of the study while providing a conclusive statement(s) of the outcomes of the study.

### **1.7. Concept clarification: why ‘Judean(s) and not ‘Jew(s)’?**

There is a resonant debate among scholars regarding the translation and meaning of the word Ἰουδαῖος. Miller (2010, 2012), in a two-part series of articles, and a promise of a third one, aptly summarises the developmental character of the debate. The first essay reviews how scholars have contributed to the meaning of the term in relation to other ancient ethnic labels. After his review, Miller (2010:122; cf. 2012:306) concludes that in the last seventy years, a major shift has occurred within scholarship in relation to the meaning and the use of the term Ἰουδαῖος. Many scholars now understand the term to have functioned in its ancient context as an ethnic category rather than a religious option. The second article places this “major shift” within the modern social-scientific discourse of ‘race’, ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’. In Miller’s (2012:303, 306) view, since World War II, a transition has occurred from ‘race’ to ‘nation’ and then to ‘ethnic group’, with relation to social scientist’s interpretation of group identities. This shift lies behind the transition of the meaning of the word Ἰουδαῖος within biblical scholarship. ‘Race’ and ‘nation’ are understood today as not corresponding to the way the way in which people in antiquity perceived group identity. According to Miller (2012:305-307), “An examination of the meaning of *Ioudaios* must therefore be attentive not only to the term itself but also to the shifting meanings of other ancient and modern terms that are used to define it, such as ‘race’, nation, ethnicity, and *ethnos* – all the while taking care to avoid inadvertently confusing modern concepts with ancient perception of ‘groupness’.” Furthermore, he posits that modern insights about ‘race’, ‘nationalism’ and ‘ethnicity’ are welcome, since they aid in the process of our attempt to understand ancient societies. Nevertheless, he insists, ethnicity stands a better option than ‘race’ and ‘nation’ when designating people groups such as Egyptians, Parthians, and so forth, which are contrastable to Ἰουδαῖος.

The increase in understanding Ἰουδαῖος as an ethnic category in the last seventy years as Miller observes, is probably what lies behind Danker’s (2000:478-479) recommendation, in the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, that the word should be rendered ‘Judean’ instead of ‘Jew’ in order to highlight the “ethnic-religious-social realities” embedded in it. Furthermore, scholars like Boyarin (2003:66-71) and Mason (2007:489) point out that “religion” is a non-existent category before the emergence of Christian apologists in the third and fourth-century AD, and therefore inappropriate for analysing ancient Judaism. More radically, Esler (2003:66-67) proposes

that to translate Ἰουδαῖος as ‘Jew’ ostracises the so designated from what defined their unique ethnic identity, including the geographical territory associated with them and the temple cult. Indeed, these were essential aspects of their ethnicity in accordance with the ancient convention of naming people groups based on primordial territory. Furthermore, he insists, “the words ‘Jews’, ‘Jewish’, and even ‘Judaism’ now carry meanings indelibly fashioned by events after the first century”. Accordingly, “it is arguable that translating Ἰουδαῖοι as ‘Jews’ is not only intellectually indefensible... but also morally questionable. To honour the memory of these first-century people it is necessary to call them by a name that accords with their own sense of identity” (Esler, 2003:68).

The proposal advanced by these scholars of rendering Ἰουδαῖος as ‘Judean’ is not without opposition. Amy-Jill Levine (cited in Miller, 2010:99), for example, argues that when “the Jew is replaced with the Judean... we have a *Judenrein*, (‘Jew free’) text, a text purified of Jews. Complimenting this erasure, scholars then proclaim that Jesus is neither Jew nor even Judean, but Galilean... once Jesus is not a Jew or a Judean, but a Galilean, it is also an easy step to make him an Aryan.” This study is cognizant of the on-going debate with regard to the translation and meaning of Ἰουδαῖος. Nevertheless, I choose to translate the word as ‘Judean’ for the purposes of extrapolating the salient social and ethnic differences that are embedded in the term itself and the people so designated in antiquity. Agreeably, Miller (above), Esler (2003:53-76) and Mason (2007:489f) observe that the first-century Ἰουδαῖοι, whether at home in Judea or in the diaspora, viewed themselves as an ethnic group (see definition of ‘ethnic group’ in chapter III), comparable to other people groups like the Romans, Egyptians, Greeks, etc. Indeed, these other people groups, whom they (Judeans) lumped together as τὰ ἔθνη (Gentiles), understood the Judeans as such (cf. Stanley, 1996:177). Accordingly, the words ‘Jew(s)’ or ‘Jewish’ will be used in this study only when directly quoting sources that use them with reference to ancient Judeans.

## **CHAPTER II: Paul and ethnicity in Romans: the state of current research**

The task of this chapter is to acquaint ourselves with the current state of research on Paul and ethnicity in Romans. How have scholars dealt with the question of Judeans and Gentiles in Romans? As it will become apparent, through the influence of new perspective on Paul current scholarship is alive to the ethnic dimensions of Paul's letter to the Romans. However, the state of research is polarised between the arguments of new perspective and offer a contrary opinion - designated here as neotraditionalists.<sup>4</sup> My aim is not to resolve the controversies that emanate from the interpretations of these two schools, but to highlight how both schools treat themes that bear on the question of Judeans and Gentiles in first century world, which are also central to Paul's argumentation in Romans: "Judean-Gentile ethnic relations" "the law," "the works/practices of the law," "righteousness," among others. The chapter proceeds as follows: first the relevant arguments of the new perspective school are explicated (2.1). Secondly, the objections and proposals of the neotraditionalists are discussed (2.2). Thirdly, a critical appraisal of both schools is done (2.3). Fourthly, two studies that have offered an ethnic reading of Romans are reviewed (2.4). Lastly, a conclusion that summarises the states of the current research and states how this study builds on it is made (2.5).

### **2.1. The new perspective on Judaism and Paul**

#### **2.1.1. The birth of a new paradigm: *Stendhal & Sanders***

Before proceeding with this section, a brief word on how scholarship prior to the new perspective treats Paul's ethnic language is necessary. In a very apt manner, Stanley (2011:110) characterises the situation when he says:

Prior to the New Perspective, scholarly discussions of Paul's language regarding 'Jews' and 'Gentiles' were invariably framed in theological terms, focusing on the question of how Paul viewed the positions of these two groups (and the nascent 'Christian' community) in God's plan of salvation. Both the problem and Paul's solution(s), which in the eyes of most scholars centred on 'justification by faith', were defined in intellectual terms. Little was said about how Paul's rhetoric might relate to any concrete interactions between real-world 'Jews' and 'Gentiles' in the communities to which Paul was writing

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<sup>4</sup>The term 'neotraditionalist' was coined by Eisenbaum (2004:673) to refer to scholars that contend for "the traditional reading (also called the Augustinian-Lutheran interpretation) of Paul in light of the new perspective critique". For her, anyone writing after the emergence of the new perspective should be regarded so, since they either acknowledge or incorporate some of the ideas of the new perspective into their reading.

Other scholars have made similar observations. In chapter I, I cited Lee (2009:142) who like Stanley observes that the ruling interpretation attempts to transcend ethnicity and make Christianity a universal and all-inclusive religion. This way ethnicity is alleged to be irrelevant for any objective social-historical criticism. Buell and Hodge (2004:239–241; cf. Hodge, 2007:48) make a similar observation arguing that in the history of Pauline interpretation, the ethnic dimensions of Paul's theologising are largely overlooked, treated as irrelevant, or even transformed into something else.

A call for a new way of understanding Judaism, and so Paul, stretches back centuries. But in the twentieth century, such calls are anticipated, for example, in the works of Moore (1921; 1927-1930). But Stendahl's seminal essay *The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West* (1963) is acknowledged to have opened up a new era in Pauline studies (cf. Barclay, 1996c:199). Stendahl (1963:200) unleashes heavy criticism on the ruling Pauline interpretation, which essentially analyses Paul from the standpoint of the introspective conscience of the West. According to him, it is at this point that the traditional interpretation finds "the common denominator between Paul and the experiences of man, since Paul's statements about 'justification by faith' have been hailed as the answer to the problem which faces the ruthlessly honest man in his practice of introspection". According to Stendahl (1963:200–201), such an understanding of Paul is totally misplaced. In fact, a fresh look at Paul's writings evidences a man of "robust conscience," who never struggled with an introspective conscience or difficulty in fulfilling the demands of the Torah. Indeed, while the impossibility of fulfilling the whole law forms part of Paul's argumentations (cf. Rom 2.17-3.20; Gal 3.10-12), such impossibility must be understood against the background of his primary concern: an inclusive salvation for all that incorporates Judeans and Gentiles.

For Stendahl (1963:203–204), therefore, the traditional obsession with the individual's quest for salvation, whose liberating answer is righteousness by faith apart from the works of the law, has more to do with Luther's sixteenth-century struggles than it had with Paul's real first century interests. Paul did not arrive at his views about the present place of the law by testing its effect against his own conscience, but by grappling with the most important issue he faced: the relations of Gentiles and Judeans in God's plan of salvation. The traditional interpretation therefore rests on analogism; whereas Paul's statements about the law and its works were directed towards particular socio-historical issue, they are understood as general principles of legalism, and where his main concern was the possibility of Gentiles' inclusion in the Messianic community, his statements are understood in terms of man's quest for salvation and assurance; human predicament and its solution (Stendahl, 1963:205–206).

Stendahl's reiterates his position in his subsequent work (1976:1-2), arguing that such ignorance of Paul's primary concerns is especially manifested in its reading of Romans, for it is this letter that is treated as the primary window to Pauline thought, with righteousness by faith serving as the unlocking key of his gospel and theology. Yet, he continues, the doctrine was itself "hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of the Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs of the promises of God to Israel". Instead, Stendahl (1976:3-5) insists, understood properly, Romans is an *apologia*, simultaneously presenting how the Gentile mission fits into God's salvation plan and the place of Israel in God's mysterious plan. This understanding was lost in the history of Romans' interpretation as the universal predicament of humanity became the main context for Paul's doctrine. The letter "became a theological tractate on the nature of faith" with the doctrine of righteousness as "the timeless answer to the plights and pains of the introspective conscience of the West" (Stendahl, 1976:5). However, when Paul and Romans are understood properly, the real centre of Romans is chapter 9-11, where Paul deals with his most important concerns – the relations of Judeans and Gentile, the mystery that was revealed to him. To these chapters Paul only adds a preface (Rom 1-8), whose main contention is not how one may be saved -whether by the practices of the Torah or something else - but that since Judeans and Gentiles are made right by faith, it is possible for both to be accepted in Christ (Stendahl, 1976:28-29).

I will not enter into a critique of Stendahl and his controversial opinions regarding Paul and Romans, however, one can highlight that his contention for an understanding of Paul that takes seriously the socio-historical context in which he and his audience were embedded is an important aspect that aids our interpretation of his letter. Stendahl's protest however did not catch the interest of scholarship until the publication of E.P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), the main catalyst behind a paradigm shift in Pauline studies and the back bone for the new perspective on Paul. Like Stendahl, disgruntled with the traditional understanding of Judeans as epitomes of a universal human problem and Judaism as a 'legalistic' and 'works-righteousness' religion, Sanders (1977: xii) sets himself, through his study, to destroy such caricatures by establishing a more accurate picture of Judaism and Paul. After an investigation of Judaism's Tannaitic traditions, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical writings, Sanders (1977:422) concludes that there appears to have been an all-pervasive pattern of religion that constituted first-century Judaism, which he summarises in the phrase: *covenantal nomism*.

The "pattern" or "structure" of covenantal nomism is this: (1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. That implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results

in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenant relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement.

In other words, in first-century Judaism 'getting in' to the covenant was through God's grace (covenant), but 'staying in' was through 'obedience to the Torah' (nomism). Having established that, the second part of the book measures up Paul against covenantal nomism. According to Sanders (1977:441–443), two primary convictions governed Paul's thought: the first being he had come to believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and through him salvation was available to all who believe; secondly, that he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. The two convictions were intimately connected. The watershed for his role as an apostle to the Gentiles was the belief that salvation belongs to *all* who believe - Judean or Gentile. This is what compelled him to preach the gospel to the whole world. Contrary to the traditional interpretation, Paul's conviction and thought did not develop from an analysis of the universal human plight and quest for salvation, but from the discovery of the *solution* - salvation is found in Christ for all. From that *solution* Paul worked backward to the premise that *all* peoples must need such salvation. "It appears that the conclusion that all the world – both Jew and Greek - equally stands in need of a saviour *springs from* the prior conviction that God had provided such a saviour" (Sanders, 1977:443).

When it comes to the way Paul poses the problem in Romans - from plight to solution – Sanders (1977:444–447) maintains that it is not a reflection of the actual missionary preaching of Paul. "It seems unlikely that he followed the modern fundamentalist tactic of first convincing people that they were sinners and in need of salvation." The content of what he called his gospel (cf. 1 Thess 2. 8; 3.2; 1 Cor 9.14; 2 Cor 11.7, 12; Rom 15.9; Gal 1.11; 2.2) indicates that he considered his message as to be what God had done in Christ. He did not begin with human sin and transgression but with the offer of salvation, which is available in God, and how men could participate in it. "The real plight of man, as Paul learned it not from experience, nor from observation, nor from an analysis of the result of human effort, but from the conviction that Christ came to be lord of all, was that men were under a different lordship" (Sanders, 1977:500). The corollary of this is that Paul was not dealing with 'legalism' or 'works-righteousness' when he attacked his own kinsmen. Neither was he disillusioned with the observance of the law prior to his conversion (cf. Phil 3:6-8).

What is distinctive about Paul's view of the law – and in fact about his theology (is): Christ saves Gentiles as well as Jews. This was not only a theological view, but it was bound up with Paul's most profound conviction about himself, a conviction on which he staked his career and life: he was the apostle to the Gentiles. The salvation of the Gentiles is essential to Paul's preaching; and with it falls the law; for, as Paul says simply, Gentiles cannot live by the law (Gal.2:14). Further, it was a

matter of common Christian experience that the Spirit and faith come by hearing the gospel, not by obeying the law (Gal. 3:1-5). More important, they come *only* this way. *It is the Gentile question and the exclusivism of Paul's soteriology which dethrone the law, not a misunderstanding of it or a view predetermined by his background* (Sanders, 1977:496–497).

Against this background, Sanders (1977:504–508) maintains, Paul's teaching on righteousness by faith and not by the works of the law emerges. When he denies that righteousness cannot come by observation of the law, he should not be understood to be denying that Judean righteousness comes by the law; for righteousness is defined as being Torah obedience (Phil 3.9). Rather, he should be understood to be saying that righteousness, which is based on the obedience of the Torah, is not true righteousness or the right kind of righteousness. The only proper righteousness according to Paul is the "Christian righteousness," which is based on something else: faith in the Messiah. This is what Paul works out in Galatians and Romans. Sanders (1983:30–35) insists that the argument of Romans "concerns the equal standing of Jew and Gentile – both are under the power of sin – and the identical ground on which they change that status – faith in Jesus Christ." Judeans' sense of privilege is excluded; righteousness is accessible to both Judeans and Gentiles on similar basis. Moreover, the phrase 'not by the works of the law' should not be construed as an attack on legalism or works-righteousness, but rather a critique of his ancestral faith. Paul's emphasis is not 'works' abstractly conceived, but the practices of the Mosaic law. The argument is that one does not need to be a Judean in order to be righteous, something that was contrary to the standard teaching and practice of Judaism, since it taught that the law was a sign of a privileged and favoured status. In other words, the law is unable to provide for God's ultimate commitment: the salvation of all peoples without privileging one (1983:46-47).

Like his predecessor Stendahl, Sanders' views of second temple Judaism, Paul and Romans are controversial and have been a subject of heavy criticism (see below). But it is right to argue that his works have been revolutionary. Over against an overly ahistorical approach to Paul's writings, these scholars highlight important contextual first-century issues that Paul faced and his attempt to address them. Both emphasise that Paul was not attacking a *homo religiosus* when he critiqued Judaism and Judeans. He was engaging real people who lived in a real world and who viewed the world in a certain manner. Most significantly for our purposes, these scholars accentuate the theme of Judeans and Gentiles and their relations in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus, within Paul's overall theology. That he was deeply concerned with their relations and he attempted to reconfigure their ethnic identities and relation so that those who trust in Jesus could be considered as God's people on similar grounds. Both authors opened up, as Stendahl (1976:95) himself

anticipated, a “new perspective for systematic theology and practical theology,” and in their wake, a full-blown fresh perspective on Paul and his writings emerged.

### **2.1.2. The new perspective on Paul: *Wright & Dunn***

N.T. Wright’s inaugural essay *The Paul of History and Apostle of Faith* (1978), written barely a year after Sanders’ seminal publication, lays the groundwork for what has characterised his writings since then. Taking his cue from Stendahl and Sanders, Wright (1978:65; cf. Wright, 1991:240–243) argues that Paul considered the historical people and descendants of Abraham as the God-ordained solution to the world. However, instead of providing the solution, they had failed. But if one seeks to find out how Israel has failed, Paul’s answer is not that they are guilty of “legalism” or “works-righteousness” but of “national righteousness”:

The belief that fleshly Jewish descent guarantees membership of God’s true covenant people... Within this ‘national righteousness’, the law functions not as a legalistic ladder but as a charter for national privilege, so that, for the Jews, possession of the law is three parts salvation: and circumcision functions not as a ritualist’s outward show but as a badge of national privilege. Over against this abuse of Israel’s undoubted privileged status, Paul establishes, in his theology and in his missionary work, the true children of Abraham, the world-wide community of faith. Faith unlike the Torah, is available to all (Wright, 1978:65).

According to Wright (1978:69–72), the corollary of Israel’s failure/sinfulness is that she cannot fulfil her God-ordained task of reversing the problem bequeathed by the Adamic fall and inaugurating the new people of God. This is what their anointed representative (the Messiah) faithfully does. Consequently, Israel Messiah is the foundation for new humanity that comprises of Judeans and Gentiles, who are made right by his death and resurrection according to the promise given to Abraham. Paul’s doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore primarily a polemical doctrine, targeting not ‘nomism’ or ‘*menschenwerke*’ as the traditional Lutheran understanding maintains, but the Judean national superiority. The doctrine criticises Israel’s ‘national righteousness’, a criticism that is also found in both John the Baptist and Jesus. It is polemical because it announces an open way for all - Judean and Gentile alike - to enter the multi-ethnic family of Abraham by faith. Faith is the badge of entrance and not the law or circumcision.

Furthermore, Wright (1997:118–133; 2002:398–401) argues that Paul’s righteousness language must be understood within the settings in which it was rightly embedded, that is, second temple Judaism’s covenant, law-court and apocalyptic contexts. In those settings God’s righteousness means “covenant faithfulness”: - his “loyalty to the covenant with Israel” through which he would act to vindicate his people Israel and judge her oppressors, the Gentile peoples. What is more, according to Wright (1997:119), righteousness described covenant Judeans; “those who adhered in the proper way to the ancestral covenant charter,

the Torah, were assured in the present that they were the people who would be vindicated in the future.” For that matter, righteousness in its first century contexts “is not a matter of *how someone enters the community of the true people of God, but how you tell who belongs to that community.*” In his writings therefore, Paul preserves the “shape” of doctrine of Judaism, while at the same time filling it with new “content”: all who trust Jesus are the members of Abraham’s family, their sins having been forgiven. Faith is what demarcates them other than the works of the law - the badges - that differentiated Judeans from Gentiles: the Sabbath and kosher laws and circumcision (Wright, 1997:131–132).

According to Wright (1978:82–83), this understanding is what Paul works out in his letter to the Romans. In the letter, whose main theme is the revelations of God’s righteousness apart from the works of the law (cf. Wright, 2002:397), Paul mounts-up a detailed challenge against Judaism as its advocates presented it. He attacks Judaism’s (1) sense of boasting, not the boast of a legalist *per se*, but that which emanates from its monotheistic belief that God is a God of Judeans and not Gentiles, and the possession of the law that marked them as privileged members of the chosen ethnicity; (2) sin of breaking of the law; (3) abuse of the law by making it a license of “national righteousness” and an automatic Judean privilege to the exclusion of the Gentiles and (4) trust in the law and circumcision as symbols of ethnic privilege. The totality of these charges is what Paul charges Israel with in Rom 10:3-4: “For being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they do not submit themselves to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

It is however through Dunn that the salient sociological aspects of Paul’s critical engagement with Judaism and Gentilism become more pronounced. For Dunn (2008:103), Sanders provides us with “an unrivalled opportunity to look at Paul afresh, to shift our perspective from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to do what all true exegetes want to do – that is, to see Paul properly within his own context, to hear Paul in terms of his own time, to let Paul be himself”. In his own confession, Dunn’s (2008:16–17) new perspective on Paul is anchored in five things: first, it builds on Sanders’ new perspective on second temple Judaism. Second, it is premised on the understanding that “a social function of the law was an integral aspect of Israel’s covenantal nomism, where separateness *to* God (holiness) was understood to require separateness *from* the (other) nations as two sides of the one coin.” Third, it contends that Paul’s teaching on righteousness “focuses largely if not principally on the need to overcome the barrier which the law was seen to interpose between Jew and Gentile, so that the ‘all’ of ‘to all who believe’ (Rom. 1:17) signifies, in the first place, Gentile as well as Jew.” Fourth, it understands the phrase ‘works of the law’ in Paul’s exposition of the gospel

as a slogan to counteract Judeans' insistence on certain works as indispensable for one's standing in the covenant. And fifth, "It protests that failure to recognise this major dimension of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith may have ignored or excluded a vital factor in combating the nationalism and racialism which has so distorted and diminished Christianity past and present" (cf. Dunn, 1998:338–340; 354–366).

It is clear from that statement that like the others above, Dunn maintains that Paul's doctrine of righteousness by faith is reactionary. He was reacting against the "works of the law". The phrase 'works of the law' refers to

what the law requires, 'deeds' which law makes obligatory... what the law required of *Israel as God's people*... what Israel's righteousness consisted of ... Israel's part of the covenant which Yahweh had made with Israel in first choosing Israel as his special people. 'Works of the law' were Israel's response to that grace, the obedience God called for in his people, the way Israel should live as a people of God" (Dunn, 1998:354–355; 2008:23–24).

From a sociological perspective therefore, Dunn (2008:213–226; 265–283; 1998:352–356) insists that there should be no difficulty in seeing how the law functioned both as an ethnic identity marker and a boundary, reinforcing Israel's sense of distinctiveness and marking off Israel from the surrounding pagan nations. Three groups of laws, in this case, became particularly prominent in first-century Judaism: circumcision, dietary and purity, and the Sabbath laws, and it is the barrier that these laws had created between the Judeans and the rest of the nations that Paul aimed to break by his teaching on justification by faith. If anything, many of his fellow Jewish contemporaries were adamant that these Jewish works were essential for membership into the covenant and salvation.

For Dunn (1996:842–843), the corollary to a new perspective on Judaism and Paul is a new perspective on Romans: "What is at stake in Romans is not the gospel in general or in the abstract, but the gospel in particular as embodied by Paul's own life and work – Jewish gospel for Gentiles, and the strains and tensions, which stemmed from that basic conviction". Paul's contention is "the gospel for Jew *and* Gentile" as is emphasised in the thematic statement (1.16-17) and climax (15.7-12) of the letter. It is also what is emphasised in the ubiquitous word *all* (πᾶς): *all* who believe (cf. 1.16; 3.22; 4.11; 10.4, 11-13); *all* unrighteousness (cf. 1.18, 29), *all are* under sin (3.9, 12, 19-20, 23; 5.12), the *entire* seed (4.11, 16), and *all* Israel' (11.26).

The issue is not so much the universality of human need and of the gospel's sufficiency as whether and how the gospel, Jewish in origin and in character, reaches beyond the Jewish nation to include the nations beyond ("all" = Gentile as well as Jew, Rom 1:18–5:21). And conversely, the issue is whether the gospel now

drawing in Gentiles in such numbers remains a Jewish gospel and is still the gospel for the Jews (“all” = Jew as well as Gentile, Rom 9–11) (Dunn, 1996:843).<sup>5</sup>

Once Romans is viewed this way, Paul’s theme of the law in the letter falls into place and a more coherent picture of both his positive and negative statements of the law is possible: for where the problem is between Judeans and Gentiles, the law is addressed as a hindrance preventing Gentiles from the gospel. “It is a Jewish claim to have the Law and thus to have a privileged position before God (Rom 2:12-29) which focuses the problem of Israel’s election (3:1). It is the Jewish boast in this privileged status as marked out by their obedience to the Law which Paul seeks to counter by his focus on faith (Rom 3:27-31; 4:1-25)” (Dunn, 1996:843–844; cf. 1998:362–365).

In conclusion, like Stendahl and Sanders, both Wright and Dunn stress the importance of appreciating the social and historical contexts under which Paul’s theology emerged. Particularly, issues that have to do with Israel in God’s redemptive purposes, the place of the Torah in the new regime inaugurated by the Christ-event, and the inclusion of the Gentiles as God’s people together with Judeans on similar terms. For Paul, as Wright puts it, ethnicity no longer counts as a guarantee for membership into the people of God. The law does not privilege ethnic Judeans and circumcision is not the badge that demarcates Judeans and Gentiles. Noticeably, Dunn accentuates the “social function” of the law and its works. The Torah is what distinguished ethnic Judeans from ethnic Gentiles, and particularly, the ‘works of the law’ were the ‘boundary markers’ that identified as uniquely Judeans and separated them from the rest of the Gentiles. Consequently, it is against such ethnocentric restrictiveness that Paul polemicized in order to bring together Judeans and Gentiles in Christ as the one people of God.

## **2.2. Objections of the neutraditionalists**

### **2.2.1. Not ‘covenantal nomism’ but ‘variegated nomism’**

The new perspective school has been the subject of numerous criticisms. The intention here is not to repeat those critiques, but to highlight those that contribute to my own study. I will depend primarily on a number of essays from the two volumes by Carson *et al.* (2001; 2004), written primarily as counterpoints to Sanders’ covenantal nomism (first volume) and the new perspective on Paul (second volume). The first volume explores the complexities of second temple Judaism with the aim of establishing whether covenantal nomism is the most

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<sup>5</sup> Dunn (1996:843-844) does not deny the universality of human sin and its solution in the gospel as an important theological claim of Paul’s letter. However, he maintains that a claim of such a kind originates from its historical particularity.

appropriate and overarching pattern by which to describe first-century Judaism (Carson, 2001:5). Significantly, the contributors to the volume find covenantal nomism consistent with a considerable bulk of Judean literature of the second temple period. But at the same time they find that Judaism's approach to the Torah and its observances more variegated than Sanders' covenantal nomism allows. They therefore nuance their discussions whilst critiquing him in significant ways.

A few examples will suffice. After a review of the vast corpus of the extant Judean prayers and psalms, Falk (2001:55–56) contends that: "It is only to be expected that the motifs associated by Sanders with the pattern 'covenantal nomism' recur frequently throughout these prayers. No doubt, from the perspective of those who prayed them, all of the prayers reviewed here would be seen to reflect something very like such a traditional covenantal perspective." However, he notes that Sanders' covenantal nomism "masks very different conceptions of the problem of sin, the balance of focus on nationalism and individualism, and most significantly the boundaries of the covenant". Similarly, after a review of 1QS and the Qumran pattern of religion, Bockmuehl (2001:412–413) concludes that his "findings are not fundamentally incompatible with those reached by E. P. Sanders' famous study of 1977: Qumran manifests an eschatological faith in which salvation and atonement for sins are not humanly earned but divinely granted by predestined election and membership in the life of the observant covenant community." However, there are also texts that manifest tension between tendencies towards a 'legalistic' and 'grace alone' approach to salvation.

The contributor who considerably diverges from Sanders is Mark Seifrid. His essay concerns righteousness in the Hebrew Scriptures and other Judean literatures. Among other reasons, Seifrid (2001:424) stringently critiques Sanders and the new perspective for understanding צדק (righteousness) as a description of Israel's covenant status. He argues:

The word ברית (covenant) signifies a distinct relationship, which often calls forth quasi-forensic and familial language. In biblical terms one generally does not 'act righteously or unrighteously' with respect to a covenant. Rather, one 'keeps', 'remembers', 'establishes' a covenant, or the like. Or conversely, one 'breaks', 'transgresses', 'forsakes', 'despises', 'forgets', or 'profanes' it ... Just as a covenant is a particular kind of relation, righteousness takes the particular form of love and loyalty in a covenantal relation. All 'covenant-keeping' is righteous behaviour, but not all righteous behaviour is 'covenant-keeping'. It is misleading, therefore, to speak of 'God's righteousness' as his 'covenant-faithfulness'. It would be closer to the biblical language to speak of 'faithfulness' as 'covenant-righteousness'.

Seifrid (2001:425), in conversation with the works of Hans Heinrich Schmid, proposes that "righteousness language in the Hebrew Scriptures has to do in the first instance with God's ordering of creation," a fact that is supported by the close association between righteousness and the vocabulary that has to do with "ruling and judging". It should not come

as a surprise though when the vocabularies are used in close proximity with ‘covenant’, since ‘ruling and judging’ has to do with God’s covenant with Israel. However, it must be emphasised that “the biblical conception of kingship bears a universal dimension, as is apparent in its various aspects and developments: in the connection between ruling and wisdom, in hope for all-embracing justice by means of God’s rule, and in messianic ideal” (Seifrid, 2001:425). When it comes to the Judean literature that Sanders reviews, Seifrid (2001:432f) finds Sanders’ understanding of righteousness as description of ‘covenant status’ inadequate, arguing that a number of literatures apply the term to Gentiles as well. This way, he argues, “the terminology has to do with creational thought, not merely God’s covenant with Israel”. In the section below, I will pick up on Seifrid’s understanding of righteousness vis-à-vis Paul.

### **2.2.2. A traditional Paul: Seifrid, Gathercole, Moo, and O’Brien**

The essays in the second volume look afresh on the relevant Pauline writings and engage with the new perspective interpretation of them. Here I will briefly highlight the arguments these four authors, which have to do with Judaism, righteousness, the law, and the works of the law.

In his concluding remarks of the essay briefly reviewed above, Seifrid (2001:441) insists that his observations about righteousness demands a reassessment of the new perspective’s understanding of righteousness in Paul. For example, he argues that that Paul cites or alludes to Psalms (cf. 72.1-3; 85.9-13; 89.14; 97.1-2; 98.1-9) and Isaiah (cf. 40-66 *passim*), while invoking the revelation of God’s righteousness (Rom 1.17), is itself evidence that he is thinking in creational terms, since those texts speak of God as creator and ruler of the whole earth. God’s acts of righteousness do not represent mere salvation of Israel but institute the founding of his justice in the world which he created and governs. In the present essay, Seifrid (2004:105–107) contends that Paul’s Romans must be understood against this backdrop: “Paul sets forth the light of his gospel in Romans against the dark background of the fallen condition of humanity”. Contrary to Sanders, *plight to solution* is exactly what Paul establishes in Rom 1.18-3.20 and 3.21f. Seifrid (2004:116–118; 120–121; 127, 141), insists that Paul’s interest in Romans is not ethnicity as is clearly indicated by his use of *ἄνθρωπος* (human being) (cf. Rom 1.18; 2.1). Even in his engagement and criticism of an imagined Judean (cf. 2.1f), Paul is dealing with a much serious problem – the moralistic and self-righteousness tendency of all human beings, now epitomised in Judaism. For Seifrid, Judaism regarded the obedience of the law (works of the law/deeds of obedience) as the necessary condition by which to secure divine favour from God. But for Paul such work based righteousness represents a “false anthropological optimism”.

Moving on, in an essay whose subject is justification in Rom 3.21-4.25, Gathercole (2004:150-153) contends that when Paul speaks of the manifestation of God's righteousness apart from the law, he speaks directly to the salvation of both Israel and the Gentiles. When he insists on righteousness apart from the works of the law, he is particularly attacking Judeans' confidence in the obedience of the law and what would merit their vindication before God in the final tribunal. At the core, he opposes righteousness by means of the Torah. Consequently, for Gathercole, Dunn's sociological understanding of the law and its practices cannot stand, for if it were the case the emphasis would lay on the salvation of the Gentiles only. But as things stand, Paul addresses both Judeans and Gentiles. In this section of Romans, Paul basically contrasts two ways of righteousness (salvation): one by means of the Torah and the other apart from the Torah. For him, Israel's failure is comprehensive incorporating a failure to deliver in terms of the obedience to the whole law. The upshot is a comprehensive criticism that Paul mounts against Israel, a criticism by which he attacks Israel's pursuit of righteousness on the basis of the law and its practices at the expense of faith. However, Gathercole (2004:156-157) observes that the question of the inclusion of the Gentiles should not be excluded *in toto* from Romans since it is the subject of 3.29-30, while maintaining that the theme of the inclusion of the Gentiles has to do with the *scope* of Paul's doctrine and should be distinguished from its *content*.

Moo (2004:188, 196) opens his essay by applauding the new perspective on Paul for highlighting the "people issues in Paul's theological agenda [as] an important correction of a traditional neglect of such themes". He particularly singles out the significance of Rom 9-11 as highlighting those themes, arguing that the chapters focus on the relationship between Judeans and Gentiles in God's salvation history: it is here that Paul's concern about Judeans and Gentiles emerge in the clearest manner in Romans. "To the Jew first and then the Gentile' receives its classic elaboration in these chapters, as Paul weaves Old Testament quotations and allusions into a complex defence of God's faithfulness to his promises to Israel." Notwithstanding, Moo (2004:188) finds the new perspective about the law and works of the law as quite untenable. He charges it of exchanging "background and foreground in their overall reading of Romans". Certainly, for him, Romans has got people or ethnic issues at heart since he is concerned with "how God's grace in Christ embraces both Israel and the Gentile – as Paul announces the theme in 1.16, 'first to the Jew, then to the Gentile". However, "Individual human beings here (9-11) and, I would assert, in Romans generally are the immediate concern of Paul. The specific referents 'Jews' and 'Gentiles', representing the key salvation-historical categories of 'human beings', are a very important but secondary concern." Even when Paul is concerned with ethnic issues, he reinterprets the OT prophetic

expectations about Israel's restoration in order to speak in the light of the gospel and its inclusion of individuals (Moo, 2004:203).

In agreement with the new perspective, Moo (2004:206) also argues that Paul criticizes the law because as God's gift, it excluded the Gentiles from the covenant people of God. This is the logic of Rom 3.29-30. The fact that righteousness of faith provides equal access to God for both Judeans and Gentiles is consonant with the fact that God is the God of Judeans and Gentiles. Against such a backdrop, Rom 10.4 makes sense since it unequivocally states that "Christ is the end to the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes". Moo (2004:206) is however critical of Dunn's view of the social dimension of the law and its practices. He says:

Fundamental to Paul's critique of the law in Romans is not its social function – the law, because it is basically *Israel's* law, excludes Gentiles – but its soteriological function – the law, because Jews could not live up to its demands in the 'flesh', cannot deliver them – or any other human being – from the power of sin and death. To be sure, both themes are present in Romans 1-4; but the latter is, I think, the more basic for Paul's argument.

Consequently, Moo (2004:208–209) thinks that "in Romans 'works' include 'anything' one does, whether good or bad (9:12); and... 'works'/'works of the law' are often contrasted with both faith (Rom 3:38; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:5) and grace (Rom 11:6; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5 ['mercy']; Eph 2:8-9 [both grace and faith]; cf. Rom 4:4-5)". As a result, "rather than reading an alleged specific, technical meaning of 'works of the law' into 'works', we should view 'works of the law' as a subset of the more general category 'works'" (Moo, 2004:211). Even when Israel's ethnic issues are in view, Paul's focus is the larger human problem:

because people are sinful and unable to meet the demands of the law, their own 'works' must always fall short of bringing acceptance with God. God's work in Christ, appropriated by faith, stands opposed to Israel's 'works', then, not because (or at least not only) because Jews wrongly viewed their covenant works as giving them an exclusive track in salvation but because Israel's works fall into the general category of human works (Moo, 2004:211).

O'Brien (2004:253–254) begins his essay with a sharp dismissal of Sanders' covenantal nomism. He calls it "reductionistic", "misleading", "flawed", and worthy of abandonment. He argues that while it is true that God established a covenant with Israel on the basis of grace, for Paul, not all who descend from Israel are Israel. God's promise of salvation was not to ethnic Israelites corporately, but to individual Israelites, a remnant preserved throughout history by God's electing grace. This is what is foundational to Paul's thinking. Furthermore, within second temple Judaism, Gentiles entered the covenant by accepting and performing the law, while apostate Jews needed to repent and re-accept the Mosaic Law individually (O'Brien, 2004:255–260). For O'Brien (2004:261–263), therefore, Paul attacks Judaism's

false confidence and their election, a criticism that is in continuity with the Old Testament prophetic tradition. In fact, according to O'Brien, it is this criticism that Paul mounts against his fellow Judean-Christians in 2 Corinthians (10-13) and Phil 3.1-11. In the 2 Corinthian passage Paul defends himself against the attacks of some of these Judeans, but also charges them with boasting about their election and taking pride in being members of the chosen people. Himself, however, rather than boasting in his ethnic credentials, he boasts in his weakness thereby upsetting the reputation his opponents were associating with their unique ethnic identity. In the Philippian text, "Paul sets his own example. Through a radical re-evaluation of values, he has been conformed to Christ's pattern of suffering and death, and subsequent exaltation. In a manner not equal to but modelled after the pattern of Christ, Paul has undergone a total loss of his former status" (O'Brien, 2004:262). What is more, Paul is clear that "'staying-in' salvation is intimately bound up with the on-going obedience of the believers... however, it is the activity of God, not the effort of the *fallen* human being, that is the *ground* of one's perseverance in salvation. Human effort is the effect not the cause" (O'Brien, 2004:265).

O'Brien (2004:272f) concurs with his fellow essayists that the new perspective's exposition of righteousness does not adequately elucidate the essential relationship between God and human beings in Paul's theology. According to him, by embracing the ideas of the school it means: "Justification by faith has been pushed to the periphery of Paul's teaching since it is thought to be dealing with the ecclesiological problem of Jew-Gentile relationship in the body of Christ rather than the universal human problem of sinfulness" (O'Brien, 2004:282). Moreover, with Seifrid he contends that righteousness has to do with "God's ordering of creation" (O'Brien, 2004:282), and "includes the sense of 'accordance with a norm', and cannot be reduced simply to relationships" (O'Brien, 2004:287). Similarly, on the 'works of the law', O'Brien (2004:279-280, 282) maintains that they play a much bigger role than just ethnic boundary markers: "Paul employs the expression 'works of the law' to deal ... with the problem of universal sinfulness. The phrase "refers to 'deeds done in obedience to the law of Moses' and "points not simply to *ethnic* distinctives, but also *ethical* ones".

In conclusion, it is plainly clear that the neotraditionalist scholars briefly reviewed here diverge significantly from the new perspective scholars. For them, the Judaism that Paul attacked is one that was characterised by legalism and works-righteousness. Although some acknowledge the Judean-Gentile ethnic motif and its implications for Paul's theologising, some, like Seifrid, are more radical and assert that Paul is not interested in ethnicity. In fact, when he attacks Judeans and Judaism he attacks what is general to all humanity. Moreover, these scholars, righteousness is exclusively understood soteriologically. The doctrine

solves the problem of humanity's alienation from God. Finally when it comes to Paul's phrase on the 'works of the law', these are interpreted to mean any human work(s) that is done with a view to merit favour from God. How these practices of the law affected the Judean-Gentile relationship and whether Paul is dealing with that situation is not primary the interest of these scholars. In other words, the question of Judeans and Gentiles in Paul's overarching theologising is treated as mere background and not at the forefront of Paul's theologising in Romans.

### **2.3. An appraisal of the new perspective and neotraditionalists**

In light of the new perspective and the neotraditionalist's debate, one can only say the struggle continues. For the new perspective scholars, the age-old Judean-Gentile divide is an important aspect of Paul's rhetorical argumentation on Romans, not just its background. In fact, it forms the basis for his argument. But for the neotraditionalists, it is the background and not the foreground. In fact, for some, ethnicity has got nothing to do with Paul's argumentation in the letter. In my own judgment, the new perspective argument issues a fresh ray of light in our quest to understand Paul in his context(s). It corrects the imbalance that largely characterises theological expositions of Romans which have little or no regard for the occasional nature of the letter (cf. Bird, 2006:33). The new perspective has also been effective in accentuating Paul's Judeanness and his attempt to interpret Judaism in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. Judeans and Gentiles remained Paul's primary anthropological categories, and although from a Judean perspective this classification represents humanity as a whole, both words describe real people and communities that lived in first-century AD Greco-Roman world. And as the next chapter will show, their relationship was not always cordial, but was characterised by tensions and conflicts. It will also be argued that the law itself, as what embodied Judean ethnicity, played a significant role in the conflict. Therefore, despite the resistance of the neotraditionalists, the social function of the law and its demands is something that cannot be easily expunged.

Nonetheless, the new perspective insistence that righteousness has to do primarily with the Judean-Gentile divide or the inclusion of Gentiles into the one people of God, and a matter of how to tell who belongs to the new covenant community, may not, at best subsume the meaning of the doctrine in the Bible. Certainly, the doctrine is itself fundamentally embedded in the OT Scriptures and Judaism. However, the new perspective's emphasis that God's righteousness means his "covenant faithfulness" is reductionistic, since it does not take seriously its creational aspects.<sup>6</sup> Stendahl's argument that the doctrine was hammered out

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<sup>6</sup> Not everyone among the neotraditionalists is convinced of the connection between righteousness and creational thought in Paul. Blocher (2004:481) for example, maintains that "it is not evident that

for *only* one purpose of defending Gentile Christians is also reductionistic, and so is the view that the doctrine served only a polemical purpose. The neotraditionalists' emphasis that the doctrine serves a soteriological purpose is important, for Paul addresses a much serious problem – the predicament of all human beings without the revelation of God's *saving* righteousness. However, I find that the kind of *either or approach* that the two schools seem to represent as unhelpful. Insisting that Paul's doctrine of righteousness *only* serves an occasional purpose is at best reductionistic, but so is a soteriological *only* approach that treats the ecclesiological import of the doctrine as peripheral since it only concerns Judean-Gentile relationships (see O'Brien above).

As will become clearer in the subsequent sections, righteousness, in its first-century Judean context, described the blessed identity of Judeans, as opposed to Gentiles, who lived in accordance with the Torah. In this sense therefore, a sociological import of the doctrine cannot be expunged. Similarly, the neotraditionalists contention that the "works of the Torah" may not be reduced to mere identity or boundary markers, but speak of God's moral demands and deeds done in obedience to the law, something that Dunn (2008:23–28) concedes, is welcome. But it is also true that for first-century Judeans the practices functioned as ethnic identifiers, defining and separating the righteous from the unrighteous; those who would be part of the future messianic kingdom and those who will not. This way, as Silva (2004:247–248) rightly observes, the traditional reading fails

to take fully into account the early Christian struggles with the Jewish-Gentile question... Sanders, and those following in his steps, have helped us to see these problems more clearly. It would be folly to deny that (exclusivistic) national and sociological commitments on the part of Paul's Jewish contemporaries were an integral part of the attitudes the apostle was combating.

But despite the new perspective contribution to our understanding of Paul and the question of ethnicity in Romans, Paul's ethnic rhetoric is still largely abstracted from the particular ethnic situation under which it is embedded. This is pertinently so, when one considers that the question of ethnicity and ethnic strife was not unique to early Christianity but was an endemic problem in the Greco-Roman world. As Stanley (2013:177) points out, the school should be commended for its emphasis on the ethnic dimensions of Paul. However, their revisionist reading still leaves Paul and his audiences in a social vacuum. One, for example, would not easily realise through their arguments that Paul and his addressees hailed from a diverse society, where ethnic identity was contested and at times was a source of horrible

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the thought of creation is essential to the notion of righteousness/justice; texts appealed to (or apocalyptic contexts) are not conclusive."

hostility and civil strife. Two studies of Romans have attempted to integrate first-century Judean and Gentile ethnic issues in the reading of Romans. To these I turn briefly.

## **2.4. Ethnic readings of Romans**

### **2.4.1. James C. Walters: “*Ethnic Issues in Paul’s letter to the Romans*” (1993)**

In his own words, the aim of Walters’ (1993: ix–x) short but precise study is to carefully “interpret the available evidence for the situation of the Jews in ancient Rome and to assess the effect of early Christianity’s changing relationship to the Jewish communities as a background for understanding the manner in which Jew-Gentile issues are treated in Paul’s letter to the Romans.” In over three quarters of the book, Walters (1993:5–66) provides a detailed socio-historical and religious situation of the Judean community in Rome, highlighting the role it played in the origin of the early Christian movement there and the way in which the latter’s relationship to the former had begun to change by the time of Paul’s writing (55-58 A.D.). Walters’ work, however, is more of a reconstruction of the social-historical background than how Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans functions and addresses the extant ethnic issues. One needs only to compare the space he gives for the reconstruction of the background and his engagement with Paul’s letter.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Walters’ (1993:73, 79, 91) analysis of Romans under the themes of “the impartiality of God,” “the priority of Israel” and “the coexistence of the weak and the strong” demonstrates an able attempt to correlate the socio-historical data with the content of Romans. His argument can be summarised as follows: Paul uses the theme of the impartiality of God rhetorically to force a reconsideration of the prevailing Judean-Gentile divide based on the law. He prioritises the place of Israel in God’s salvation history to counter the prevailing anti-Judean attitude among the Gentile Christians in Rome, and he curbs the spirit of judgmentalism that had arisen between “the weak” and “the strong” by proposing practical ways by which these believers would remain together in one community and not move in different directions in Rome.

An important weakness in Walters’ study is that although he employs the terms ‘ethnic’, ‘ethnic identity’, and ‘ethnicity’, he never explores their meaning in ancient antiquity and how Paul viewed or uses them. Neither does Walters incorporate the contributions of the new perspective though writing in a period when their ideas are in circulation. Nonetheless, Walters’ reconstructions and findings on both the situation of the ancient Judean community

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<sup>7</sup>The book includes: a 3-page introduction; 98-pages, including the endnotes, on the social historical situation in Rome; 37-pages of one chapter on ethnic issues in Romans (including the endnotes) and a 2-page epilogue.

and the early Christian movement in Rome, as well as his engagement with the Romans text are grounded in the available historical evidence and will form an important point of reference for my study.

#### **2.4.2. Philip F. Esler: “*Conflict and Identity in Romans*” (2003)**

Esler’s monograph is probably the first comprehensive socio-scientific study of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Esler (2003:10) clearly states the motivation for his study: “the nature of Christian identity – that is, the question of what it means to be a Christian – in a world rent by violent, often murderous conflict between groups, in particular those of an ethnic kind.” He objects to any form of theological enterprise which is interested in theology as a static notion detached from its social life, insisting that a better approach is one that maintains that inextricable link between thought and belief, relationships and their social contexts (Esler, 2003:5, 8–11). Consequently, the methodology of the study is one that combines a socio-psychological approach to identity and a self-categorization theory to intergroup phenomena and leadership. With regard to the former, Esler (2003:12) argues that “central to Paul’s communicative purpose is to strengthen the social identity that his addressees in Rome gain from belonging to the Christ-movement, particularly by emphasizing its supremacy over other identities, ethnic especially, on offer.” To that end, and with regard to the latter, Paul’s letter is an attempt to lead Judean and Greek believers in Rome, now torn apart by ethnic differences in a manner that enhances group cohesion. In terms of the leadership model that Esler employs, Paul is an “entrepreneur of identity,” whose rhetoric is “integral to the dynamics of creating, installing, and maintaining a particular social identity in the minds and hearts of the Christ followers in Rome” (Esler, 2003:38–39).

The rest of the book employs the social identity and leadership model in the exploration of ethnic identity and conflict in ancient antiquity and the Romans text. One observation is significant here in the light of the new perspective and neotraditionalists’ debate on righteousness. Esler’s argument regarding the meaning of righteousness is based on his earlier study of the concept in his commentary on Galatians (Esler, 1998), to which I turn briefly. From Galatians, Esler (1998:143) argues that it is quite clear that both the Judiazers and the Gentile Christians believed that righteousness could be attained through the practice of the law (i.e. circumcision). This is why Paul rejects such a supposition in totality (cf. Gal 2.16, 21; 3.11; 3.21; 5.21). Furthermore, since the Judiazers were campaigning for righteousness through the practice of the law, it also follows that they did not think that it was a quality which could be found among the pagan Gentiles. In other words, Gentiles could only become righteous by crossing the boundary that separated them from the Judeans

(circumcision) in order to become part of the house of Israel. In fact, the believing Judeans were under pressure to stop associating with the Gentiles (Gal 2.11f. 6.12-13).

Drawing from this understanding therefore, but also from the *Letter of Aristeas*, which depicts righteousness as an important quality designating the unique status of the Judeans, Elser (1998:143-144) argues that “righteousness was inextricably connected with being an Israelite; with an identity to match, which included the possession of a collection of superior ethical norms which were very distinctive in the Greco-Roman world”. In his letters, especially Galatians and Romans, Paul was reacting to such ethnocentric understanding of righteousness. The doctrine was therefore essentially reactive.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Elser (1998:153) insists, if the doctrine was so central to Paul it is difficult to explain why it is conspicuously absent in his earliest letter - 1 Thessalonians – where the *dikai* word group appears only once in reference to the behaviour of Paul and others in Thessalonica (2.10). For Elser (1998:154), however, the reason for the absence is obvious: Paul is addressing a purely Gentile audience (1 Thess 1.9) and the question of righteousness had much significance since it only touched on issues related to a mixed group.

Furthermore, Elser (1998:159f; 2003:162-163) probes the OT and other apocryphal literature in order to elucidate the meaning of the *dikai* word cognates. He emphasises that the more preferred forensic interpretation of *dikaioō* in the LXX rests on weak grounds. While the word has a wide-range of meanings, the judicial connotation is more than often absent, and “simply means ‘to be regarded as righteous’ or ... ‘to be or to become righteous’” (Elser, 1998:163). When it comes to *dikaioi* and *dikaioi**synē*, Elser (1998:164–169; 2003:165–166) investigates Proverbs 10-15 and Psalm 36 (Ps 37 LXX), the two parts of the Septuagint that bear not only the greatest use of the words, but also their antithesis *asebēs* and *asebeia*.<sup>9</sup> From the two texts, Elser (1998:168) contends that *dikaioi* emerges as a description of “the exemplary Israelite” and *asebēs* as “primarily the worthless, God-forsaking Gentile”:

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, Elser (1998:153) argues that the reactive nature of Paul’s doctrine was propounded by William Wrede who in 1907 was already complaining that “The Reformation has accustomed us to look upon this [doctrine of righteousness] as the central point of Pauline doctrine; but it is not so ... it only appears where Paul is dealing with the strife against Judaism. And this fact indicates the real significance of the doctrine. It is the polemical doctrine of Paul, is only made intelligible by the struggle of his life, his controversy with Judaism and Jewish Christianity, and is only intended for this.”

<sup>9</sup> Elser (2003:165) observes that “of some 375 examples of *δίκαιος*, 100 are found in Proverbs, with a full 50 of these in Proverbs 10-15, while 50 of the 240 examples of *ἀσεβής* also occur in Proverbs 10-15. No other sections of the Septuagint approach such an intensity of use, apart from Psalm 36 (LXX). The other words related to *ἀσεβής* occur far less frequently, with *ἀσέβεια* (‘godlessness’) appearing some 75 times and *ἀσεβεῖν* (‘to be godless’) some 40 times. Both of these latter words are scattered fairly evenly across the Septuagint, except that Ezekiel has some 18 occurrences of *ἀσέβεια*.”

Both Proverbs 10-15 and Psalm 36 (LXX) concretely illustrate the meaning of 'righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη) by offering numerous antitheses that contrast the happy and blissful identity of the δίκαιοι with the wretched and doomed identity of the ἀσεβής, the godless and impious person (Proverbs 10-15), or the sinner (ἁμαρτωλός, Psalm 36)... On eight occasions in Proverbs 10-15 the words ἀδικία or ἄδικος appear as antonyms to the identity represented by δικαιοσύνη and δίκαιοι, either in close conjunction with ἀσεβής or ἀσέβεια or in substitution for them (Esler, 2003:165).

According to Esler (2003:164, 166–167), Paul's use of righteousness in Romans should be understood against this background. Proverbs 10-15 has an important bearing on Rom 1.17-18 and 1.19-32 in a manner consistent with Paul's use of righteousness in Galatians. For example, in a single statement (1.17), Paul speaks of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ while at the same time making reference to a person who is δίκαιος. In a similar manner, he juxtaposes ἀσέβεια and ἀδικία in 1.18 in a way that recalls Proverbs 10-15, where both words are used appositionally to express the blessed identity of the "righteous" and the damnation of the "ungodly". Furthermore, his choice of the words ἀσέβεια and ἀδικία of people in 1.18 subsumes the social and moral pathologies he lists in 1.19-32, which themselves evoke the wickedness and unrighteousness of people that Proverbs text denigrates.

In conclusion, Esler (2003:167; cf. 1998:168-169) contends that in terms of ancient cultures 'righteousness' describes an honourable and privileged status that is granted to a person by a distinguished person. "For the first-century Israelites, it essentially encapsulated the privileged and blessed identity that came from being an Israelite, an identity that Paul seeks to reapply to the members of Christ-following groups". For this reason, he "employs 'righteousness' when he is writing to a mixed group of Judeans (for whom... it was central to their identity) and non-Judean where the question of the Mosaic law is inevitably a pressing one and where there is tension between the two subgroups" (Esler, 2003:163–164). Esler's understanding of righteousness in its first-century Judean context and its implications for the new social identity Paul sought to create is something that this study will build on in the chapter IV. Other than that, his competent description of ethnicity and ethnic conflict in ancient antiquity will also form an important point of reference for this study.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, contemporary scholarship on Paul and Romans is alive to the ethnic dimensions of his writings. The new perspective on both Judaism and Paul has been effective in raising awareness to the crucial socio-historical situation that Paul faced while writing Romans. The neotraditionalists provide a corrective by emphasising that Paul sought to address a more serious problem than the new perspective appreciates – the predicament

of humanity that both Judeans and Gentiles face without God's free *righteousing*<sup>10</sup> grace. However, the debate must go further into specific questions regarding ancient ethnic discourse and how it might have impacted Paul's ethnic language and rhetoric in Romans. Mere proclamation of the gospel and calling believers into a life that conforms to the gospel was not the only way Paul used to address the important first-century issues that they faced. As this study will show in chapter 4, Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 had the effect of equalising Judeans and Gentiles in Rome under sin and the gospel. But more significantly, it created kinship between Judeans and Gentiles in Christ, such that both could trace their ancestry back to father Abraham. However, in order to show that effectively, ancient ethnicity and kinship discourse, and within it Judean and Gentile ethnic relations and how Paul's ethnic rhetoric coheres with it, must be investigated. This is the task of the next chapter.

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<sup>10</sup> Following Sanders (1983:13–14) and Esler (2003:14, 156), the words *righteous*, *righteouses*, *righteoused* and *righteousing* will be used in this study in order to maintain the unity of semantic field in which the word belongs [δικαιος, δικαιοσύνη, and δικαίω].

## **CHAPTER III: A socio-historical perspective of Judean and Gentile ethnicities and relations in antiquity**

The aim of this chapter is to explore and investigate Judean and Gentile ethnicities and relations in antiquity as an essential background for understanding Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans. The chapter proceeds as follows: in the first section (3.1), a plausible theoretical framework by which ancient ethnic discourse and ethnic conflict can be interpreted is established. In the second section (3.2), Judaism as an ethnic praxis in the diaspora and its impact on the Judean-Gentile relations in the Greco-Roman world is investigated. The third section (3.3) focuses its attention on the specific Roman context in which Paul's ethnic rhetoric was directed. It also probes how the ethnic situation impacted the origins of the early Christian movement there and the Judean-Gentile relations. The fourth section (3.4) probes Paul's letter for points of coherence with the general and specific ethnic situation described in the sections above. A conclusion is made in the last section.

### **3.1. Defining ethnic group, ethnicity and ethnic conflict**

This section draws from the social-sciences to investigate the meaning of the 'ethnic groups', 'ethnicity', and 'ethnic conflict' and in order to apply the results to our understanding Judeans and Gentiles ethnicities and relations in ancient antiquity.

#### **3.1.1. Ethnic groups and ethnicity**

According to Denzey (2002:489), ethnic identity is one way of delineating and defining people groups. As such, ethnicity discourse entails investigating how people express differences and the processes by which they create boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to ethnicity in contemporary socio-anthropology: primordialist and constructionist (also expressed as circumstantialist or instrumentalist). Associated with Shils (1957) and Geertz (1973), a primordialist approach holds that ethnicity is a deeply rooted phenomenon that is based on the primordial attachments that bind people together. According to Geertz (1973:259),

By primordial attachment is meant one that stems from 'givens' ... the assumed 'givens' - of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language...and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech and custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one's kinsman ... as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself.

For Geertz (1973:260-264) there exists in every person, group, and society, at all times, a bond that unites people. This bond flows from a sense of natural affinity and not civil or social intercourse. Furthermore, the actual foci under which such sense of affinity crystallises include the peoples' "assumed blood ties"; "race"; "language"; "region"; "religion" and "custom". When these are applied to ethnic identity, ethnicity is perceived and defined as an essentially durable social attachment that is rooted in shared kinship, memories, territory, traditions, customs and so forth. Horowitz (1985:56–57), for example, argues that "ethnic membership is typically not chosen but given. The meaningfulness of ethnic identity derives from its birth connection – it came first – or from acceptance by an ethnic group as *if* born into it. In this key respect (the primacy of birth), ethnicity and kinship are alike".

Constructionism on the other hand, shifts the focus of investigating ethnic identity from a *priori* categories to a group's construction of its identity, circumstances and interests. As such, a constructionist approach to ethnic identity understands ethnicity as a dynamic process and situational phenomenon which is embedded in social intercourse and explicated in terms of a group's creation, election and manipulation of boundaries (Denzey, 2002:492; Jones, 1997:72). According to Barth (1969:10–15), the father of constructionism, the primary feature under which ethnic groups should be interpreted is the fact that they are "categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people". Understood this way then, ethnicity should be explained not in terms of predetermined ideas of what constitutes it, but by investigating how a group creates and maintains its boundaries. He insists that an ethnic group is basically a social organisation like any other and the culture-bearing character that is associated with it does not define it. Culture is dependent on the ecology that the group occupies and therefore there cannot be a one-to-one connection between an ethnic group and its culture. The most important thing is that the group describes itself so and others describe it as such.

Defined this way, according to Barth (1969:13-15), the nature of an ethnic group is clear – it is dependent on the maintenance of the ethnic boundaries. The cultural features only signal the boundary and may change any time, while the continued sense of difference between the members and outsiders remain. It does not matter, if a group decides to be A as opposed to B, it is willing to be identified, treated, and judged as A and not B. On the basis of Barthian constructionism, two other alternatives have also emerged: instrumentalism and circumstantialism, with the former focusing on "the contexts and conditions that lead to the emergence of interests and the ethnic identities through which these interests are expressed". The latter on the other hand, focuses on "the circumstances that put individuals and groups into particular positions and encourage them to see their interests in particular

ways” (Hempel, 2004:256). But whether expressed in strictly Barthian terms or those alternatives, contrary to a primordialist approach, constructionism “considers that ethnic groups exploit the symbol of shared association to mask their *real* purpose – the pursuit of political and/or economic interest” (Hall, 1997:17). A constructionist approach to ethnicity therefore perceives it not as an essentially fixed or natural phenomenon, but as a fluid; one which can be freely chosen, and is perpetually constructed and reconstructed (Duling, 2005:127).

Each of these approaches is inherently weak where the other is strong. A primordialist approach, for example, essentialises ethnicity by treating it as determined, immutable and static in nature. It plays down the power of social interaction and identity construction (cf. Eller & Coughlan, 1993:192–199; Jones, 1997:68–71). Equally, constructionism overlooks the durability and continuity of an ethnic group, reducing a group’s culture and ethnic attachment as epiphenomenal and random symbols which can be manipulated for the purposes of other social, political or material interests (cf. Hempel, 2004:256; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996:9–10; Jones, 1997:87–88). Certainly, as Rajak (2000:345) rightly posits, “any group needs some boundaries or its identity will vanish. Special practices make a group distinct and also provide a way of making entry meaningful and the membership somewhat select.” However, a group’s boundary cannot be equal to its ethnicity. It is impossible to separate cultural attributes like customs, ethos, habits, language, and so forth, from a group’s identity. Boundaries that a group elects to maintain and protect its unique identity are expressions of the group’s culture. Indeed, “a social boundary cannot exist without the ‘stuff’ that it encloses. It is not a boundary that makes the group; it is the group that makes the boundary” (Cohen, 1999:6–7).

It seems, therefore, that approaching ethnicity from one of the options available does not provide an adequate framework that constructively engages with the nature of ethnic identity and relations. Constructionism is currently the dominant framework for understanding ethnicity, and one which is commonly applied to the study of early Christianity (cf. Esler, 2003; Buell & Hodge, 2004; Buell, 2005; Hodge, 2007; Barreto, 2010).<sup>11</sup> However, in practice these scholars hardly match either of these two ideals. In fact, it is now common for scholars to construe ethnic identity as a dynamic, incorporating both fixed and fluid

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<sup>11</sup> According to Jones (1997:84), “from the late 1960s onwards the dominant view within ‘western’ social scientific traditions has been that ethnic groups are ‘self-defining systems’ and consequently particular ethnic groups have been defined on the basis of self-identification and identification by others. Such a definition has largely been set within a theoretical framework focusing on the construction of ethnic boundaries in the context of social interaction and their organizational properties. Ethnicity has been regarded as essentially a consciousness of identity *vis-à-vis* other groups; a ‘we’/‘they’ opposition.”

properties. Hall (1997:2, 25), for example, whose study is dedicated to Greek ethnic identity in ancient antiquity, argues that ethnic identity is not rooted in the “genetic traits, language, religion, or even common cultural forms” (primordial elements), but in the discursive elements of social interaction. However, he quickly acknowledges that myths of common descent are the primary distinguishing features of ethnic identity. Similarly, Cohen (1999:3–4), whose acumen is directed to second temple Jewishness, argues that “Jewishness was a subjective identity, constructed by the individual him/herself, other Judeans, other Gentiles, and the state.”

The dilemma engendered by the two seemingly divergent approaches has inspired some scholars to seek for a multidimensional approach to ethnic groups and ethnicity that not only incorporates primordialist and constructionist emphases, but also transcends the polarity they engender. Jones (1997:84f), from whom this study largely draws its framework, is such example. She defines ethnic groups and ethnicity thus:

*Ethnic groups are culturally ascribed identity groups, which are based on the expression of a real or assumed shared culture and common descent (usually through the objectivities of cultural, linguistic, religious, historical and/or physical characteristics). As a process ethnicity involves a consciousness of difference, which, to varying degrees, entails the reproduction and transformation of basic classificatory distinctions between groups of people who perceive themselves to be in some respect culturally distinct (Jones, 1997:84).*

For Jones, therefore, the cultural features that inform ethnic identity are not just fluid since they are an important part and parcel of the essentials that determine the durability and continuity. But at the same time, those features are also informed and transformed in the process of social interaction. At this juncture, Jones (1997:88–90) weaves concept of *habitus*, from Pierre Bourdieu’s *theory of practice*, as the critical interface between the continuity and dynamism of ethnicity and that which addresses how people recognise their commonality of existence. According to her, the *habitus* “is made up of durable dispositions towards certain perceptions and practices... which become part of an individual’s sense of self at an early age, and which can be transposed from one context to another. As such, the *habitus* involves a process of socialization whereby new experiences are structured in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences.” Jones (1997:90) also draws from Carter G. Bentley’s *practice theory of ethnicity* which also extrapolates from Bourdieu and employs *habitus* as the means by which ethnic subjectivity can be interpreted:

According to the practice theory of ethnicity, sensations of ethnic affinity are founded on common life experiences that generate similar habitual dispositions... It is commonality of experience and of the preconscious habitus it generates that gives members of an ethnic cohort their sense of being both familiar and familial to each other (Bentley, cited in Jones, 1997:90).

Such kind of an understanding of ethnicity Jones (1997:90) argues is inclusive and facilitates an analysis of ethnic identity that appreciates the connection that exists between ethnic subjectivity and social interaction. Viewed this way, then, “Ethnicity is not a *passive reflection* of similarities and differences in the cultural practices and structural conditions in which people are socialized... Nor is ethnicity, produced entirely in the process of social interaction.” But rather, it is rooted in the “shared subliminal dispositions of the *habitus* which shape, and are shaped by, objective commonalities of practice”. A common *habitus* engenders group affection which is consciously appropriated through the extant symbolic resources share by its members. The symbolic resources themselves are not random but emanate from the *habitus* and the experiences of the people. But they also reflect the instrumental and circumstantial contingencies of a particular situation.

Jones’ application of the concept of the *habitus* is helpful not only in integrating both primordialist and constructionists’ claims, but is also collaborated by what Hutchinson and Smith (1996:6–7) view as the characteristic features that ethnic communities *habitually* exhibit in various degrees: “a common *proper name*”; “a myth of *common ancestry*”; “shared *historical memories*”; “one or more *elements of common culture*”; “a link with a *home land*” and “a *sense of solidarity*”. These can be construed as what informs the *habitus*, which in turn informs ethnic attachment and identity. Moreover, the definition incorporates ethnicity’s susceptibility to other socio-political and economic factors of social existence. It can be manipulated or transformed as situations warrant. However, the manipulation does not take place in a social vacuum. It is structured around the groups’ *habitus*.

But what would such an understanding of ethnic identity and ethnicity look like for ancient societies?

### **3.1.2. Ethnicity in the ancient antiquity**

Without claiming one-to-one commensurability between modern conceptualisations of ethnicity and those of ancient societies, it is quite evident from the discussion above that contemporary understanding of ethnic identity offer vantage points by which one can proceed to investigate the nature of ethnicity in ancient antiquity. Extrapolating from the theoretical framework describe above, one can reasonably argue that common culture and common ancestry are the two important salient features of ethnic identity, which different groups objectify in various ways. How then, did this work out for the ancients? An important place to begin with is to find out how the ancients used the word ἔθνος, from which English words ‘ethnic’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnocentrism’ loosely derive. The term was applied to a broad

range of collectivities including human and animal.<sup>12</sup> But it also certainly designated people groups that would today be referred to as an ethnic group. According to Danker (2000:276), the word ἔθνος designated “a body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions - a nation or people,” while the articular plural, τὰ ἔθνη, referred to “people groups foreign to a specific people group”. Another important term which was also used in ethnic reasoning is the word γένος, a word related to the verb γίγνεσθαι, which means “to be born,” “to come into being,” and eventually, “to become”. The word was an important for Greek ethnic constructions, designating groups whose membership was only ascribed to birth and common ancestry (Hall, 1997:35-36).

In the LXX the two Greek words, λαός and ἔθνος are reserved primarily to render אֱל, the principal designation for the Israelites. Its articular plural (τὰ ἔθνη), however, is primarily used to translate אֲדָמִים, the principal label for the Gentiles and one that always bore a negative connotation describing a category of social behaviour that is marked by difference and otherness. The adjective ἐθνικός (‘Gentile’) and the adverb ἐθνικῶς (‘like a Gentile’) also bear similar connotations (Horrell, 2012:126-127; Duling, 2005:120-130). Indeed, by the third and second centuries BC the expression τὰ ἔθνη “had already become the *terminus technicus* for Gentiles” (Wan, 2009:67). Similarly, within the Judean literature of the last two centuries BC, γένος became more prominent designating the people of Israel. Together with λαός and ἔθνος, it is became more pronounced in Judean ethnic rhetoric, emphasising ancestry and kinship Judean ethnic constructions in the context of suffering and persecution (Horrell, 2012:126-127; cf. Lieu, 1995:58-60).

To come back to the use of ἔθνος in ancient antiquity, Mason (2007:483-484) emphasises that the people groups that the term designated possessed their own specific character (φύσις, ἦθος), which usually was expressed through the groups’ “unique ancestral traditions” (τὰ πάτρια) that typically reflected the groups’ common kinship (συγγενεία). Furthermore, each group had its own “charter stories” (μῦθοι), customs, ethos and laws (νόμοι, ἔθνη, νόμιμα), a constitution (πολιτεία), and leadership (οἱ πρῶτοι, ἄριστοι, ἐπίσημοι). Within this fundamental category of ἔθνος was also an element of what is today called ‘religion’ – in case of Judeans, what scholars would identify as “the Jewish religion”. Moreover, every people group normally

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<sup>12</sup> In Homer ἔθνος is used for “warriors or young men” (*Iliad*, 2.91; 3.32); flock of birds (*Iliad*, 2.459); swarm of bees (*Iliad*, 2.87) or flies (*Iliad*, 2.91; 3.32). Sophocles uses it to refer to bands of wild beasts (*Philoctetes*, 1147; *Antigone*, 344). Herodotus uses it to refer to the inhabitants of the Greek πόλις (*Histories*, 7:161), Plato uses it for οἱ πενέσται (a group of people who were subjugated to the Thessalians) (*Leges*, 776d; *Republic*, 420b). Aristotle uses it as equivalent of βάρβαρος (*Politica*, 1324b-1326b). Romans used ἔθνος to refer to provinces outside Italy (Appian, *Bella Civilla*, 2:13) (Liddell & Scott, 1996:480; Hall, 1997:34–35; Sechrest, 2009:57–58).

had a “national cult” that involved priesthood, temples and sacrifices, which formed an important part and parcel of the people’s founding stories and organisation.

The features that Mason highlights to have been constitutive of ancient ethnicity are similar to those associated with modern understanding of ethnic groups and ethnicity as has been reviewed above. Indeed, a few examples from ancient antiquity illustrate the point well. Speaking of the Greek ethnicity, Herodotus (*The Histories* 8.144.2) describes it in terms of common blood, common tongue, common shrines and sacrifices, as well as similar customs and values (τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐὸν ὄμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα). While the word ἔθνος does not appear here, the passage exhibits features that are associated with ethnicity. Similarly, in his *Rewards* (57), Philo described the twelve tribes (φυλὰς) that made up the Judean nation (τοῦ ἔθνους) and having been connected not only by membership in a common household (οἰκίας) and lineage (συγγενείας), but also by a kindred kinship (γνησιωτέρας οἰκειότητος). They were brothers who shared the same father (ὁμοπάτριοι). Their grandfather (πάππος), great-grandfather (πρόπαππος), and their father (πατρι) were the founders of the nation (ἀρχηγέται τοῦ ἔθνους).

Likewise, in his *Antiquities* (12. 240-241), Josephus reports of some Judeans who apostatised during the Maccabean period saying that they desired to abandon their own laws and customs (τοὺς πατρίους νόμους) and citizenship (πολιτεία), and instead to follow after the laws of the king (τοῖς βασιλικοῖς) and adopt the Hellenic citizenship (τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν πολιτείαν). They therefore concealed their circumcision, forsook all the customs of their ancestors (τὰ πάτρια) and imitated the practices of other peoples (ἐμιμοῦντο τὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἐθνῶν ἔργα). The author of 1 Maccabees (1.13-15) reports the same events saying that these wicked people required permission from the king to follow after “the ordinances of the Gentiles” (τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἐθνῶν) and to live “according to the customs of the Gentiles” (κατὰ τὰ νόμιμα τῶν ἐθνῶν). They therefore uncircumcised, abandoned the holy covenant and affiliated themselves to pagan Gentiles. Furthermore, Mason (2007:480, 491–493) emphasises that the works of Josephus were written with an underlying motive of explaining the Judean history, laws, and customs to the Romans (*Judean War*) and to provide an accessible version of the Judean constitution (*Judean Antiquities*). Besides, in his *Against Apion*, Josephus “regularly juxtaposes Judeans with Babylonians, Egyptians, Chaldeans, Athenians, and Spartans. Each of these peoples has a homeland, a lawgiver and laws, ancestral customs, sacred texts, priests and aristocrats, and a citizenship; so they may readily contrasted and compared.”

But was ethnicity in the ancient world conceived of in primordial terms only? My argument is that this was largely the case. Campbell (2006:4–6) affirms this when he says that when it comes to first-century communities, more attention must be accorded to the primordial aspects of ethnicity. Furthermore, members of an ethnic group, especially when their survival is under threat, are likely to manifest a primordialist view of ethnicity by emphasising the cultural indicia that is conspicuous at the moment (cf. Esler, 2000:46). This was particularly so with the Judeans, who during the Greco-Roman period were a minority group. Indeed, Lee Levine (cited in Campbell, 2006:5) stresses that “A Jewish community was an entity no less ethnic than religious in essence, and as such, its common history, origins, customs, cultures, and aspirations served to bind them together. When one combines an ethnic base and well-defined religious component, the bonds forged – internally and with other communities can be formidable”.

Yet, to emphasise a primordial approach to ancient ethnicity is not to preclude aspects of dynamism associated with ethnicity for ancient societies. According to Horrell (2012:136), ancient ethnicity discourse involved “a sense of stability and continuity through descent, but also – in dialectical tension with it - some sense of mutability and possibility: one could become, or cease to be, Greek, Roman, or Jewish depending on one’s connections (including adoption) and conduct, which generally included religious dimensions.” Along similar lines, Hodge (2007:28–33), whose study reviews patrilineal descent and the construction of identities in the ancient world, argues that ancient peoples practiced “a double discursive competence” when it came to ethnicity and kinship. On the one hand, they emphasised the “essentialness of blood relationships,” but at on the other hand, they reconfigured and reorganised the relationships to an extent of creating new ones. Both kinship and ethnicity were important strategic means by which communities were organised and membership was defined. She particularly observes that adoption was one of the most renowned methods of constructing kinship and ethnicity. But an important aspect of the process of adoption is that it was always legitimised through a religious ritual, especially, an animal sacrifice. The purpose of the ritual was to ratify the new kinship between the parents and the adoptee.

What is more, individuals and communities constructed genealogies by linking them to remote and legendary ancestors. The more remote and well-known the ancestor was the more the reputation and nobility. This way, as Rosalind Thomas (cited in Hodge, 2007:31) says “prestige, status, even moral character might be derived from the original progenitor, preferably legendary, heroic or divine”. Hodge (2007:31–36) illustrates her point by showing how, for example, patrician and plebeian families constructed their histories back to Trojan

and famous Greek heroes. She also notes how Julians claimed ancestry from Aeneas. But more importantly, she highlights how Dionysius, by the use of kinship and ethnicity, rhetorically reclaims the name and image of Rome and its people by linking them to Greece and Greekness in his *Roman Antiquities*. According to her, Dionysius first establishes the three features are the *sine qua non* of Greekness: ancestry, geographical territory, and customs and tradition. Then, after identifying the various tribes that inhabited Rome, he reconstructs their ancestries and customs by tracing them back to Greece and the Greekness. Through this he transforms the history of various barbarian groups and confers upon them the honour and prestige associated with being Greek: "Hence from now on let the reader forever renounce the views of those who make Rome a retreat of barbarians, fugitives and vagabonds, and let him confidently affirm it to be a Greek city" (*Roman Antiquities* 1.89.1-2, cited in Hodge, 2007:36)

In conclusion, it is right to emphasise that both culture and descent formed important aspects of ancient ethnic discourse. Ancient people groups classified themselves or were classified by others by more fixed characteristics that can be summarised under the two categories. However, ethnic identity was not completely fixed and static. There were elements of dynamism which allowed for the creation of new ancestries and kin relations. Through adoption, religious ritual or sacrifice, and genealogical construction individuals and groups were able to construct and link their ancestry back to famous people of the past. But despite such transformations, the people themselves did not understand ethnicity in such constructionist terms as it is done today. For example, with the spread of Hellenism across the East of the Roman Empire, 'Hellene' came to mean anyone who spoke pure Greek and embraced the culture. Yet, 'Greek' was not stripped of its ethnic connotation. Most of the people in those cities could still trace their ancestry back to Hellas when required. While the boundaries of the 'Greek' became more and more permeable, the basic content of what it meant to be Greek remained significantly unchanged (Stanley, 1996:113–115).

As will become evident in the subsequent sections and chapter, recognising the primordial gravity of ancient ethnicity, but also its character of being dynamic, and so negotiable, is an important factor for interpreting Judaism and Paul's ethnic rhetoric. Judaism as an ethnic praxis in the diaspora was essentially understood in primordial terms. Yet, it was possible to include Gentiles as proselytes. Paul, as an apostle to the Gentiles, had a major task of reconfiguring the history and ethnic identity of God's people, hitherto defined as Israelites, in order to create a new people and a new social identity comprising of Judeans and Gentiles in Christ. In the new regime inaugurated by Christ, Judeans and Gentiles in Christ comprised the one family of Abraham and the one people of God.

### 3.1.3. Ethnic conflict

Ethno-cultural and religious conflicts have been present in the world's past and present. From a socio-anthropological point of view, Horowitz (1985:50) informs us that while group loyalties and contrasts are an essential aspect of human social life, it takes only a few differences or prejudices between individuals and groups for divisions and tensions to emerge. Interactions between people groups are bound to end in tension, especially, if there is prejudice between insiders and outsiders. Marsella (2005:653–654) insightfully corroborates Horowitz's sentiments in an essay that reflects empirically on the relationship that exists between culture and conflict. According to him, while cultural differences do not necessarily engender conflict, it is clear that such differences have the capacity to provoke tension, hostility, and even genocide, especially when "codified and embedded in 'unassailable' belief systems, such as those associated with nationalistic fervour or fundamentalist political, economic, and religious systems". He helpfully lists seven culturally embedded pathways which lead to violence and conflict:

Perception of danger to national or group survival, identity, well-being; perception of 'Other' as evil, dangerous, threatening; perception of situation as unjust, unequal, unfair, humiliating, punishing; perception of self as self-righteous, moral, justified, and 'good' by virtues of religion, history, identity; perception that normal pathways for resolution may no longer be available, accessible, acceptable; the availability of military or other means for engaging in war and aggression; and the availability of media for gaining support for actions through propaganda (Marsella, 2005:654).

In a similar manner, Stanley (1996:115), whose essay conscientiously reviews the numerous Judean and Greek ethnic conflicts in Asia Minor between the latter half of the first-century BC and early second century AD, contends that good interethnic relations are possible: where relations between the concerned groups are well organised; where the different groups occupy different or complementary geographical or socio-economic zones; where power is annexed in a mutually agreeable manner; where different ethnic groups have similar histories of residence in a particular area, and where the different ethnic groups share common worldview, language and ethos. Conversely, ethnic tensions and conflicts are likely when ethnic groups are in competition for scarce socio-economic and territorial resources; when there are inconsistencies in terms of social or political power; when there is an occupation of another groups' territory; when there is a history of conflict between specific people groups and discordant social values. As will become evident here below, Judean and Gentile ethno-cultural character and differences weighed against Marsella's pathways that lead to ethno-cultural conflict or Stanley's factors that lead to good or bad interethnic cooperation, rate extremely low on the qualities that lead to harmony, but high on factors that lead to ethnic conflict and violence.

### 3.2. Judaism as ethnic praxis and its impact on Judean-Gentile relations

According to Cohen (2006:26, 37–38), diaspora Judeans had an uneasy relationship with their host environments. While they desired to support and partake of their hosts' ethno-cultural bounties, they were also unwilling to surrender their unique ethnic identity. In cities like Alexandria and Rome, whole neighbourhoods were inhabited mostly by Judeans, who practically refused to be involved in the city's communal events such as the national cult ceremonies. One of the ruling aspects of their ethnic identity was a sense of opposition between 'us' (Judeans) and 'them' (Gentiles). In fact, this categorisation was so embedded that even the most Hellenised Judeans and the Gentiles were aware of it. Philo, for example, writing in the context of Judean persecution in Alexandria, notices that even Flaccus, the governor of Egypt, was aware that both in Alexandria and in all Egypt lived only two types of people: "us' and 'them'". He then goes ahead to explain that Judeans lived in the millions all over the inhabited world and any attack against them or their ancestral customs (ἔθνη πατρία) could not go without a revolt. In fact, he anticipates that such an affront against them could fill the entire world with an ethnic war (φάναι τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐμφυλίων πολέμων ἐπλήψωσεν) (*Flaccus* 41-50).

But how did the Judeans maintain such a dichotomous view of the world around them? Furthermore, what is it that made them unique and a subject of such great controversy in the ancient world? It is my contention that their sense of ethnic identity and solidarity had everything to do with it. To show evidence for this, I will draw chiefly from Barclay's (1996) comprehensive and multifaceted study of ancient Judaism covering Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, Cyrenaica, Syria, Asia, and Rome. I will particularly dwell in the last chapter of the book where Barclay makes a conclusive statement on what actually made Judean communities survive as "*coherent and enduring entities*" in the diaspora. According to him, three things stood at the core of Judean identity: (1) the *ethnic bond* that held them together, (2) the *social and symbolic resources* from which all of them depended on, and (3) the *practical distinctions* that defined and demarcated their social identity (1996b: 400-402). I will discuss these briefly before coming to a conclusion.

#### 3.2.1. Judaism's ethnic bond

Barclay's (1996b:402–403) definition of ethnicity corresponds perfectly with what has been argued for above. According to him, "it was ethnicity - precisely the *combination* of ancestry and custom – which was the core of Jewish identity in the diaspora". Barclay (1996b:405–413) then proceeds to highlight the important features that provide evidence for Judaism's ethnic bond which includes the pervasive ethnic terminology that is employed by both

insiders and outsiders regarding Judeans; the extreme process by which proselytes were resocialised in Judaism; the marriage regulations and the training of children in the Judean way. With regard to the ethnic terminology, as I have highlighted above, Judeans of antiquity understood themselves and were understood by the Gentiles as an ethnic entity comparable to other ethnic groups (cf. Mason, 2007:489). Barclay (1996b:405–410) reiterates this point, underlining that almost every diaspora literature constantly refer to Judeans as an ἔθνος, φύλον, γένος and λαός. There is also a clear demarcation is made between them as “fellow nationals” (ὁμοεθνεῖς) and “tribesmen” (ὁμόφυλοι) and everyone else as “other” (ἄλλοεθνεῖς and ἀλλόφυλοι). Equally, Gentile literature attests that Judaism was an ethnic unit. Furthermore, a significant of Judeans’ relationship with the Greco-Roman authorities was that whenever their right to assemble or collect funds was contested, the foundation for their appeal and the basis on which it was granted was the established right to practice their own “ancestral customs” (τα πάτρια ἔθνη) or to live in accordance to their ancestral laws (οἱ πάτριοι νόμοι). Barclay (1996b:407–408) emphasises that

We should note the force of the epithet *πάτριος* in such cases: it indicates what is hereditary, what is passed down from one’s ancestors, what is embedded in one’s familial and ethnic traditions. Indeed, the notion of ‘ancestral customs’ precisely encapsulates that combination of kinship and custom which we have taken to define ethnicity. It was on this basis that the Romans respected Jewish peculiarities and privileges, on the principle that time-honoured ethnic practices should never be disturbed.

On the *process of resocialisation*, Barclay (1996b:408–410) maintains that the process by which Gentile-proselytes were resocialised in Judaism is evidence for the distinctiveness of Judean ethnic identity diaspora. New adherents to Judaism underwent a radical process of assimilation that practically effected a new ethnicity. For example, in Josephus’s *Antiquities* (20.38-39), King Izates is advised that circumcision, the *sine quo non* of Judaism (see below) would render him assuredly a Judean (βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος) and an alien to his own people. The book of *Judith* (14.10) reports about Achior, the Ammonite, who when he saw “all that the God of Israel had accomplished... came to believe utterly in God and had the flesh of his foreskin circumcised, and he has been added to the house of Israel until this day” (NETS).<sup>13</sup> Philo (*Virtues* 108, 175; *Special Laws* 102), while praising the proselytes for their conversion, asserts that they have entered a completely new πολιτεία since they have renounced their ancestral customs and idolatrous associations. He praises them for the courage to abandon their kinsfolk by blood, country, customs, temples, and idols, and for

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<sup>13</sup> NETS = “New English Translation of the Septuagint” (Pietersma & Wright, 2007)

taking the journey to a better home (Judaism), where there is clear revelation of the truth and the worship of the one true and living God.

Yet, despite this radical resocialisation, it is important to note that the proselytes never reached equality with native Judeans. According to Cohen (1999:157–162), only in the eyes of outsiders did the proselytes become Judeans. Certainly, Judean literatures describe their conversion in terms of change of ethnicity and insist that they should be treated equally with native Judeans. However, nowhere do the literatures indicate that the proselytes attained real equality with the Judeans by birth. In fact, the opposite is what seems to have been actually the case. Philo himself upholds that proselytes are decidedly inferior to the natives (*Moses* 1.147). Furthermore, that many Judean sepulchral inscriptions bear the words “the proselyte” after the name of the person being celebrated (cf. Leon, 1960:250f) is an indication of the ambiguous identity of the proselytes. Indeed, Cohen (1999:160-162, 323f. 2006:47) speaks of “Two Qumran texts [that] prohibit the proselytes (*gēr*) from entering the temple; another records that the people of Israel are divided into four groups: priests, Levites, Israelites, and proselytes. According to Mishnah, a proselyte should not say ‘Our God and God of our fathers’, in his prayers, nor should he recite the Deuteronomic formula ‘from the land you have sworn unto our fathers to give us’.” The reason for that is obvious: they do not share a common ancestry with the Judeans. Davies (1974:177) makes a similar observation with regard to the exclusivity of Abraham’s fatherhood when he says: “But in Judaism he was regarded as the father of Jews. Even proselytes were not allowed to call him Abraham ‘our father’, and in liturgy of the synagogue substituted ‘your father’ for ‘our father’ in referring to the patriarch. Nor could proselytes, as could all Israel, share in his merits.” This is an important, but often neglected, background to Paul’s rhetorical argumentation regarding the universal nature of both Judean monotheism and Abraham’s fatherhood in Romans 3.28-30 and 4.1-25.

When it comes to the marriage restrictions and the socialisation of children, Barclay (1996b:410–412) observes that Judaism prohibited its own people from marrying from outside the community. For sure, some Judeans in the diaspora were integrated into their host’s cultures to the extent marrying foreign wives. However, mixed marriage was not the norm. It was strongly discouraged. As a matter of fact, an important role of circumcision was to control who a Judean woman could marry and have sex with. Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.139, 145-46) records how some Gentile males had to go through circumcision in order to be allowed to marry Judean girls. Elsewhere, he makes the social function of circumcision explicit when he asserts that to the extent that Abraham’s seed should be kept from mixing with the Gentiles, God instituted that they be circumcised on the eighth day after birth

(*Antiquities* 1.192). Philo also emphasises that circumcision made it a taboo for Judean women to receive alien seed from uncircumcised men (cf. Philo, *Questions* 3.61). The children were socialised under their ancestral customs and traditions such that there remained a certainty Judaism as an ethnic phenomenon would be passed on from one generation to the other (Barclay, 1996b:412–413).

### 3.2.2. Judaism's social and symbolic resources

Judaism's ethnic bond was augmented by the social and symbolic resources that all individuals and local communities were depended on. The most significant of these are the local communities and the network of other diasporas, the Judean Scriptures (law), and the figure of Moses. On *the local communities and diaspora networks*, Barclay (1996b:414–418) observes that whether officially constituted or not, the local gatherings were organised in a way that the Judean ethnic identity was reinforced and preserved. Diaspora Judeans gathered for Sabbath celebrations, common meals, festivals and fasts. They also kept a close link with their homeland and fundraised in order to support the Jerusalem temple. Philo (*Flaccus* 42-43) demonstrates the connection between the diaspora communities and their homeland when he asserts that although the Judeans were dispersed all over the ancient world they all regarded the 'holy city' (ἱερόπολις) where the sacred temple stands as their 'mother-city' (μητρόπολις). Cicero (*Flaccus*, 66-69) records how the Judean community in Rome stood in solidarity with those of Asia during the trial of Flaccus in Rome (59 BC), while Josephus (*Antiquities* 17.299-303) reports of how Roman Judeans stood in solidarity with an embassy from Palestine, who had come to lobby against Archelaus's rule in 4 BC.

*Commitment to the Scriptures* was another resource which all Judeans depended on. Barclay (1996b:425–426) emphasises: "Throughout the diaspora, from Alexandria to Ostia, and from the synagogue in Caesarea...to the 'amphitheatre' in Berenice... the Jewish communities looked to their 'holy books' for instruction in their distinctive way of life." Not only that, but they also believed that their Torah was of divine origin (cf. Philo, *Embassy* 210; Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.223). Indeed, Philo (*Moses* 2.37) maintains that the law was given under divine dictation. Elsewhere he stresses that while all peoples keep their own customs and traditions, this was especially so when it came to the Judeans (*Embassy* 210). Josephus (*Apion* 171-178) boasts that compared to other peoples, Judeans were the most acquainted with their "ancestral constitution". The law was integral to every aspect of Judean social and intellectual life. Its instruction, especially on the Sabbath, was strictly adhered to and was treated with great sanctity. The law, as Wright (1992:235–236) rightly notes, was the sum total of Judean worldview.

With this kind of emphasis on the law, it should not surprise us that the *figure of Moses*, naturally defined Judean ethnic identity since he was its human author and giver. According to Barclay (1996b:426–428), it is for this reason that there was a tradition of an anti-Mosaic slander right from Manetho (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) through to Tacitus (first and second-century AD). Josephus (*Apion* 2.151f.) insists that among all the law-givers who ever existed, no one could compare to Moses. He provided the best ‘constitution’ (πολιτεία) and designed the best way to be instructed. In a culturally competitive Greco-Roman world therefore, Judeans were strict followers of Moses for better or worse. He provided and enhanced their social and ethnic identity.

It is worth noting that Barclay does not mention or highlight the significance of the figure of Abraham with this regard. However, his significance, as the ancestor of the Judean nation, for first-century Judaism cannot be overemphasised. He is venerated as the patriarch of the nation (cf. Josephus, *War* 5.9.4 & 380; *Romans* 4.1) and the paragon of righteousness (*Jub* 23.10; *Sir* 44.19-21; *1 Macc* 2.52; *Jud.* 8.25-27 and *4 Macc* 16.19-25; Philo, *Abraham* 3-6; *2 Bar* 57.2; *Jub* 15.1-2; 16.20-21). To belong to Abraham was a mark of the highest distinction. It meant that you belonged to the chosen people of God. The author of *Psalms of Solomon* (9:8-9) says: "You are God and we are the people whom you have loved, for you chose the descendants of Abraham above all the nations". It is these people who were uniquely designated as the heirs of God's promises and covenant (*Sir* 44:21; *II Esd* 3:13-15). Jeremias (1964:8–9) rightly captures the significance of this Judean ancestor when he says Abraham is a “celebrated national and religious hero of the people. His figure is surrounded by innumerable legends and miracle stories in his honour, and his grave in Hebron is revered as a holy place. Descent from Abraham is the pride of the rest of Israel.”

### **3.2.3. Judaism’s practical distinctions**

Four things “marked off” Judeans from the rest of their neighbours: monotheism; separatism at meals, circumcision and Sabbath observance. On *monotheism*, Barclay (1996b:429–434) contends that central to this unique feature of first-century Judaism was a rejection of any alien, pluralistic and iconic cult, something that was consonant with what the law taught against following the mores and gods of other nations (*Deut* 6.14; 12.30-31; 29.17, 25). Israel was supposed to worship the only one true God. Accordingly, the diaspora literature constantly identifies God as the “God of Israel” or “the ancestral God” (cf. *3 Macc* 5.13; 7.16; *4 Macc* 12.17; *Ezek* 213; *Joseph and Asneth* 7.5, 11.10). The *Letter of Aristeas* (134-138), a document that manifests a combination of complete loyalty to Judean ethnicity but also active participation in the Hellenistic culture (cf. Barclay, 1996b:147), says:

When therefore our lawgiver [Moses], equipped by God for insight into all things, had surveyed each particular, he fenced us about with impregnable palisades and with walls of iron, to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of the other nations, remaining pure in body and in spirit, emancipated from vain opinions, revering the one and mighty God above the whole creation ... And therefore, so that we should be polluted by none or be infected with perversions by associating with worthless persons, he has hedged us about on all sides with prescribed purifications in matters of food and drink and touch and hearing and sight (cited in Hoehner, 2002:370).

The striking thing in this statement is how the author brings together Judaism's exclusivity, resources and practical distinctions. More importantly, he pointedly connects Gentilism with false religion and pollution. The assumption is that the religion of the Gentiles is wrong and the integrity of Judean monotheism demands that they separate themselves from other competing religions. Monotheism infiltrated every aspect of Judeans' social life (Barclay, 1996b:430–431). Furthermore, because of its monotheism, Judaism confidently asserted a moral and intellectual superiority over the Gentiles. Again, the *Letter of Aristeas* (152) is instructive: "For most of the rest of mankind defile themselves by their promiscuous unions, working great unrighteousness, and whole countries and cities pride themselves on these vices. Not only do they have intercourse with males, but they even defile mothers and daughters. But we have been kept apart from such things" (cited in Hoehner, 2002:371).

When it comes to *separatism at meals*, Barclay (1996b:436) insists that despite their relative assimilation to their host cultures, Judeans upheld the chief dietary laws. These included refraining from certain foodstuffs and table-fellowship with Gentiles. The passage from *Letter to Aristeas* cited above aptly captures that separatism. But also the decree of the people of Sardis recorded in Josephus (*Antiquities* 14.261) states that the Judeans of the city had been allowed to meet and practice their own ancestral practices. It particularly highlights that those in charge of the city's market had been charged with the duty of making sure that the relevant foodstuff was available for them. Elsewhere, Josephus emphasises the Judean discipline of diet as a matter of pride (*Apion*, 2.173-174; 234, 282). In Rome, Judeans' abstention from pork made the people there speculate that the Judeans had a special reverence for pigs (Petronius, *Frag* 37, Juvenal, *Sat* 6.160; 14.98-99).

Finally, on *circumcision*, Barclay (1996b:438) argues that it constituted practically the most unambiguous symbol of Judaism. Elsewhere he says, circumcision "was the physical sign of belonging to the covenant of Abraham, the fleshly inscription of genealogical identity marking the ancestral heritage of every male Jew (cf. Phil 3.5)" (Barclay, 1998:545). The reputation of this rite made it the permanent sign of Judean ethnic identity and commitment to its ancestral customs. All male Judeans were circumcised and it was the ultimate requirement for male proselytes (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.257-258; 20.38). In fact, *Jubilees* (15.26)

asserts that Gentiles cannot belong to the covenant because they lack a sign (circumcision) that they are the Lord's. They are therefore destined to be slain from the earth. Within the Qumran community, the ritual was understood as able to provide access to heaven and the messianic kingdom since it encapsulated both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants (Witherington, 2004:126; CD 16.4-6; *Jub* 15.31-33). I have already mentioned above Josephus' record of the conversion of King Izates, who was advised that circumcision would render him a true Judean and foreigner to his own countrymen. Similarly, the Judeans who desired to leave Judaism (see above) hid their circumcised genitals such that even when they were naked they appeared as Greeks. Hiding their circumcision was a sign of forsaking all the laws and customs of their ancestors.

When it comes to *Sabbath observance*, Barclay (1996b:440–442) highlights that the Sabbath was by far the most conspicuous and celebrated social rite since it was the most regular. It was also socially controversial since it affected the social, political and economic relationship of Judeans and Gentiles. The sanctity of the Sabbath day is heightened by the fact that it is the day when Judeans were instructed on their law. It was so important that on its basis Roman authorities not only excused Judeans from work on the day, but also Judean men were exempted from military service (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.226, 228, 232, 234; 16.162-165; Philo, *Embassy* 156-158; *Moses* 2.211, 219). Wright (1992:233–234) appropriately highlights that Sabbath observance, together with other festivals, were symbols of loyalty to Israel. They emphasised the one God of Israel and the one people of God, something that heightened the Judeans' emotional and cultural bond and as a consequent, reinforcing and revitalising their self-consciousness.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to argue that Judean communities in the diaspora remained distinctive and coherent due to the way they perceived and practiced their unique ethnic identity. Central to that identity was their specific *τὰ πατρία* embodied in the Torah. The law provided them with the utmost symbolic and covenant boundary between 'us' (Judeans) and 'them' (Gentiles). In terms of Jones' definition, the Torah provided them with their ancestral and cultural claims. In terms of Hutchinson and Smith's six features that are habitually exhibited by an ethnic group, the Torah afforded their proper name as Israelites/Judeans; a common ancestry that could be traced back to Abraham; shared historical memories of their origins, deliverance and preservation; the most important elements of their culture; it connected them to their homeland; and ultimately was the anchor of their sense of solidarity. In other words, as Barclay has showed us, the law purchased their ethnic bond and their symbolic and practical resources. It assuredly marked them as Judeans and provided the holiness code that separated them and defined their social intercourse with neighbours.

Every time one of these features was activated and practiced all the other features were reinforced and Judean ethnicity was further affirmed.

But what kind of relationship did such ethnic exclusiveness and sense of superiority engender between them and the Gentiles or the Roman authorities?

#### **4.2.4. Judean and Gentile ethnic conflicts in the diaspora**

The general policy of the Roman authorities towards Judeans and Judaism was that of toleration. According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 16.162-165), under Julius Caesar, the Judeans were granted the right to practice their own traditions and customs as handed down by their ancestors. They were allowed to collect temple tax and send it to Jerusalem, as well as being exempted from appearances in court on the Sabbath. Furthermore, their communal properties were safeguarded. To steal from them or their property was tantamount to sacrilege and incurred a heavy penalty. After the death of Julius Caesar, Augustus favourably ratified the policies. Philo (*Embassy* 156-158) reports that Augustus knew that Judeans had prayer-houses/synagogues (προσευχή) where they congregated on the Sabbath to be educated on their ancestral philosophy (πάτριον παιδεύονται φιλοσοφίαν). He also knew that they fundraised for the Jerusalem temple; yet, he did not expel them from Rome or withdraw their citizenship because they were also committed to their own ethnicity (Ἰουδαϊκός – “Judeanness”). Augustus did not institute any change against their synagogues nor did he prevent them from fundraising but instead supported them and permitted them to collect the monthly-dole on a day other than the Sabbath in Rome.

But commenting on the force of the sanctions on behalf of Judeans, Smallwood (1981:138–139) insightfully observes that they “had the effect of making anti-Semitic actions illegal. But legislation could not kill anti-Semitism, and Gentile ill-will may actually have been exacerbated by the sight of Jews receiving protection and preferential treatment from Roman authorities.” To add to Smallwood’s sentiments, one may argue that Judean’s ethnic exclusivity and adamant refusal to integrate their customs with those of their host cities would have been an obvious point of contestation. I have already argued, with Horowitz, Marsella and Stanley above, that socio-political and religious discrimination is a fertile ground for inter-ethnic conflict. It seems like this was exactly the case between Judeans and Gentiles in the diaspora. Many ethnic conflicts between Judeans and Greeks/Gentiles arose in Syrian Antioch, Alexandria and in the cities of Asia Minor in the latter years of the first-century BC through to the first-century AD. While ancient authors are not forthright in giving the reasons why this was the case, Cohen (2006:38) states that Judeans “antagonised certain elements of the local population by demanding both tolerance and equality. They

asked that the city continue to recognise their autonomous communal organisation while also extending them the rights to citizenship” (cf. Smallwood, 1981:139–143). Stanley (1996:115–118) insists that the ethnic conflicts had to do with both social and political relations of the Greeks and Judeans. On the one hand, because Judeans understood their *πάτρια ἔθνη* to have been of divine origin, they could not possibly abandon these practices, especially Sabbath-observance, dietary restrictions, and circumcision. On the other hand, the Greeks did not see any reason why they should forsake their own beliefs and practices that had sustained their ethnicity for centuries. The strong ethnic claims of both groups meant that a door was constantly open not only for misunderstanding, but also for conflict and violence.

Furthermore, the Greco-Roman *literati* vehemently attack and disparage Judaism. A review of Stern’s three volumes *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (1974-1985) evidences a pervasive anti-Judaic attitude in antiquity. According to Feldman (1986:21–22; 1993:107), while evidence on how the Greco-Roman masses regarded Judeans is scarce, “the intellectuals who produced our literary sources generally express utmost contempt for the mob... (and) leave no room for doubt about the widespread hatred and fear of the Jews among the masses in the Roman Empire”. Capturing this phenomenon, Meagher (1979:6) aptly states: “The roster of ancient writers who expressed anti-Judean feelings reads like a syllabus for a second-semester course in classics: Cicero, Tacitus, Martial, Horace, Juvenal, Persius, Dio Cassius, Marcus Aurelius, Apuleius, Ovid, Petronius, Pliny the Elder, Plutarch, Quintilian, Seneca, Suetonius.”

It is therefore, commonplace today for scholars of ancient antiquity to speak of a pervasive “anti-Semitism” or “anti-Judaism” in the Greco-Roman world (cf. Daniel, 1979:45-65; Walters, 1993:37f; Schäfer, 1997:197f.). Even those who resist the idea of a full blown anti-Judaism (cf. Gager, 1985; Feldman, 1993; Barclay, 1996b) still find it a difficult task to explain why Judeans, of all other ethnic communities in ancient antiquity, were singled out as a subject of great social and literary ridicule. Yet, they all agree that it had to do with Judean’s ethnic exclusivism and practices. According to Feldman (1993:125–176), the Greco-Roman authors constantly charge Judeans of misanthropy, which is associated with their stubborn exclusivity and sense of superiority; their intolerant theology; their rituals, especially circumcision which is depicted as physical deformity. In fact, Philo (*Special Laws* 1.1-2) asserts that circumcision is treated as the most ridiculous law by the Gentiles. Judeans are also attacked for their Sabbath and Kosher laws. Abstention from pork, a delicacy for both Greeks and the Romans, was strikingly at odds with the Gentiles. In fact,

Emperor Gaius himself demanded to know from Philo and the other emissary that had visited him in Rome (41 AD): “Why do you refuse to eat pork” (Philo, *Embassy*, 45.361).

In conclusion, it is proper to maintain that Judaism’s clannishness and separateness, which was generated by its ethno-cultural distinctiveness, resulted in enmity and hostility from the rest of Gentile ethnicities. While the authorities ensured the protection of the Judeans, the reality was that anti-Judaism attitude and feelings could not be erased; it probably exacerbated the bad relations. The reality that this is what happened is evidenced by the many ethnic conflicts in Syrian Antioch, Asia Minor and Alexandria. Furthermore, literatures by pagan-Gentiles manifest severe hostility and hatred towards Judaism. It was earlier observed that ethno-cultural conflicts are bound to happen wherever there are perceptions of danger or threat to group survival and perceptions of moral superiority; where social and political power is not annexed in a mutually agreeable manner and when the ethnic groups involved do not share a common worldview, customs and ethos. It seems that this was largely the case between Judeans and Gentiles or the authorities in the diaspora.

#### **4.3. Judeans and Gentiles in Rome and the origins the Roman church**

Having reviewed what would have been generally typical in the diaspora, I now turn to the specific context in which Paul’s ethnic rhetoric was addressed. The question to be answered is how much of what has been described above was actually replicated in Rome, and how did it affect the origins of the early Christian movement there?

##### **3.3.1. Rome in antiquity**

The demographics of ancient Rome are well captured by two ancient authors. Writing in the second-century AD, Aelius Aristides (*Oratio* 26) depicts Rome as the sum total of the expansive Roman Empire; the collective market of the entire world. Indeed, he insists that whatever is not found in Rome does not exist anywhere else (cited in La Piana, 1927:206). Similarly, writing in the third-century AD, Athenaeus of Naucratis (*Deipnosophistes* 1.36) captures the cosmopolitan nature of Rome when he says that Rome is “the nation of the whole world” and “the epitome of the whole earth ... the days of an entire year would not suffice for a man who should attempt to count all the cities which are to be found in that uranopolis of Rome, so numerous are they. For indeed some entire nations are settled there” (cited in La Piana, 1927:206). These statements may have come from a later period than the one that concerns this study, but they provide us with a clear picture of how the demographics in the first-century Rome looked like. They leave no doubt that Rome was a multi-ethnic city with many of the Greco-Roman peoples represented. As a matter of fact, La Piana (1927:188, 194–195) observes that by the second century BC Rome was an

overpopulated city, with hordes of foreign immigrants arriving from every corner of the ancient Mediterranean:

From Greece and the Hellenised cities of Asia Minor...from Syria ... From distant Mesopotamia and from Egypt, the lands of ancient wisdom, astrologers and experts in divination, soothsayers and physicians, all soon learned the road to Rome. From Alexandria, chief centre of Hellenism, philosophers and teachers...The Jews of Palestine, as well, and of the diaspora formed in Rome a large community, the largest Jewry of the West and second only to those of the great Hellenistic centres Alexandria and Antioch.”

What is even more significant for our purposes here is that having arrived in Rome the immigrant groups did not immediately assimilate into the host population and their cultures. They generally grouped together in pockets of ethnic concentrations for both security and comfort. They also lived in close proximity to their sacred shrines in order to maintain their distinct traditions and customs. Furthermore, the natives of the city were themselves xenophobic towards their influx and suspicious of their foreign cults, and although generally the authorities were tolerative of the foreign populations, at times they would be forced to expel them from the city (La Piana, 1927:233; Walters, 1993:3–5). The phenomenon of Romans’ suspicion of the immigrants and their cultures is for example captured by Dionysius in his *Roman Antiquities* (2.19.3) when he marvels saying:

Notwithstanding the influx into Rome of innumerable nations which are under every necessity of worshipping their ancestral gods according to the customs of their respective countries, yet the city has never officially adopted any of those foreign practices, as has been the experience of many cities in the past; but, even though she has, in pursuance of oracles, introduced certain rites from abroad, she celebrates them in accordance with her own traditions, after banishing all fabulous clap-trap (translation by Earnest Cary).

However, this does not mean that there was zero integration between the immigrant groups and the natives. While many of them arrived as slaves, and were inferior to the Romans, they formed an important part of the Roman workforce, and would eventually become freedmen possessing Roman citizenship, and ultimately part of the *plebs urbana* (La Piana, 1927:233, 266). Generally, therefore, Rome, in its first-century context can be described as a place of cultural resistance but also integration. But the question that concerns us most is the fate of the Roman Judeans, who, as La Piana says (above), were arriving in hordes both from Palestine and other diasporas, and from whom the early Christian movement in Rome emerged.

### **3.3.2. Judeans of Rome: their socio-historical situation**

The earliest available record of an abiding Judean community in Rome is by Valerius Maximus (writing in the first-century AD) and is negative. According to him the *praetor*

*peregrinus* Cornelius Hispalus expelled the Judeans in 139 BC because of their attempt to contaminate the morals of the Romans with the cult of Jupiter Sabazius. He also removed their private altars from public places (cf. Leon, 1960:3; Smallwood, 1981:130).<sup>14</sup> According to Wiefel (1991:86), the Romans always mistook Judeans for the worshippers of the Hellenistic-oriental Sabazio cult. For that matter, reference to Jupiter Zabazius here should be equated with Yahweh Sabaoth.<sup>15</sup> If so, it is significant that the first ever expulsion of the Judean community from Rome had to do with their attempt to proselytise Romans. This event sets the precedence for the kind of opposition that Romans would direct against Judeans' attempt to proselytise in Rome. For although Judeans were guaranteed the right to practice their own ancestral laws and traditions, any "attempts to gain adherents among the Romans were frowned on, discouraged, or actually forbidden" (Smallwood, 1981:130; Wiefel, 1991:88).

A much stronger evidence for an abiding presence of Judeans and Judaism in Rome is from Cicero's speech in defence of Lucius Valerius Flaccus in 59 BC (*Flaccus* 66-69). During his term as the *praetor* of the province of Asia Minor, Flaccus extorted property belonging to the Asian Judeans, which was intended to be conveyed to Jerusalem. Now he was appearing before a Roman jury to answer the charges against him. In his defence, Cicero highlights that the Roman Judean population was a vast multitude, citing this as the reason why the case had to be held in an open space. He also notes the cohesiveness of the Judeans and their great influence in public gatherings. But more than that, Cicero's speech is also pervaded with the underlying attitude of anti-Judaism. He pays tribute to Flaccus for resisting Judaism, which he calls a barbaric superstition (*barbarae superstition*). Flaccus' actions, according to Cicero arose from a great sense of responsibility and in the interest of the public (*pro re publica*). Cicero goes ahead to denigrate Judaism by arguing that every people have got their own religion (*civitati religio*), however, the demands of Judaism are irreconcilable with the grandeur of Rome and the dignity of its institutions and ancestors. Commenting on the character of Cicero's speech, Schäfer (1997:180–182) observes that its social and political force cannot be expunged. Cicero and those he represents views

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<sup>14</sup> Some scholars doubt whether there was a Judean community of any significance in Rome by 139 BC (cf. Barclay, 1996b:285; Marshall, 1975:139–142). But as Smallwood (1981:129–130; cf. Longenecker, 2011:60–61) contends, it is not impossible that some Judeans had reached and settled in Italy by this time since there is evidence for diplomatic contact between Palestine and Rome in c. 161 and c. 150 BC (1 *Macc* 8.1-32; 12.1-18).

<sup>15</sup> Wiefel (1991:86) argues that it is proper to "keep in mind that the general perception of the Jewish community in Rome was surrounded by misconceptions from the very beginning of its history. The Romans mistook them for the followers of the Hellenistic-oriental Sabazio cult for one or two good reasons: they misunderstood the Jewish word for God, Sabaoth, the Greek form of Zebaoth, and they might have made the same mistake with the word Sabbath, the most conspicuous custom in Judaism."

Judeans and Judaism as contrary to and incompatible with *religio*, “the essence of the political, cultural, and religious ideals of ancient Rome”.

Cicero’s sentiments may be infused with the rhetorical exaggerations of a lawyer representing his client, but his anti-Judean attitude is replicated in the writings of many other Greco-Roman authors. Positively though, they point to what would have been an increasingly Judean presence in Rome characterised by a strong ethnic cohesion, exclusivity, and strict adherence law (cf. Barclay, 1996b:287; Gruen, 2004:21–22). The first-century AD witnessed more socio-political oppression of Roman Judeans. Philo (*Embassy* 159-160; *Flaccus* 1) reports that Sejanus, the *praefectus praetorio* (14-31 AD), planned to exterminate the Roman Judeans: “Matters in Italy became troublesome when Sejanus was organising his onslaught... he wished to make way with the nation, knowing that it would take the sole or the principal part in opposing his unholy plots and actions, and would defend the emperor when in danger of becoming the victim of treachery” (translation by F.H. Colson).

We may never know exactly the imports of Sejanus’ anti-Judaic attitude, but he probably was behind the expulsion of Judeans from Rome in AD 19, under Caesar Tiberius. The event must have been so significant to be captured by four authors: Josephus, (*Antiquities* 18.83-84), Tacitus (*Annals*, 2.85), Suetonius (*Tiberius* 36.1), and Dio Cassius (*History* 57.18.5). Josephus associates the expulsion with proselytism. According to him, Fulvia, a woman of nobility, had become a proselyte under the influence of four Roman Judeans who ended up swindling her. On hearing this, Tiberius ordered the whole Judean community to leave Rome and conscripted 4000 for military service in Sardinia. He also heavily penalised those who refused to serve for fear of breaking the Judean law (τῶν πατρῶν νόμων). Tacitus links the expulsion to an embargo on both the Egyptian and Judean cults. He confirms Josephus’ report that 4000 were sent to Sardinia, and cynically adds: “if they die due to the bad climate, a cheap loss” (*si ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum*). He also informs us that the rest of the people were ordered to leave Italy by a certain date if they do not renounce their rites. Dio, like Josephus, associates the expulsion proselytism saying: “As the Jews had flocked to Rome in great numbers and were converting many of the natives to their ways, he (Tiberius) banished most of them” (translation by Earnest Cary).

Commenting on these reports, both Smallwood (1981:204) and Barclay (1996b:299) insist that Fulvia’s adoption of Judaism must have sent a sign of danger to the emperor with regard to Judean proselytism, having found its way even among the Roman aristocrats. Without a doubt this was tantamount to an ethno-cultural invasion. Tiberius was therefore obligated to take measures against it. Hence, “The majority... of the Jews in Rome, together

with the more ardent converts, were driven from their homes in 19 AD because their proselytising activities had reached dimensions at which they were regarded as a menace to Roman order” (Smallwood, 1981:208). There is no evidence as to how long the Judeans were away from Rome or the conscripts remained in Sardinia. Neither is there substantial evidence as to how Gaius Caligula (37-41) treated Judeans in Rome. But as Esler (2003:87) rightly points out, he “did nothing to support the Alexandrian Judeans who were suffering heavily under the Greeks, and at his death, he was busy planning to persecute the Judeans by installing a statue of himself in Jerusalem”.

Certainly, by the early 40's AD the Judean population in Rome had built up and had become increasingly significant both socially and politically. While narrating events associated with Claudius' accession to power (41 AD), Dio (*History* 60.6.6), without many details says: “As for Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he (Claudius) did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings” (translation by Earnest Cary). Suetonius (*Claudius* 25.4), however, reports of a real expulsion saying: “Because Judeans were constantly rioting at the instigation of *Chrestus*, he (Claudius) expelled them from Rome” (*Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit*). The fourth-century Paulus Orosius (*Pagans* 7.6.15-16) dates the expulsion in the ninth year of the reign of Claudius (49 AD). Luke in Acts (18.1-2) also reports of an expulsion in which a Judean named Aquila and his wife Priscilla had arrived in Corinth from Italy “because Claudius had ordered all Judeans to leave Rome.”

I will return to these events in the next section since they provide the immediate socio-historical context for the origin of the Roman Christian movement, the ensuing relationship between Judeans and the Gentiles, and the letter to the Romans. But for now, it can be concluded that right from the beginning of their settlement, Roman Judeans' situation in Rome was complex. The first time a reference is made about them, it reports their proselytism and a subsequent expulsion from Rome. Cicero's speech reveals that the Roman attitude towards Judeans was largely negative. By the time of Sejanus and Tiberius, their situation worsens. They face extermination, although they end up being oppressed and expelled from the imperial capital instead. In the 40's AD they are prohibited from assembly and eventually expelled. Claudius' little care for the Judeans in general is representative in his *Letter to the Alexandrians*, which he sent immediately after he assumed power. In the context of the Judean-Greek/Egyptian ethnic strife in Alexandria, he charges the Judeans with being responsible for the conflict and forbids them from demanding equality with the rest of the ethnic groups or demanding equal participation in public life. He

reminds them that the city of Alexandria did not belong to them and therefore they could agitate for special treatment. He warns them of his readiness to proceed against them in every way as fomenting a common plague for the whole world (translated by A.S. Hunt & C.C. Edgar). For sure, such a stance does not indicate a man who cared for Judeans and Judaism.

This socio-historical analysis of Roman Judaism would be incomplete without exploring two important aspects: proselytism and social organisation. If proselytism features in most of Judeans' expulsions from Rome and is one of the subjects of ridicule among other Judean practices, why then did the Gentiles find Judaism attractive? According to Smallwood (1981:205–206), in the late republic, the formal Roman state religion failed to satisfy the spiritual and emotional needs of many Romans. Many of them therefore turned to philosophy and the mystery cults of the East. Few of them turned to Judaism. However, many became loose adherents, clinging only to the fringes of Judaism but shrinking from a decisive commitment to convert. Furthermore, Tobin (2004:27–30), who draws from Josephus, helpfully observes that the very same reasons why Gentiles turned to Judaism are the same that made it repulsive. According to him, in *Against Apion*, Josephus highlights the following features as those that influenced Gentiles to adopt Judaism: a superior constitution (2.145-219) compared to those of other nations (2.220-278); monotheism (2.164-167; 190-192); antiquity (2.154-156, 168, 256-257); observance of the Sabbath (2.174, 234); dietary law observance (2.174, 234); the cohesiveness of community (2.146, 179-183, 257); and moral superiority (2.146, 170-171, 199-211, 214). Tobin observes that although Josephus arrived in Rome in 71 AD and nothing is known concerning his relationship with Roman Judeans, his arguments closely parallel those of other Greco-Roman Judeans and were most likely gained while living in Rome. This implies that he not only used sources from the Roman Judean community, but at least there was some contact between him and the elite among them. One can therefore suppose that Josephus' extensive comparisons of the Judean constitution with the laws of other people groups in the ancient world would have been part of the traditions of the Judeans of Rome. If so, then, an inclination towards moral superiority would certainly have been part of their self-understanding.

Without a doubt Josephus would have exaggerated the attractiveness of Judaism for polemical reasons. Indeed, these features are a subject of pejorative satirising by Roman authors. I have already highlighted Cicero's sentiments about Judeans. Horace (65-8BC) humorously ridicules "the circumcised Judeans" (*Satires* 1.9.69-70). In his *De Superstitione* preserved by Augustine (*City of God* 6.11), Seneca (c. 4 BC- 65 AD) disparages Sabbath observance as wastage of a seventh part of life in idleness. He also mocks Judean

proselytism saying that their customs and traditions of these “cursed people” are so influential that they are now received all over the world: “the conquered have given their laws to the conquerors”. Moreover, he continues, while the Judeans know the origin and meaning of their customs, the rest of the people (the proselytes) practice their rituals without an idea of what they mean (translation by William M. Green). Petronius, a satirist and a man of great repute in Nero’s palace (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.18), satirising on Judean circumcision says: “The Judean may worship pig-god and clamour in the ears of heaven, but unless he cuts back his foreskin with the knife, he shall go forth from the people and immigrate to Greek cities” (*Frag* 37). Juvenal’s *Satires*, which McCaffrey (2009:69) says “offers a street-level view of Rome”, are deeply concerned with proselytism, as well as other important aspects of Judaism:

Some who have had a father who reveres the Sabbath, worship nothing but the clouds, and the divinity of the heavens, and see no difference between eating swine's flesh, from which their father abstained, and that of man; and in time they take to circumcision. Having been wont to flout the laws of Rome, they learn and practise and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses committed to his secret tome, forbidding to point out the way to any not worshipping the same rites, and conducting none but the circumcised to the desired fountain. For all which the father was to blame, who gave up every seventh day to idleness, keeping it apart from all the concerns of life (*Sat* 14.4b-6, translation by G.G. Ramsay).

Tacitus’ (c. 56-120 AD) comments about Judeans and Judaism are as hostile as can ever be:

Whatever their origin, these rites are maintained by their antiquity: the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity. For the worst rascals among other peoples, renouncing their ancestral religions, always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews; again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity. They sit apart at meals, and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful. They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference. Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice, and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account (*Histories* 5.5, translation by Clifford H. Moore & John Jackson).

I have quoted at length both Juvenal and Tacitus here because, although writing at a later date, their sentiments certainly are representative of what I have argued to have been characteristic of Gentiles’ attitude towards Judeans in the diaspora. They are also representative of what was actually characteristic of Roman Judeans. Commenting on this characterisation of Judeans, Schäfer (1997:32) rightly posits that “we have here the essence and climax of all the motifs which in antiquity are connected with the Jews”. Similarly, on Tacitus’ passage, Cohen (1999:42) says that its “tone and general outlook are as significant

as its specifics. Tacitus conceives of the Jews as a secret and sinister society, hostile to the civilised order and opposed to anything that Romans hold sacred and dear.” Other Roman authors like Martial, Quintilian, Frontinus, Pliny, Petronius, Persius, and Suetonius – all of them, as Walters (1993:37) posits, touch briefly on Roman Judeans, but “with glancing blows” finding their ancestral laws “stupid, anti-social or humorous” and critiquing them for “strangeness, exclusivity or proselytising.”

The other important aspect of Roman Judeans that needs to be highlighted here is their social organisation. According to Leon (1960:167–194) and Wiefel (1991:89–92), the six catacombs that have been unearthed provide very insightful epigraphic data into the social organisation of the Roman Judean community. The inscriptions evidence the existence of at least fourteen individual congregations (*proseuchai* or *synagogues*),<sup>16</sup> with a similar organisational structure. Each congregation had its own leaders: at the top is the ‘council of elders’, with one of them being the ‘chief elder’. Then there is also an executive called ‘the rulers’, with a ‘ruler’ elected for a period of three years. Then there is the ‘head of the synagogue’, who was in charge of synagogue activities, an ‘administrator’, a ‘scribe’, and a ‘priest’. However, compared to the social organisation of Judeans in Alexandria or Cyrene (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.114), there is a complete “absence of a single, controlling organisation supervising the individual synagogues” (Wiefel, 1991:91; cf. La Piana, 1927:358f). This implies loose social relations between the various congregations in the city. There is however, according to Longenecker (2011:66–67), a Mishnaic tradition that evidences that Judean leadership in Jerusalem maintained close relationships with various early Roman congregations. This phenomenon is supported by Acts 28:21-22 where Paul, having arrived in Rome in chains, the Judean leaders confirmed that they had not received any reports about him from Jerusalem. Wiefel (1991:92) points out that the loose synagogical structures in Rome provided an essential prerequisite for the penetration of early Christianity in Rome. The implication of this aspect of Roman Judaism will be explored in the next section.

In summary, three major observations can be made with regard to Rome and the situation of Roman Judeans in first-century AD. First, that Rome was by all means a multi-ethnic city with immigrants from almost every people group represented in the empire. Among the

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<sup>16</sup> Lampe (2003:431) provides the following list: (1) “a συναγωγή Ἀγριππησίων” (2) “a συναγωγή τῶν Αὐγουστιζίων” (3) “one of the Volumnesnses or βολουμνησίων” (4) “one of the (He)rodians” (5) “a synagogue on the Mars Field” (6) “one in the *Subura* quarter (Σιβουρήσιοι)” (7) “συναγωγή Αἰβρέων/Ἐβρέων” (8) “συναγωγή Ἐλαίας” (9) “a ‘proseucha’ near republican wall between the Porta Esquilina and the Porta Collina” (10) “a synagogue of the *Calcarenses*” (11) “of the Tripolitans” (12) “Ἀρχ[ης Λι]βάνου” (13) “of the Σεκηνῶν” (14) “of the *Vernaculi*”.

multitudes, Judeans were reasonably the most prominent due to their exclusiveness and total subjugation of all their social, political and religious mores and institutions to their ancestral law, something that marked their distinctiveness and created an impassable boundary against integration with other ethnicities (cf. La Piana, 1927:205). Secondly, while the right to practice their own ancestral laws was preserved by the different political regimes, Judeans experienced oppression, prohibition and eventually expulsion from Rome. Their adherence to their ancestral laws, sense of moral superiority and proselytism were countercultural and incompatible with the customs and values of Rome. Their tenacity in fighting for their rights was difficult to maintain while holding on to the ideals of *Pax Romana* (cf. Rutgers, 1994:67f.). Thirdly, from the literary evidence available, it seems that Roman Judeans were actively involved in proselytization, often with noticeable success. A few Gentiles, with some high ranking officials, were attracted to Judaism due to its monotheism, antiquity, superiority of their ancestral laws and high moral ethic. But as a result of such attractiveness, many of the Greco-Roman *literati* write with such animosity towards Judeans and their customs. The anti-Judean attitude so pervasive in diaspora was very much alive in the Roman capital.

### 3.3.3. Origins of Roman Christianity

In the previous section, I mentioned statements by Dio, Suetonius, Orosius and Luke, which refer to the Judeans' prohibition from assembly and expulsion in the 40's AD. According to Dio, they were prohibited from assembling but permitted to continue practicing their ancestral laws in 41 AD. Suetonius and Luke speak of a real expulsion from Rome, while Orosius dates the expulsion in 49 AD. Questions have been asked as to whether these statements refer to the same or to two different events (cf. Slingerland, 1992). Here I follow scholars who argue for two different events, one in the beginning of Claudius' reign, which restricted Judeans from meeting and eventually an expulsion in 49 AD. Such a version of the events has the benefit of indicating a gradual intensification of anti-Judean activity by Claudius (Esler, 2003:100; Wiefel, 1991:94). Furthermore, according to Lampe (2003:14), Orosius' dating of the expulsion in 49 AD perfectly corresponds to Luke's record of the events recorded in Acts 18. "Between the edict of Claudius and the datable proconsulate of Gallio of the year 51/52 AD (v.12) lay, according to Luke, eighteen months (v.11) plus προσφάτως (v.2) minus *ἡμέραι ἰκαναί* (v.18). This calculation fits Orosius's dating to 49 strikingly!"

The important question, however, is the relationship between the prohibition and expulsion of Judeans and the origins of the early Christianity in Rome. According to Suetonius, Judeans were constantly causing disturbance in the city under the instigation of *Chrestus*,

and as a result Claudius expelled them from Rome (*Claudius*, 25.4). But who was *Chrestus*? The majority of scholars agree that *Chrestus* is a reference to Christ, and the most appropriate interpretation of Suetonius' statement is that the proclamation of the gospel about Christ within the Roman synagogues constantly issued conflicts between Judeans who were committed to their ethnic law and those who had come to believe in the freedom associated with the gospel (cf. Lampe, 2003:11–16; Wiefel, 1991:92–93; Barclay, 1996b:303–306; Fitzmyer, 1993:31–32).<sup>17</sup> According to Wiefel (1991:93), “it is a dispute within the Roman synagogues about the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth which led the emperor to act against the Jews... since there was no central Jewish authority to mediate the dispute, Claudius turned vigorously against all Jews”. This understanding finds support in the fact that Priscilla and Aquila, who must have been believers in Christ before meeting Paul in Corinth, were involved in the same expulsion. They hosted Paul in Corinth since they shared a similar trade, and after 18 months they accompanied him to Syria, before he eventually left them in Ephesus (Acts 18.2, 11, 18-19).

From the analysis therefore, it can be concluded that internal conflicts in the synagogues began to emerge in the late 30's or early 40's as the gospel began to gain adherents in the synagogues. The loose structure of the synagogues in Rome and the lack of a central controlling body must have worked to the advantage of the penetration of the gospel (Wiefel, 1991:92–93; Lampe, 2003:12, 69). The presence of Judeans, who held strongly to their ethnic distinctiveness, and the messianic Judeans, who would have included the proselytes, God-fearers, and Greeks, who always formed part of the diaspora synagogues, though occupying a separate space (cf. Acts 13.43; 14.1; 17.17; 18.4) led to increased factions and tumultuous disputations (cf. Schreiner, 1998:13). This should not come as a surprise since it is exactly what was happening in the cities of the ancient Mediterranean as the message about Jesus Christ was reaching people beyond the Judean ethnic lines (cf. Acts 6.9-15; 13.45, 50; 4.2, 5; 14.9; 18.12-17). With the expulsion of the Judean community from Rome, the Gentile believers in Christ no longer functioned under Judean influence and therefore developed new strategies and organisational structures that would have included “house churches” or “tenement congregations” (cf. Rom 16.5, 23), something that was already a tradition in the East (cf. 1 Cor 16.19; Phm 3; Col 4.15) (Wiefel, 1991:94–96). Wright

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<sup>17</sup> The one scholar who strongly opposes this interpretation is Slingerland (1989:135–138). According to him, *Chrestus* should be treated as a reference to another person other than Christ since it was a common name during the period of Suetonius' writing. He could not have misspelt 'Christ'. He had a certain *Chrestus* in mind. However, Fitzmyer (1993:31) argues that precisely because both *Chrestos* and *Chrestus* were common Greek and Latin names, Suetonius did not understand the name *Christos* ('Christ' or 'anointed') and therefore confused it with the commonly used Greek name *Chrēstos*, pronounced at that time as *Christos*. It is therefore reasonable to hold that that dispute over Christ that caused the disturbances and led to the expulsion (cf. Calvert-Koyzis, 2004:116–117).

(2002:407) is probably right when he hypothesises that in that keeping with the anti-Judean phenomena in late antiquity, the Romans would have been glad to see the Judeans gone for good and regretful to see them return in the early days of Nero's reign. Upon their return, it is not difficult to imagine controversy and unrest between Judean and Gentile believers that is reflected in the Paul's letter to the Romans.

#### **4.4. Judean-Gentile divide and Paul's Romans: points of coherence**

##### **3.4.1. Paul's addressees: Judeans and Gentiles**

That Paul in Romans addresses an ethnically mixed congregation(s) is something that many scholars agree (cf. Minear, 1971:8–13; Wiefel, 1991:94–96; Marcus, 1989:68).<sup>18</sup> In fact, Sanders (1983:183) asserts that “scholars universally and doubtless correctly conclude that Rome was a mixed church”. The letter itself bears witness to this fact. Paul identifies his addressees as Gentiles (cf. 1.5-6, 13; 11:13; cf. 15.15-16), but also assumes a Judean audience (cf. 2.17; 4.1; 6.14; 7.1, 4; 16.7, 11 and 21). Importantly, the inclusive formula “Judean and Gentile/Greek” is ubiquitous in the letter (cf. 1.16; 2.9; 10; 3.9, 29-30; 9.24; 10.12). Importantly also, “the weak” and “the strong” in 14.1-15.7 are clearly linked with the Judeans (circumcision) and Gentiles in Rome (15.8-9). In this section, I will highlight two important features that provide significant points of coherence between the socio-historical situation described above and the content of Paul's letter: the presence and conflict between “the weak” and “the strong” and the “circumcision and uncircumcision” in Rome.

##### **3.4.2. ‘The weak’ and ‘the strong’ in Rome**

Paul's language of “the weak” (ὁ ἀσθενῶν) and “the strong” (οἱ δυνατοὶ) in Rom 14.1-15.13 is a significant evidence for an ethnically mixed audience in Rome but also the most clear evidence for ethnic strife between Judeans and Gentiles. A few scholars have however argued against such a position, notably, Karris (1991:66, 71), who maintains that Rom 14.1-15.13 “should be analysed for what it is: general, Pauline paraenesis and not so many pieces of polemic from which a scholar may reconstruct the position of the parties in Rome who occasioned the letter”. For him, Romans is addressed to a church that Paul never met,

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<sup>18</sup> I follow Lampe's (2003:359–360) argument that Paul never designates the Roman church as ἐκκλησία, only part of it is so addressed in 16.5 (τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν). The same chapter, however, reveals that there might have been a number of congregations in Rome: those of the household of Aristobulus, (τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου) (16.10); those of the household of Narcissus (τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου) (16.11); “Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas together with the brothers (τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀδελφούς) (16.14); and Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, together with all the saints (τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς πάντας ἁγίους) (16.15). This represents five congregations or house churches, and if one assumes that the rest of the people mentioned in the chapter belonged in other house churches, the number increases significantly (cf. Hultgren, 2011:699–703).

and therefore his language and exhortations to “the strong” and “the weak” should be treated as a “generalised adaptation” of his teachings to the more concrete situation in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 8; 9; 10.23-11:1). After an analysis of the two passages (Rom 14-15 and 1 Cor 8-10), Karris (1991:71–79) argues that there is a one-to-one connection between them. The Romans’ text is “theoretical development of the actual treatment” of the 1 Corinthians’ text and the few differences should be attributed to Paul’s attempt to generalise his earlier position for the Roman audience.

Karris’ position is challenged by Donfried (1991) and Watson (1991) in the same volume his essay appears. Donfried (1991:109) insists that while one may not doubt the clear similarities between the 1 Corinthians and Romans’ passages, the parallels should not be construed as proof of Paul’s dependence upon the former in order to write the latter. Paul was free to apply similar principles in two different situations. But a more forceful refutation of Karris’ argument is offered by Reasoner (1999), whose study analyses the relationship between “the weak” and “the strong” against their socio-historical background and how the language fits within the context of Romans as a whole. Reasoner (1999:27–45) does not deny that there are similarities between the texts, however, he contends that verbal links between them are inconclusive and lack the corresponding vocabularies and concepts. For example, he argues that the centrality of the main verbal imperative, *προσλαμβάνομαι* in Romans (14.1, 3; 15.7x2) and the prominence of the theme of *πίστις* (14.1, 22, 23x2) has no parallel in the 1 Corinthians passage. In fact, neither of the words is found there. Furthermore, *κοινός*, a word that is linked to the attitude of “the weak” towards meat in Romans (14.14x3) is also completely absent in 1 Corinthians. Conversely, key terminologies and concepts that are prominent in the 1 Corinthians passage like *γνώσις* (8.1, 7, 10-11); *ἐλευθερία* (10.19); *τὸ εἰδωλόθυτον* (8.1, 4,7,10, 19, 28); *ἐξουσία* (8.9; 9.4-6, 12, 18), *συνείδησις* (10. 25, 27) are all not found in Rom 14.1-15.13 (cf. Hultgren, 2011:498). Reasoner (1999:41) concludes that the Romans text, and indeed the whole letter, arose from the situation of both Paul and the Roman believers. Rom 14-15 “appears to be practical teaching, focused on an actual situation in which Paul’s first readers lived”.

Having dealt with Karris’ argument, I can now proceed to show how “the weak” and “the strong” in Romans are linked to the specific socio-historical situation in Rome. The first link is supported by how Paul transitions from addressing himself to the specifics of “the weak” and “the strong” (14.1-15.4) to summoning both to unity and mutual acceptance, while providing the theological basis for that (15.4-13). After addressing himself to the specific needs, Paul prays that God would grant *you* (plural – “the weak” and “the strong”) *to be of one mind with one another* so that with *one accord you* (both groups) *may with one voice glorify God*

(15.6). Then he summons them to accept one another just as Christ has accepted *you* (both groups) for the glory of God (15.7) (cf. Marcus, 1989:68; Esler, 2003:342). Paul then proceeds to show how Christ has accepted *them*, but now he designates the two groups (circumcision) “Judeans” and “Gentiles”: “For I say, Christ has become a servant (διάκονος) of *the* circumcision (Judeans) in order to establish the promises God made to *their* ancestors (τῶν πατέρων), and so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy (15.8-9). According to Paul, Christ’s death is a service to the Judeans, for through it God’s promises to their forefathers are ultimately fulfilled. And since the promises encompassed the Gentiles, through the same death, a way is opened for the Gentiles to glorify God for his mercy. In order to proof this, Paul invokes a string of OT scriptures that speak God’s long-intended redemptive plan of bringing Judeans and Gentiles together as his one people (15.9b-12) (cf. Hultgren, 2011:530; Kruse, 2012:532–534).

The second important link between the Judean-Gentile conflict in Rome is that “the weak” are tied to aspects that have to do with Judean ethnic identity: the observance of kosher laws, which included questions regarding what is “clean” (καθαρός) and ‘unclean” (κοινὸν) (14.14, 20) and the observance of days (14.2-3, 5-6). On the one hand, ethnic Judeans with a few Gentiles (former proselytes or God-fearers) would have renounced meat (14.2, 15, 20) as part of their commitment to prohibitions against meat and food offered to idols and partaking of blood (cf. Lev 17.10f; Ex 34.15; Acts 15.20, 29; 21.25; Rev 2.14). This seems to have been common in Rome. Josephus (*Life* 13-14) reports of some Judean priests who, while visiting Rome around the time that *Romans* was written, chose to eat only figs and nuts in order to avoid contamination. Hultgren (2011:499; cf. Lampe, 2003:73–74; Watson, 1991:203–207) argues that it was common for Judeans to refrain from eating meat especially when the persons were living in a pagan environment (cf. *Tob* 1.11; *2 Macc* 5.27). Daniel refrained from meat and wine whilst in captivity in Babylon (*Dan* 1.8-16; 10.3), Judith refrained from food and wine offered to her by an Assyrian officer (*Jud* 12.1-2), and Esther took pride in not sharing at Haman’s table, refusing wine that may have been offered in libation (*LXX Esther* 14.17). On the other hand, the ‘days’ (*Rom* 14.5) that “the weak” kept in Rome would have been the Sabbath day together with other Judean festivals. Sabbath observance was one of the most characteristic features of Roman Judeans. In fact, according to Williams (2004:15–17; cf. Barclay, 1996a:298–299), the observance “was such a pronounced feature of Jewish identity in Rome that their Gentile neighbours not only noticed it but commented upon it more than upon any other Jewish ritual practice”. Furthermore, the Sabbath day was also a day of fasting in commemoration of the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 63 and 37 BC. It was a day of sorrow and repentance rather

than a day of joy and thanksgiving. It is right to suppose that the Judean believers, in solidarity with the rest of the Judean community, observed the Sabbath day.

It is reasonable to conclude that the identity of “the weak” in Rome included ethnic Judeans, with some Gentiles (proselytes or God-fearers), who although they had come to trust in Jesus as the Messiah, still held strongly to the exclusiveness of Judean ethnicity. “The strong” on the other hand, would have included Gentiles, with some Judeans like Paul – cf. 15.1), who regarded the specific Judean ethnic laws and practices as no longer binding.<sup>19</sup> “The weak” believers would have regarded their ethnic laws as important and by practicing them they would have been demonstrating their ethnic solidarity and loyalty to the larger Judean community in Rome. Indeed, according to Dunn (1988b:805), they would have been unwilling to give up “something of fundamental importance within their Jewish heritage, something close to the heart of the distinctiveness of the whole Jewish (and now Jewish Christian) tradition and identity”. Furthermore, as Barclay (1996a:298) notes, some would have been regulars in the synagogue gatherings:

Any Jews in Rome who regularly ignored the Sabbath would not only undermine the Jewish stance on this matter (over which they had won official recognition) but also forfeit an important means of maintaining their position in the Jewish community. To forego the social and educational opportunities of the synagogue meeting was to jeopardize the maintenance of one’s Jewish identity.

### 3.4.3. The ‘circumcision’ and ‘uncircumcision’ in Rome

I have already highlighted Paul’s rationale for mutual acceptance between “the weak” and “the strong” or Judeans and Gentiles: Christ has become a servant of the Judeans (*περιτομή*) in order to establish God’s promises to their fathers so that the Gentiles (*ἀκροβυστία*) can glorify God for his mercy. Paul’s switch from his weak and strong language to circumcision (*περιτομή*) and Gentiles (*ἀκροβυστία*) is significant, since the language pervades the first four chapters of Romans. Importantly, Holladay (2003:453–454) argues that while the terms Ἰουδαῖος, Ἑβραῖος, Ἰσραήλ and their cognates are important markers of Judean ethnic identity in Paul, they must be considered together with his circumcision and uncircumcision language. The sheer frequency of the terms in the Pauline corpus (*περιτέμνω* - 8x in the undisputed letters, 1x in a disputed letter; *περιτομή* - 25x in the undisputed letters, 6x in the

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<sup>19</sup> The fact that the identity of “the weak” (Judeans) and “the strong” (Gentiles) includes a minority from either side does not in any way weaken the argument advanced here of a Judean-Gentile ethnic tension in Rome. Only a view of ethnicity that understands ethnicity as a fixed quality would argue for such a weakness. But as it has already been argued, ethnicity is negotiated between aspects of fixity as well as fluidity. At times ethnicity can be highlighted while at other times ignored depending on the social-political or economic circumstances. Furthermore, as Stanley (2013:179–180) rightly posits, “Ethnic identities are not exclusive; an individual can have multiple ethnic identities, with some being activated and others lying dormant at any given time”.

disputed letters; and ἀκροβυστία - 16x in the undisputed letters, 3x in the disputed letters) is itself an indication of how basic the categories were for Paul and his interpretation of reality around him. While Paul has in mind the physical state of being circumcised or uncircumcised (cf. Rom 2.25, 26; 3.1; 4.4.10, 11, 12; 1 Cor 7.18-19; Gal 2.3, 5.2, 3, 5, 11; 6.12, 13, 15; Phil 3.5), this understanding quickly merges with his understanding of both ‘circumcision’ and ‘uncircumcision’ as “ethnic labels,” with “the circumcised’ or ‘(the) circumcision’ meaning “Judeans” while the “the uncircumcised” or “the uncircumcision” meaning “Gentiles” (cf. Rom 2.26, 27; 3.30; 4.9, 12; 15.8; Gal 2.7; also Col 3.11; 4.11; Tit 1.10).

But a more significant issue to grapple with is the origin of Paul’s use of the language and whether it bears at all on the Judean-Gentile ethnic situation in Rome and Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans. According to Marcus (1989:77–79), Eph 2.11-16 hints to what might have been the origins of the use of the terms περιτομή and ἀκροβυστία as designations for people groups. The passage contrasts the Ephesian’s former situation without Christ and their present situation with Christ. In their former life, the author says that they were Gentiles in the flesh (τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί), called ἀκροβυστία by the so called περιτομή, and lacked the most significant privileges reserved only for the Judeans: separated from the Messiah; alienated from Israel’s citizenship (πολιτεία); foreigners (ξένος) to the covenant promises; without hope and without God in the world. Interestingly also, the author states clearly that a barrier and a dividing wall of hostility - the law and its commandments - separated Judeans from the Gentiles, something that we have found to have been actually the case in the diaspora.

According to Marcus (1989:77) this passage provides the socio-historical situation in which ἀκροβυστία and περιτομή came to be used as designations for Gentiles and Judeans. In agreement with the OT use of the adjective ‘uncircumcised’ (‘ārēl) as a term of scorn, disgrace and insult, the Ephesian passage “indicates that ἀκροβυστία is not a self-designation of Gentiles but a manifestation of the dividing wall of hostility, an insulting nickname used by Jews for Gentiles” Eventually, Marcus (1989:77) says, since it is common for people to express their prejudice with nicknames especially where there is a history of ethnic or racial animosity, ἀκροβυστία became “an ethnic slur designating the Gentile person”. Περιτομή on the other hand, became an ethnic slur for the Judeans, especially due to the colossal ridicule that was associated with its practice. Commenting on the Ephesian text, Barth (1974:254–259) emphasises that “the spiteful designation of Gentiles by the term ‘the uncircumcision’ and the factual separation of the Jews from the Gentiles were as real as the presence or absence of the distinctive bodily mark. Paul alludes to name-calling or to nickname, and he accepts it as fact.” To return to Romans, because of the age-long hostility between Judeans and Gentiles, Marcus (1989:79) says:

I would suggest that 'foreskin' and 'circumcision' originally were epithets hurled at Gentiles and at Jews respectively by members of the opposite group in Rome and elsewhere. Use of such epithets would have become particularly common when Gentiles and Jews were thrown into close contact with each other, as seems to have been the case in the ethnically mixed Roman Christian church.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to explore and investigate Judean and Gentile ethnicities and relations in ancient antiquity as an essential background to Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans. The first section considered a possible framework from which ethnic group, ethnicity and ethnic conflict can be understood. It was discovered that the primordial-constructionist polarity that pervades modern understanding of ethnicity needs nuancing. Jones' definition of ethnicity that integrates the primordialist and constructionist claims of ethnicity while transcending them was found to be more plausible. Two key elements of ethnic identity were emphasised: culture and common ancestry. Both these features were found to have been essential in ancient ethnicity. It was also found that though ancient ethnicity should largely be understood from a primordial perspective, there were also aspects of social constructionism. It was emphasised that although ethnic diversity is not an automatic cause of ethnic tensions, conflicts are bound to happen when the ethnic groups involved sense a threat to their survival, when the groups interpret reality differently, when there are entrenched perceptions of the "Other" as evil, morally superior, dangerous, prejudiced etc.

The second section considered Judaism as ethnic praxis in the diaspora and ways in which it impacted the Judean-Gentile relationships. It was found that Judean ethnicity was negotiated around questions of ancestry and culture. Judeans were strict adherents to their unique ethnicity, which was essentially defined by their specific ancestral and cultural claims embodied in the Torah. The Torah afforded them their ethnic bond, the social and symbolic resources from which they all drew and the practical distinctions that separated them from the rest of the world. However, despite the rigidity of their ethnic boundaries, at times, Gentiles, who showed interest or admired Judaism's antiquity and its sense of moral superiority could cross them and tentatively become Judeans through a strict process of socialization. It was also discovered that Judeans' unique ethnic claims engendered ethnic strife with their neighbours. They held that their ethnicity was of divine origin, and therefore could not have been easily abandoned. While their cultural claims were largely countercultural, they fought tooth and nail to protect them, while demanding equal treatment with the rest of the peoples. The situation that their ethnic claims engendered was always a breeding ground for ethnic animosity, strife and violence.

The third section considered the specific Judean-Gentile situation in Rome and the origin of the early Roman Christian movement. It was discovered that the bad ethnic relations between the Judeans and the Gentiles across the ancient Mediterranean world were replicated in the imperial capital. Judeans were among the most distinctive ethnic groups due to their strict adherence to their ancestral laws and customs. They tended to stick together and resistant integration with others. They had pronounced boundaries between them and others that included an intolerant theology, circumcision, Sabbath observance and kosher laws. As Walters (1993:54–55) emphasises: “For other foreign groups these distinguishing marks may have occasioned only limited negative reactions. After all, foreign groups had their own gods and customs as well. However, from the vantage point of conservative Romans, Jewish resistance to Roman acculturation and Roman gods made the Jews appear anti-Roman, aloof, misanthropic, and dangerous for Roman mores.”

It was also discovered that although Roman Judeans had government protection, the latter actually oppressed and eventually expelled them from Rome. The masses were not friendly either, although quite a few were attracted to their antiquity and moral superiority. The last expulsion that was reviewed was significant for it happened at a defining period in the history of the early Christian movement in Rome. I have argued that a plausible explanation for the conflict that led to their expulsion was the proclamation of the message about Jesus as the long awaited Judean Messiah within the synagogues. Luke tells us that *all* the Judeans (those of traditional persuasion and those who had come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah) were expelled from Rome. In the intervening period, the fourth section has showed that, the early Christian movement in Rome took a new shape as the Judean element was largely, if not completely, eliminated. The movement became more *Gentilish* in character as it attracted more Gentiles who previously had not been involved with Judaism. A more anti-Judean attitude definitely would have crept in. When the Judeans began streaming back into Rome they found a completely new environment in which they were a minority and almost unwelcome, where previously they had exercised enormous power and control. Controversy and unrest emerged between Judean believers (“the weak” or “the circumcision”) who sought to maintain their ancestral and cultural claims in solidarity with the rest of Roman Judeans. The Gentile believers (“the strong” or “the uncircumcision”) on the other hand, would have been obstinate in their rejection of those uniquely Judean practices, considering them unnecessary and impinging on their freedom in Christ.

The question that now remains to be answered is how might have Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 addressed that specific Judean-Gentile ethnic situation in Rome. This is the task of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER IV: Paul's ethnic rhetoric: equalising Judeans and Gentiles and creating kinship between them under Abraham's fatherhood**

This chapter investigates how Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 might have addressed the extant ethnic tensions between Judeans and Gentiles in Rome thereby realising unity among them. The approach of the chapter is one that takes seriously the Judean-Gentile social-historical situation described above and the contingency of the letter to the Romans. In other words, it takes seriously the socio-historical context in which Paul and his audiences are embedded as a significant element that aids us in our interpretation of how he frames his gospel and what he wants to achieve. Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans, though influenced by the universalising element of his gospel, it had a particular focus on uniting Judeans and Gentiles in Rome now divided along ethnic lines. According to Wendland (2002:183–184; cf. Thurén, 1995:49–53), ancient rhetorical practice involved influencing an audience to think and behave in a particular way. The speaker/author endeavoured to *convince* the audience/addressees about the legitimacy of certain proposals and to *persuade* them to change their thought patterns and conduct accordingly. In an epistolary argument like Romans, the author seeks to address a particular *problem* by providing a *solution*. If ethnic strife was a problem in Rome, how might Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 have addressed it? It will be argued that Paul's ethnic rhetoric equalises Judeans and Gentiles under sin (1.18-3.20) and the gospel (3.21-31) and constructs kinship between them under Abraham's fatherhood (4.1-25), thereby realising the much needed unity.

The chapter proceeds as follows: the first section (4.1) briefly considers Paul's ethnic map and its bearing on the interpretation of Rom 1-4. The second section (4.2) brings Romans 1-4 within its socio-historical and rhetorical context by particularly considering the meaning of "righteousness" and the "works of the law," both significant themes for ancient Judaism and Paul's rhetorical argumentation. The third section (4.3) investigates how Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Rom 1.18-3.20 realises the equality of Judeans and Gentiles by placing them under a common plight - sin. The fourth section (4.4) explores how Paul's argumentation in Rom 3.21-31 realises the equality of Judeans and Gentiles through the gospel. The fifth section (4.5) examines how Paul creates kinship between Judeans and Gentiles under Abrahamic fatherhood. The last section (4.6) concludes the chapter.

#### 4.1. Paul's "ethnic map": an apostle to the Gentiles and conciliator of Judeans and Gentiles

Who did Paul think he was? What were his views about Judeans and Gentiles? What did he think was his role in bridging the Judean-Gentile divide? These are questions that this section considers briefly before proceeding with the main exegetical sections.

Paul was born in Tarsus, a significant city in Asia Minor (Acts 9.11; 21.39; 22.3). Strabo (*Geo* 14.4.12-15; 14.13-15) describes the city as having been a centre of Hellenistic culture, rhetoric and Stoic philosophy (cf. Barrett, 1994:453–454; Bock, 2007:658). Furthermore, like many other Greek *poleis*, the city was ethnically diverse, with a population that would have included the natives, the lineal descendants of Greek and Seleucid's settlers, the Romans, and diverse immigrants from the ancient Mediterranean (Stanley, 2013:182–183; Witherington, 1998:662–663). Jerusalem, and Judea, where Paul immigrated for training (Acts 22:3; cf. 26.5), though inhabited largely by Judeans, was not free from Greek and Roman influence. In fact, Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.267-279) reports incidences of ethnic strife between Judeans and Greeks around Judea. In essence, Paul would not have escaped the diversity of the peoples who lived or travelled in this region during his years of training (Stanley, 2013:183).

Both the Acts narrative and Pauline letters depict Paul as an ethnic Judean. Acts portrays him as a Torah-observant Judean; one committed to the ancestral laws of his people, even when other Judeans themselves accused him of teaching rebellion against it (21.21, 39; 22.3; 24.14; 28.17, 20). From his letters, Paul portrays himself as one who intimately associated himself with Judean communities in the diaspora, even to the point of being disciplined by their authorities (cf. 2 Cor 11. 24). He speaks of himself as having been circumcised on the traditional eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a former Pharisee and zealot, and a strict adherent of the law (Phil 3.5-6). He identifies himself as an ethnic Israelite (Rom 11.1), and in fact, while defending himself against his competitors in Corinth he invokes his ethnic credentials (2 Cor 11.22). Similarly, in Galatians (2.15-16), where the truth of the gospel is at stake, he invokes the ethnic status he shares with the rest of Judean believers in order to defend it saying: "We (ἡμεῖς) Judeans by birth and not sinners from the Gentiles" know that a person is conferred with righteousness on the basis of faith in Christ and not by the "works of the law".

But it is also clear from his letters that Paul had come to regard some of these ethnic credentials as rubbish in comparison to the greater value of knowing the Messiah (Phil 3.7-9). So he speaks of circumcision as nothing, maintaining that what matters is keeping God's

commandments and being a new creation (1 Cor 7.19; Gal 5.6; 6.15; cf. Rom 2.25-29). He claims to be “convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself” (Rom 14.14). In its context the statement implies that he no longer regarded Judean kosher laws as a relevant factor in the new era inaugurated by the Messiah. While writing to the Galatians, he speaks of his “former conduct in Judaism” – his progress in Judaism beyond his contemporaries and zeal for his ancestral laws and customs (1.13-14). According to Dunn (1999:184), the description “speaks strongly of the Pharisaic commitment to separatism and scrupulosity in Torah obedience, which is reflected also in Phil 3.4-7”. All this had been radically re-evaluated in Christ (Phil 3.17f. Gal 1.15f. 2.19). Central to that re-evaluation was his calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9; Rom 1.5; 11.13; 15.16). This role was formally ratified by other apostles, who confirmed that he was entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised (Gentiles) while Peter to the circumcised (Judeans) (cf. Gal 2.8-10; Acts 15). Furthermore, as an apostle to the Gentiles, he sought to defend and preserve the “truth of the gospel” for the sake of the Gentiles and against any attempts to force them to Judaize (cf. Gal 2.11-15).

An important aspect of Paul’s life and identity, as Barclay (1995:90) highlights, is that the major part of his life that we are acquainted of was spent while traversing the diaspora. Within this geographical and social space, Paul’s gospeling and letter-writing took place. But it is also within this space, as chapter III has attempted to show, that Judeans spread by the millions and faced a common intellectual and practical necessity - defining and defending their identity amidst the ruling social and cultural norms of the pagan Gentiles. Paul had to work hard within the same social parameters to redefine and practice the gospel. But one important aspect of Paul’s thinking that is ubiquitous in his letters is his conditioning to interpret human diversity appositionally. His letters betray the ethnic diversity of the first-century world by the way he couples ‘Judeans’ and ‘Gentiles’, as well as through the way he interprets the two worlds they represent.

It is clear, for example, that he highly regards his own people. That he prioritises Judeans over the Gentiles (cf. Rom 1.16, 2.9-10), a priority that he worked out in ministry strategy in the diaspora. He always sought to evangelise them first (cf. Acts 13.4-5, 14-44; 16.13-15; 17.1-4, 10-12, 16-17; 18.1-4; 19.8; 28.16-24). Furthermore, when he speaks of Judeans or Judaism, he clearly explains them in terms of their unique ethnic identity which is defined by their common historical memories, ancestry, laws and customs (Rom 2.17-20; 9.4-5). In fact, he insists that there is an advantage in being an ethnic Judean (3.1-2). His emotional attachment to them is unquestionable. In utter sincerity and anguish of heart he wishes that he were accursed (*ἀνάθεμα*) and separated from Christ on their behalf (Rom 9.1-3). Even

their rejection of the gospel and subsequent rejection by God, they are serving the interest of the Gentiles, and indeed the whole cosmos. They still are the beloved for the sake of their ancestors, for God's gift and calling for them is irrevocable (Rom 11.11-15). In other words, as Hodge (2007:50) observes, for Paul, Judeans are a people who find their unique identity in the stories and memories of their ancestors; the promises and covenants God established with their forefathers; the laws and cultic symbols and ceremonies that marked them as a special people of God and separated them from the rest of the world's peoples.

When it comes to the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη), Paul's letters manifests a similar contempt for them as is found in the LXX and other Hellenistic Judean writings (cf. Scott, 1995:57; Barclay, 1996b:388).<sup>20</sup> Standing on that tradition, he juxtaposes "living like a Gentile and like a Judean" (ἐθνικῶς καὶ οὐχὶ Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῆς) (Gal 2.14). He also speaks of "Judeans by birth and not Gentile sinners" (φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοὶ) (Gal 2.15). While challenging the high level of sexual immorality among the Corinthian believers, he says that it has no comparison, even among the Gentiles (1 Cor 5.1). Elsewhere he summarily charges the Gentiles as a people "who do not know God" (1 Thess 4.5), a world that is inherently godless, unrighteous, and alienated from the God of Israel (see 4.3.2 below, cf. Eph 2.11f.).

But without a doubt, he considered the members of the churches he planted in the Roman provinces of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia as somehow lifted from such ethical morass. He for example refers to the Corinthian believers as those who "were *formerly* Gentiles led astray to mute idols" (1 Cor 12.2), and those from Thessalonica as having "turned from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess 1.9). Most importantly, within those communities of faith, while continuing the normal Judean intolerance to sexual immorality and idolatry (cf. 1 Cor 6.18; 1 Cor 10.14), Paul advocated for a different type of social space - one in which being a Judean or Gentile no longer mattered (Gal 3.28). We can be sure that Paul was not unaware of the socio-historical ethnic divide between Judeans and

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<sup>20</sup> According to Scott (1995:121–123), of the 45 times Paul uses ἔθνος in his uncontested letters, 30% of those occur in conjunction with OT citations. He uses the singular only once (Rom 10.19) - a citation from Deut 32.21. Otherwise, Paul uses the word exclusively in the plural and in accordance with the OT and Hellenistic-Judean's three senses: first, for 'the nations' as in nations of the world, including Israel – though he never designates Israel as ἔθνος but always λαός. Secondly, he uses the plural to refer to "the non-Judean nations" (i.e. the Gentiles). In Rom 15.10-11 for example, citing Deut 32.43, ἔθνη is contrasted to the λαός of God, just as Ps 117:1 contrasts πάντα τὰ ἔθνη to πάντες οἱ λαοί. Paul viewed his grace and apostleship as directed towards bringing the obedience of faith ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (1.5; cf. 15.18). In that context he also defines the nations as composed of 'Greeks' and Barbarians' (Rom 1.13-14). Thirdly, Paul uses the plural to designate individuals or people groups residing in the Gentile world (Rom 11.13; 1 Cor 12.2; cf. Eph 2.11). However, he never uses ἔθνος in its singular form to refer to a single 'Gentile', but only contrasts a single Ἰουδαῖος with a singular Ἕλληνα (cf. Rom 1.16; 2.9; 10.12; Gal 3.28; cf. Col 3.11). It is nevertheless not always clear whether he uses Ἕλληνα that way as a substitute for ἔθνος, though both are at time used synonymously.

Gentiles. Yet, as his ministry strategy affirms, he made himself a slave of all; when among the Judeans he lived as a Judean, though not subject to the Judean law, and when among the Gentiles, he lived as a Gentile, though not without the law of Christ. He had become “all things to all men” (1 Cor 9.20-23). Commenting on this text, Hays (2011:153), says that Paul understood himself “as a conciliator, seeking to overcome cultural and ethnic divisions in order to bring people of all sorts into the one community of faith”. In other words, as an apostle of Christ, Paul understood part of his role as bringing Judeans and Gentiles together in a new social identity comprising of Judeans and Gentiles.

#### **4.2. Romans 1-4 in its socio-historical and rhetorical context**

The majority of scholarship recognises that Rom 1.16-4.25 is a complete unit within the rhetorical argumentation of Paul’s letter. Traditionally, commentators whose interest is theological exposition of Romans argue that the twin themes of the section are human sinfulness (1.18-3.20) and God’s free offer of salvation (3.21-4.25) (cf. Moo, 1996:92; Kruse, 2012:82; Dunn, 1996:845–846; Schreiner, 1998:25). Wright (2002:405, 410) helpfully nuances his structure so as to reflect the Judean-Gentile motif. He speaks of the challenge that God’s righteousness presents to Gentiles and Judeans alike and God’s faithfulness to the covenant as the twin themes that bind the section. As it was highlighted in chapter I, there is nothing necessarily wrong in analysing Romans this way. Though not a Christian theologian in the modern sense of the word, Paul’s letters are attempts to theologise for his first-century audiences. Furthermore, the themes that these scholars highlight are without a doubt present in the letter and significant. Paul’s ethnic rhetoric is consonant with a clear universalising element of his gospel. The two categories, Judeans and Gentiles, from Judaism’s point of view, represent the whole of humanity, and indeed reverberate with Paul’s own vision of the “reconciliation of the world” (Rom 11.15; cf. 8.18f.).

However, as it has been suggested in this study, mere proclamation of the gospel and calling his addressees into a life that conforms to the gospel was not the only method Paul employed to address the first-century social issues that he and his churches faced. His letters manifest more than that. Particularly, his ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 manifests an attempt to use contemporaneous ethnic rhetoric to equalise and create kinship between Judeans and Gentiles in Rome thereby realising unity among them. Two important concepts, ‘righteousness’ and ‘works of the law’ were significant to Judean ethnic identity, but are also salient in this part of Romans. How are they to be understood in the light of the socio-historical situation at hand?

#### 4.2.1. The social implications of 'righteousness' in its first-century context

As it became clear in chapter II, what Paul means by the term (God's) righteousness is a point of contestation between the new perspective and the neotraditionalists. The new perspective scholars argue that in its first-century context, the term has to do in the first instance with how to tell who belongs to God's family. As such, the doctrine of righteousness of faith is polemical, with its import on the inclusion of the Gentiles as the people of God on similar terms with the Judeans. The neotraditionists on the other hand, argue that righteousness in Paul is exclusively soteriological, contrasting the two ways in which human beings are saved; on the basis of the righteousness that comes through the Torah or on the basis of faith in Christ. Paul's interest is the salvation of all human beings through righteousness by faith. My intention here is not adjudicating the two schools, but to highlight certain aspects of the theme of righteousness that are significant to the socio-historical situation described above.

Whatever position one holds, righteousness in Paul must mean, among other things, an advantaged status or condition that is reckoned to a person or group of persons. Talbert (2002:35–42) provides a handy summary of how the *dikai* word cognates are used in the LXX and other ancient Judean writings. According to him, righteousness is a covenant-relational term. People are righteous because they have fulfilled the demands of a relationship or are unrighteous because they have failed to keep those demands (cf. Seifrid, 2001:424).<sup>21</sup> From Talbert (2002:37-38), three things can be said with regard to meaning of the *dikai* words in the LXX. Firstly, when used with regard to God what they mean or imply is: (1) God is righteous (Neh 9.8; Isa 45.21; cf. *Jub* 1.5-6); (2) God's covenant faithfulness (Gen 19:19; Judg 5:11; Ps 30.1, Isa 45.23 (3) God is *righteoused* by people (Isa 42.21; cf. *Sir* 18.2); (4) God *righteouses* people (1 Kgs 8.31-32; Isa 53.11, 50.8), and lastly (5) God's righteousness is given to people (Ps 71.1-2; cf. *Arist* 280).

Secondly, when the words are used in contexts that involves God and people, Talbert (2002:39) says: (1) the declarative and courtroom element is very minimal (Isa 50.8) (cf. Esler, 1998:163); (2) no major distinction is made between the meaning of the noun (righteousness) and the verb (to *righteous*), but both speak of his character and activity (cf. Ps 50.14; Isa 43.25-26; 51.5, 8); (3) there is both a granting of a new status, which results from removal of guilt (cf. Ps 50.14; Isa 43. 25-26) and a transformation (cf. Ps 71.1-2); (4) the meaning of the word change depending on whether a person is righteous or unrighteous.

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<sup>21</sup> Dunn (2008:206) also affirms this when he says: "In Hebrew thought... righteousness is something one has precisely in one's relationships as a social being. People are righteous when they meet the claims which others have on them by virtue of their relationship."

If righteous, to be *righteoused* is to have the righteousness accepted (3 Kgs 8.32; Isa 53.11), but if unrighteous, to be *righteoused* is to have one's guilt removed (Isa 43.25-26) or delivered from oppression (Isa 45.26); (5) at times, human righteousness is shown to be dependent on divine enablement (Ps 71.1-2; *Arist* 280).

Thirdly, according to Talbert (2002:39-40), Paul follows closely how the *dikai* word cognates are used in the LXX and other Judean writings. Hence, he speaks of God being righteous (Rom 3.26) or God's righteousness (Rom 1.17; 3.5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10.3). He also speaks of God being *righteoused* by people (3.4-5, 26) and God *righteousing* or not *righteousing* people (2.13; 3.20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4.5; 5.1, 9; 6.7; 8.30, 33; Gal 2.16, 17; 3.8, 11, 24). Moreover, he speaks of "a righteousness of my own derived from the law" and "the righteousness from (*ἐκ*) God" (Phil 3.9) or the "gift of righteousness" (Rom 5.17). In other words, Paul uses righteousness and its cognates to denote God's quality or character, his divine activity, and a condition granted to persons by God as a gift. When the verb is used, either God is deemed to be *righteoused* by people (Rom 3.4-5, 26), or people are *righteoused* by God (Rom 2.13; 3.20; 8.33-34; 1 Cor 4.4; Gal 2.16; 3.11) or "granted a new status or condition as a gift from God" (Rom 3.24; 26, 28, 30).

While the uses of righteousness described here have a bearing on the study of Romans 1-4, it is this last use (God's *righteousing* activity or granting of a righteous status) which is largely significant for the purposes of this study. According to Jewett (2007:272, 275-276), compared with the contemporary understanding of righteousness, the understanding of righteousness that Paul envisages is radical. Among the Greco-Roman communities, gods were not known for their righteousness. They were only invoked to intervene justly on behalf of their favourites. The Romans did not speak of the righteousness of their gods. God's *Iustitia* only emerges during Augustan period as a way of celebrating the Roman imperial cult. Roman gods only endorsed the justice of Rome because of the peoples' virtue and piety – both important moral aspects of the Roman culture. The essence of equality was not in view but imperial subjugation. Furthermore, in my review of both Wright and Esler, I emphasised that, from first-century Judeans' point of view, righteousness fundamentally condensed the privileged and hallowed identity that emanated from being an Israelite. It defined those who adhered to the primordial covenant that God had with their ancestors as was enshrined in the Torah. In terms of social identity, righteousness demonstrated to them something that was essential to their ethnic identity, making them proud of themselves and giving them a criterion by which to judge other peoples around them. La Piana (1927:385) emphasises that Judean intolerance and supposition that "they alone possessed truth and righteousness" made their neighbours lose patience for them. In the new regime inaugurated

by Christ, however, the status of righteousness that Paul envisages is made available to both Judeans and Gentiles who have faith in Christ. It should not surprise us, therefore, that Paul employs the language of righteousness almost exclusively in contexts that have to do with Judeans and Gentiles; where questions about the law and its practices are in view. Furthermore, he sought to reapply the envied status to the church – now composed of Judeans and Gentiles - and doing so, sever it from its social sphere where hitherto it had lodged as an ethnic identifier of the Judeans.

#### **4.2.2. The social implications of “the works of the law” in their first-century context**

The word ‘law’ (νόμος) in its various forms appears 35 times in Romans 2-4. The phrase ‘works or deeds of *the* law’ (ἔργων νόμου) appears in Rom 3.20 and 3.28 (cf. Gal 2.16 (3x); 3.2, 5, 10). But the phrase also appears in its abbreviated form ‘works’ (ἔργων) in Rom 3.27; 4.2, 6 & 3. According to de Boer (2011:145–148), the expression ἔργων νόμου is conspicuously absent from the Hebrew Bible, the LXX and the rest of the NT. The only exact parallel is found in a letter found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT). The author of the letter writes: “We have written to you some of *the works of the law* [*ma’ăšê ha-Torah*] that we think are good for you and for your people, for we saw that you have intellect and knowledge of the law” (4Q398 frag 14-17 2.2-4). In the context, de Boer argues that the expression means “the precepts [or commandments] of the law.” Furthermore, in several other texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls the term *ma’ăšîm* means ‘works’, which “must refer to the actual observances or doing of the precepts of the law” (cf. 1 QS 5.20-21; 1QS 6.18, Gen 20.9; 44.15; Ex 23.12). From this, de Boer concludes that the phrase ‘works of the law’ in Galatians and Romans means “actions performed or carried out in obedience to the many commandments of the Mosaic Law as preserved in the Pentateuch. The phrase ‘works of the law’ thus refers to actual ‘observance (doing) of the law’” (de Boer, 2011:146).

The definition that de Boer offers agrees with that offered by Dunn as highlighted in chapter II. Similarly, Gathercole (2002:92) argues that the phrase “should be understood primarily as deeds done in obedience to the *totality* of the Torah”. Hays (1996:151–153) makes an important observation with this regard. According to him, the Torah (ὁ νόμος) as is used by Paul, speaks of the Mosaic law which prescribed Israel’s standard code of conduct. In doing it simultaneously accomplished two purposes: first, it revealed God’s will, and second, it marked off Israel as a distinct people from the rest of the nations. On the one hand, “To be a member of God’s people is to find oneself obligated to adhere to the norms articulated in the Mosaic Torah. That this covenant obligation was understood, within the context of Judaism, not as a burden but as a privilege is clearly recognised in Paul’s diatribal address to an

imagined Jewish interlocutor who ‘boasts in the law’ (Rom 2.23).” On the other hand, the Torah set Israel apart as “a particular people of God, a people who are to serve as ‘a light to those in darkness’ (the Gentiles) (cf. Isa 49.6; Rom 2.19). The Torah created and defined Israel’s ethnicity. That is why Paul calls them *οἱ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ* (Rom 3.19) or *οἱ ἐκ νόμου* (Rom 4.14).

This definition of the law and its works is consonant with what I have established in chapter III to have been characteristic of first-century Judaism. There I have argued that the Torah provided the symbolic worldview and resources from which all Judeans drew. It required Judeans to be holy and separate and therefore engendered an attitude of moral superiority over the Gentiles. It organised them and afforded them the social distinctions and boundaries that marked them as an ethnic group. Indeed, the Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism had to be re-socialised through a severe practice of the law. The understanding also finds support in the letter to the Ephesians (2.11-22), a text which I have already referred to in chapter III. But it suffices to reiterate here that the passage clearly described the rift and boundary that marked off Judeans (*περιτομή*) from the Gentiles (*ἀκροβυστία*). The Gentiles’ social distance from Israel’s citizenship is described by the word “far off” (*μακράν*) (2.13, 17). But Israel is described as being “near” (*ἐγγύς*) (2.17). Both words are used in the OT with similar connotations (cf. Deut 28.49; 29.22; 1 Kgs 8.41; Isa 5.26; Jer 5.15; Ps 148.14). Most significantly, Ephesians links the rift, also called “the middle wall of partition” and “the hostility” with “the law of commandments in ordinances” (*τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν*). Commenting on the text, O’Brien (1999:196) says: “The barrier was, in fact the Mosaic law itself with its holiness code ... It separated Jews from Gentiles both religiously and sociologically, and caused deep-seated hostility. The enmity which was caused by the Jews’ separateness was often accompanied by a sense of superiority on their part” (cf. Hoehner, 2002:375; Thielman, 2010:163–170). Indeed, the *Letter of Aristeas* (139) also compares the law with “iron walls” by which God encloses Israel and a “fence” by which Israel is kept from mixing with the Gentiles.

Having established these vantage points for a socio-historical and rhetorical analysis of Romans 1-4, I can now proceed to investigate in detail how Paul’s ethnic rhetoric might have addressed the extant ethnic tensions between Judeans and Gentiles in Rome and realised unity among them.

### 4.3. Equalising Judeans and Gentiles under sin (Rom 1.1-3.20)

#### 4.3.1. Greeks, Judeans, barbarians and Paul's gospel (1.1-17)

Paul concludes the letters' exordium (1.1-17) with a programmatic statement that summarises the content and themes of his argumentation: *"the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Judean first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith into faith; as it is written; 'the righteous shall live out of faith'"* (1.16-17). Some of the most significant themes that form the heart of Romans are located in that thematic paragraph: "gospel"; "salvation"; "all/everyone" "faith"; "Judean"; "Greek/Gentile"; "righteousness". For Paul, God's offer of salvation in the gospel is available for "all" (πᾶς). However, "all" is not left ambiguous and abstract, but as a Judean, Paul adopts an *insider* position and totalises *all* other ethnicities together thereby creating an ethnic opposition: "Judean and Greek". In other words, as Wan (2010:144–145) rightly posits, "Paul appeals to two ethnic myths simultaneously. All "Jews" stand together in a self-diasporising unity in an ethnic myth of sameness, set apart from the 'Greeks', who are all Gentiles. All non-Judeans are thus flattened into a sameness, regardless of their self-constructed ethnicity, for no other reason than that they are different from insiders, the 'Jews'."

Paul's thematic statement is however not just forward looking only, but is strongly anchored in the rest of the exordium (1.1-15). Minear (1971:39) rightly points out that the γὰρ in the beginning of 1.16 connects the thematic statement with the preceding verses where Paul declares his hope in sending the letter and his plans to visit Rome. It becomes apparent therefore that Paul's programmatic statement (1.16-17) is depended on 1.8-15, which in turn hinges on 1.1-7 (cf. Garlington, 2006:37). The first seven verses of the exordium emphasise both the Judean origin and nature of the gospel (vv.1-5) and the sphere of Paul's apostolic vocation (vv.1-7). Without a doubt, Paul's ministry included reaching Judeans, but he viewed himself to have been called distinctly to bring about the "obedience of faith" (ὑπακοήν πίστεως) among *all* the Gentiles for the sake of Christ's name (1.5). While the meaning of "obedience of faith" is somehow ambiguous (cf. Garlington, 2006:33–36), Paul certainly has in mind the lasting effect of his gospel ministry in the entire Gentile world – the "obedience of the Gentiles" (ὑπακοήν ἐθνῶν) (15.1; 16.25-26). Schreiner (1998:34) emphasises that 'all' (πᾶς) signals the universalistic nature of Paul's gospel. It includes ethnicity. A major theme of Romans anticipated here is the inclusion of Gentiles as God's people on equal terms with Judeans (cf. 3.22, 31; 4.1-25; 16.25-26), which also functions as an indication that God's covenant-promise to Abraham of a multi-ethnic family was being realised (cf. Gen 12.3; 17.5).

In the next eight verses (1.8-15), Paul gives thanks for the faith of the Roman believers. But he also recalls his incessant desire to visit them in order to impart some spiritual gift and obtain some fruit from them just as he has done from the “rest of the Gentiles” (ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν). The “rest of the Gentile,” for whom he is under obligation, includes the Greeks and barbarians; the wise/civilised and foolish/uncivilised (“Ἕλλησιν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνοήτοις”) (1.14). According to Harrison (2013:337-338), the equivalence Greeks with wisdom and barbarians with foolishness is warranted “given the widespread stereotyping of ethnic groups in antiquity. Paul would have been aware of the dishonouring of the barbarian as ‘foolish’, ‘stupid’ or ‘innately idiots’ in popular culture”. In other words, he recognises the identity of both Greeks and barbarians and speaks to the sense of superiority of the former over the latter (cf. Witherington, 2004:44–45; Seifrid, 2004:115). Indeed, Paul will upset such ethno-cultural and religious categorisations by subsuming all the Gentile ethnicities under *foolishness*: “asserting to be wise (σοφοί), they became *foolish* (ἐμωπάνθησαν) (Rom 1.22). In other words, Paul is already beginning to demonstrate that “*all* have fallen short of God’s glory” (cf. 3.23).

Furthermore, from a Judean perspective “Judeans and Gentiles” (cf. 1.16; 2.9, 10; 3.9 etc.) is the standard formula for depicting and constructing the ethnic identity of the world’s peoples, but for the Romans and Greeks, “Greeks and barbarians” play that role (cf. Wan, 2010:138–140; Grieb, 2002:6). The importance of this pairing is aptly captured by Harrison (2013:336-337) when he asserts “Paul is writing at a time of considerable social change, as Romans and Greeks negotiated their attitude to each other and, correspondingly, to the ‘barbarian’ outsider.” His pairing of ‘Greek and barbarians’ is therefore rhetorically engineered “handle astutely Roman sensitivities about their indebtedness to Greek culture and their even stronger belief in the superiority of their customs to all the other nations, including the barbarians”. Furthermore, the element of reciprocity that marked the relationship between Romans and the Greeks, as well as the barbarians, is something that Paul himself rhetorically appropriates as a strategy to warn the Gentiles in Rome, given their sense of arrogance, dominion and judgmental attitude towards the Judeans (Rom 9.1-11-36; 14.1-15:13).

In conclusion, Paul’s gospel addresses not just generic human beings. When he says: “Greeks and barbarians,” “those in Rome,” and “Judean and Gentile,” he is speaking to people and their symbols of their ethno-cultural identity and sense of superiority or inferiority. The Roman *ekklesia* is located in a world that characterises itself this way. Appropriately, right from the exordium, Paul anticipates the nature of these ethno-cultural identities and prejudices and how the gospel addresses them. Harrison (2013:339) astutely puts it that:

In a remarkable social, pastoral and evangelistic strategy, Paul says he is indebted to culturally, religiously and educationally diverse groups (Rom 1.14a), whether Greek or barbarian. The self-conscious cultural superiority of Greeks towards barbarian tribes, as well as the boastful arrogance of Romans to both groups, is relativized in Paul's mutual obligation to each group...Paul obliterates the distinction in Christ. Oblivious to wise and powerful in the first century, there is embedded in Romans 1.14 the understanding of a new humanity and the obligation of impartial service of all people in Christ (Rom 2.11; 1 Cor 10.32; Gal 3.28; Col 3.11).

#### 4.3.2. The plight of the Gentiles in sin (1.18-32)

Paul has already confessed his eagerness to proclaim the gospel in Rome, for (γάρ) he is not ashamed of the gospel (God's power for the salvation of the Judean and Gentile) *because* (γάρ) in it God's righteousness is disclosed (1.15-17). Rom 1.18 captures Paul's rhetorical argumentation that is directed against the Gentile world (1.19-32), but also what he will later direct against Judeans the (2.1-3.20). According to him, both Judeans and Gentiles suffer an ignominious tragedy: they face divine wrath due to their ungodliness and unrighteousness (ἀσεβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν). They suffer a common problem. In fact, the net rhetorical effect of the subsequent argumentation, as it will become evident, is their equalisation under a common negative condition. Esler, (2003:145) is apt when he says: "Paul knocks away the respective foundations each group has for harbouring feelings of ethnic superiority over the other that would get in the way of their accepting the value of the new common in-group identity on offer."

After stating his proposition, Paul then proceeds to unleash a cataclysmic prophetic critique against the Gentile world in 1.19-32. According to him, the Gentile world is ungodly, unrighteous, idolatrous, immoral, and corrupt. Certainly, Paul's critique is not primarily directed towards the Gentile believers in Rome since he has already called them "beloved of God" and "holy ones" while giving thanks for their faith which is proclaimed throughout the world (1.7-8). But rhetorically, a critique of the Gentile world is a critique of the Gentile believers. They do not live in a social vacuum; the Gentile world is their social sphere (cf. 1.5, 13; 16.4). Paul does not go into the ancestries, customs and traditions of the Gentile peoples as he does with the Judeans (cf. 2.17-24; 3.1-2; 9.1-5), but adopts the normal Judean position of lumping the rest of the world together.<sup>22</sup> He identifies the Gentiles as

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<sup>22</sup> Paul does not specify his addressees here as 'Gentiles' or 'Greeks and barbarians' (cf. 1.14). In fact, because of his use of a generic term ἀνθρώπος (1.18), some commentators argue that although he has primarily the Gentiles in mind, it is not exclusively them he addresses (cf. Cranfield, 1975:105; 1988a:72-73). True, 1.18 seems to capture the arguments of 1.18-3.20, however, as Fitzmyer (1993:270-271) observes, that Paul begins to address Judeans specifically in the following section is a clear indication that he has Gentiles in mind. Furthermore, according to Adams (1997:46-47), "the fact that Paul appeals to God's creational revelation as the standard by which these people are judged (vv. 19-20) strongly tells against such a conclusion. The Jews are judged by God, according to Paul, on the basis of their possession of the law (2.12-13, 17-18)".

people who have rejected God, faulting them for failure to acknowledge the glory, honour and thanks due to him, even though they know him through creation. Instead, they warp and pervert God's knowledge, leading to futile reasoning, darkened hearts, and foolishness. Ultimately they exchange the glory of God for idols, the truth of God for a lie, and the worship of God for creation (1.19-23, 25). As punishment for those crimes, Paul says that God 'handed them over' (παραδίδωμι): to the "lusts of their hearts" (ἐπιθυμίας τῶν καρδιῶν) and "uncleanness" (ἀκαθαρσία) so that they dishonour their bodies among themselves (2.24); to 'dishonourable passions' (πάθη ἀτιμίας) (2.26) so that they were involved in homosexual behaviour; and to "a depraved mind" (ἄδόκιμον νοῦν) so that they practice things which are not proper, filled with every kind of evil and approving it (2.28-32).<sup>23</sup>

Paul's critique of the Gentile world is representative of the standard Judean ethnic rhetoric against the Gentile world. This is particularly apparent when compared to *Wisdom of Solomon* (13-14).<sup>24</sup> In Romans Paul criticises the Gentile world for its idolatry, depicting it as the fountain of all evil, immorality, sexual perversion, vice and corruption of mind (1.22-27; 29-31). Similarly, *Wisdom* claims that making of idols is the beginning of all fornication and the invention of all corruption (14.12, 16, 22-27). Moreover, Paul claims that since God has revealed himself to the Gentiles, their sinfulness and corruption is without excuse (1.20). Equally, *Wisdom* accuses them of being ignorant of God and failing to acknowledge him (13.1; cf. 13. 5, 8) (cf. Talbert, 2002:63; Witherington, 2004:63). Exactly how idolatry is connected to immorality and corruption is evident in the passage below:

And this (idolatry) became a trap for human life, because people, enslaved either by misfortune or tyranny, bestowed on objects of stone and wood the incommunicable name. Then it was not enough to go astray concerning the knowledge of God, but though living in great strife through ignorance, they call such great evils peace. For whether performing ritual murders of children or secret mysteries or frenzied revels connected with strange laws, they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either kill one another by treachery or grieve one another by adultery. And all things are an overwhelming confusion of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, unfaithfulness, tumult, perjury, turmoil of those who are good, forgetfulness of favours, defilement of souls, sexual perversion, disorder in marriages, adultery and debauchery. For the worship of idols that may not be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil (*Wisdom* 14.21b-27 NETS).

<sup>23</sup> According to Talbert (2002:57) the thought of God handing people over is typically Judean (cf. Ps 106.41; *Wisdom* 11.15-16; *Jub* 21.22). Stowers (1994:93–94) argues that the metaphor evokes the idea of handing someone over to a superior power to be punished. "God turned them over to what the ancients considered even crueller masters: 'to the desires of their hearts'... 'to dishonourable passions'... 'to a base mind so as to do that which is wrong to do'".

<sup>24</sup> Such characterisations of the Gentiles by Judeans are not unique to *wisdom*, for as Tobin (2004:109) observes, Judean texts like *Sibylline Oracles* 3.8-45, 184-187, 594-600, 764, and *Fragments* 1-3, are directed against the Gentile world's refusal to recognise and worship the one true God, and also depict idolatry as leading to all sorts of vices.

Certainly, the kind of connection between idolatry and immorality that this text envisages is what Paul has in mind when he asserts that, because the Gentiles did not see fit to worship and acknowledge God, he gave them over to a depraved mind. Consequently, they were “filled with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malevolence, craftiness, they are gossipers, slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, hard-hearted, unmerciful; and knowing the commandment of God, that those who do such things are worthy of death, they not only do them, but also approve of those who practice them” (1.29-31).

In summary, Paul standing within his own tradition, diagnoses the predicament of the Gentiles and delivers a judgment. The verdict he elicits, as Byrne (1996:72) rightly summarises, “is global, a view of the entire Gentile world encompassed in an alienation from God that contains a strong measure of delusion.” The critique undercuts every Greek or Roman sense of social or cultural superiority, rendering it as idolatry and corruption (Witherington, 2004:63–64).

#### **4.3.3. The plight of Judeans in sin (2.1-2.3.8)**

Paul begins his prophetic charge against Judeans in 2.1. Having restated what would have been an obvious critique of the immoral Gentiles (1.18-32), any devout Judean would have capped Paul’s indictment with an Amen! Yes, Gentiles are unrighteous! Then affirm: “But we will not sin, because we know you acknowledge us as yours. For to know you is complete righteousness” (*Wisdom* 15.2-3; Talbert, 2002:79). But his prophetic critique against the Gentiles is an apt rhetorical trap by which he catches the complacent Judeans. He will contend that they are as culpable as the Gentiles and there is no possibility whatsoever of finding righteous status before God on the basis of their privileged ethnicity.

For the first time in his letter Paul embraces a diatribe style and mulls over an imagined Judean representative, who remains incognito until 2.17. Some scholars however question whether Paul does not have someone in mind who thinks of themselves as morally superior and therefore able to condemn others (cf. Stowers, 1994:37; Witherington, 2004:73, 76; Tobin, 2004:110–113). But in agreement with Byrne (1996:80), the special privileges recorded in 2.4-5 (God’s kindness, tolerance, and patience) can only be comprehensible if they emanate from a Judean rather than a Gentile. In fact these very privileges have clear parallels in contemporary Judean literature:

But you, our God, are kind and true, longsuffering and ordering all things with mercy. For even if we sin, we are yours, knowing your might, but knowing we are

considered yours, we will not sin; for to know you is perfect righteousness, and to recognize your might is the root of immortality. For neither has the artful inventiveness of human beings led us astray, nor the fruitless toil of painters, a figure stained with varied colours... (*Wisdom* 15.1-4 NETS; cf. Ex 34.6-9).

In other words, the generalised use of *ἄνθρωπος* (2.1, 3) is rhetorically engineered. Paul's target is a Judean audience that sits in judgment of the Gentile world (Byrne, 1996:80; cf. Moo, 1996:126; Dunn, 1988a:81–82). The Judean in view here is ironically condemning those who practice the evils listed in 1.29-32 (*οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες* - 3.32), while practicing the same vices (*τὰ αὐτὰ πράσσεις* - 2.1), yet privileged with the knowledge that God's judgment rightly falls on those who practice such things (*τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντας*) (2.2). The rhetorical question in 3.1, which is directed upon the interlocutor, who supposes that he will escape God's judgment, has an obvious answer: "No way!" Certainly, Judaism held that "those who do lawlessness shall not escape the judgment of the Lord" (*Psalms of Sol* 15.8b). Effectively, then, by that theological standard, the Judean in view here is as culpable as the Gentile. He or she is an object of divine wrath and therefore in need of God's mercy. Paul's argument essentially removes any social distance and boundary between Gentiles and Judeans.

Paul then goes further in 2.4-11 to refute the Judean privileges by which they may lay claim on. He argues that Judeans cannot presume on God's covenant faithfulness, manifested in his kindness (*χρηστότητος*), tolerance (*ἀνοχή*), and patience (*μακροθυμία*) towards them. In ethnic terms, they may not presume on an ethnocentric understanding of the covenant. While it is true that God is kind and true, patient, and rules all things by his mercy (*Wisdom* 15.2-3; cf. *Psalms of Sol.* 7.5-10; 7.21-18.9), a privilege that Judeans have enjoyed, he cannot tolerate evil forever. These privileges are meant to elicit repentance (cf. *Sir* 5.4-7). But because Judeans presume on God's mercy and are as stubborn and unrepentant as the Gentiles, they have no protection against God's wrath. By being stubborn and unrepentant they "store up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (2.5). In that day, says Paul, God "will render to each person according to their works – tribulations and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Judean first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace to everyone who does good, to the Judean first and also the Greek, for there is no partiality with God" (2.6, 9-11).

The theme of God's impartiality is central to Paul's rhetorical argumentation in Romans 1-4. According to Walters, the theme reflects Paul's attempt to establish an equal playing field for both Judeans and Gentiles. The theme rhetorically functions to minimise the extant differences existing between the two people groups. Similarly, Bassler (1984:49–52) observes that the theme functions as the theological basis for the equality of Judeans and

Gentiles in both judgment and blessing (2.9-10) and the elimination of prejudice in judgment at the *eschaton* (2.12-16). God's impartiality disregards and transcends any sense of ethnic or moral precedence. In God's final tribunal, Judeans and Gentiles will stand on an equal footing before God in order for each to be assessed according to their works and to receive their just deserts. It is significant that 2.11 introduces the concept of law (*ἀνόμως* – 'lawless', *ἐν νόμῳ* – 'in *the* law'), a subject that dominates Paul's argument from this point on and is linked with circumcision (*περιτομή*) and uncircumcision (*ἀκροβυστία*) in 2.25-29. If God's judgment extends to *all* on the basis of works, Paul may not be silent about the law, the embodiment of Judean ethnicity, any longer. Certainly, the law and its practices stand on the side of the Judeans and seem to advantage them against the Gentiles. But for him, God's impartiality means that God will judge Judeans (those under the law) and Gentiles (those without the law) differently but equally.

In 2.12-16 therefore, Paul takes up these Judean privileges: possession of the law (2.12-16); a sense of favoured or superior position (2.17-24) and circumcision (2.25-29) and shows that they will provide Judeans with immunity before God's tribunal. I will take each in turn. First, against possession of the law, Paul argues that it is not its possession that matters, but its practice. Only those who practice the law will be *righteoused* but not those who merely possess it (3.13). Moreover, that some Gentiles, who naturally (*φύσις*, cf. Gal 2.15) don't have the law, practice some of the things written in the law testifies to the fact that possession of the law is not enough.<sup>25</sup> That they practice "the things of the law" (*τὰ τοῦ νόμου*)

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<sup>25</sup> Scholars dispute what Paul means by Gentiles "doing the things of law" (2-14-15). Some argue that Paul is speaking of "godly Gentiles" of the OT such as the repentant Ninevites, Job, Ruth, Rahab and so forth (cf. Davies, 1990:60–67). Others argue that Paul is speaking of "Gentile believers" who in accordance with the promise of a new covenant (cf. Jer 31.33) have the law now written on their hearts (cf. Wright, 2002:441–442; Gathercole, 2002:128–129; Jewett, 2007:213; Kruse, 2012:131–132). Still others argue that Paul has in mind "pagan Gentiles" who practice parts of the moral precepts of the Mosaic Law though not acquainted with the law itself (cf. Stowers, 1994:139; Byrne, 1996:89; Witherington, 2004:83; Schreiner, 1998:119–124). The first argument has little scholarly support. The second argument is plausible though unsatisfactory – largely because it is based on Paul's statement that the "work of the law" is written in their (Gentile) hearts. But as Schreiner (1998:122–123) rightly points out, it is not the law which is actually written in their hearts, but the 'work of the law' better translated the 'things of the law'. This should therefore not be confused with Jeremiah's promise. I find myself therefore in agreement with the third position. Indeed, Byrne (1996:89) argues, "Paul points to the performance on the part of some Gentiles of deeds corresponding to the dictates of the Mosaic Law. In so far as they are human beings they find in their very nature... a moral order corresponding to what the law prescribes. Paul need not have more than a few outstanding individuals in mind (so that what is stated here does not really counter the pessimistic judgment of the Gentile world as a whole formulated earlier on (1.19-32; cf. 3.9, 23). Nor does he mean that these few 'righteous Gentiles' carry out the law in its entirety." Similarly, Witherington (2004:83) posits: "Paul assumes that sometimes some Gentiles fulfil some of the requirements of the law, just as Jews do. This does not mean they always do so, or do so perfectly, for Paul will go on to call all sinners, it does mean that there is some obedience to the will or Law of God among those who are not Christians, with Gentiles in focus here."

is a sign that they have “the work of the law” (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου) written in their hearts, their consciences bearing them witness to the rightness or wrongness of their actions. In this manner therefore, Paul strips away any claim to special status that Judeans on the basis of possession of the law.

Secondly, against a sense of privileged or favoured status based on ethnicity in 2.17-24, Paul says it will not count. He eventually reveals his imaginary interlocutor, who has remained incognito since 2.1, as an ethnic Judean (Ἰουδαῖος) (2.17). Then in the next few verses (2.17-20), he lists several important features that define Judean ethnicity: reliance (ἐπιαναπαύομαι) upon the law (which includes boasting in the law, cf. 2.23); boasting (καυχάομαι) in God; knowledge of God’s will; capacity to approve what is morally superior, having been instructed in the Torah; confidence that they are a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, instructors of the ignorant, and teachers of the immature - all because they possess the law, the “embodiment of knowledge and truth”. Paul does not dispute these Judean claims. They formed Judaism’s ethnic praxis as I have discussed in chapter III. The privileges are well attested in numerous Judean writings. For example, *Sirach* depicts Judeans as a people who not only possess the law (24.23), but who also know it (24.17-20) and have the capacity to teach it (24.27). *Baruch* announces the blessed status of Israel because they know what pleases God (4.4). *2 Baruch* portrays Israel as the chosen nation; a people unequalled and who will never fall because they possess the law and never interact with the Gentiles (48.22-24). Emphasising the unique place and future of Israel vis-à-vis the nations, Isaiah asserts that Israel will be appointed as a “covenant people” (διαθήκην γένους) to be a light to the nations (ἔθνη), to open the eyes of the blind, and to release those in prison and who dwell in darkness (42.6-7; 49.6-7; 61.1f). *Wisdom* (17.2, 18.4), depicts the lawless people (Gentiles) as prisoners of darkness, deprived of the incorruptible light of the law of Israel. One of the Qumran *War Scrolls* says: “Who (is) like you, God of Israel... And who (is) like your people, Israel, whom you chose from among all the peoples of the earth, a people of holy ones of the covenant, learned in the law, wise in knowledge ... alert to the voice of glory, seers of the holy angels, with open ears, hearing profound things” (Martínez, 1996:102–103).

According to Gathercole (2002:201–202), the Judean boasting envisaged by Paul is both a feeling of superiority over the Gentiles and a confidence that they, and not Gentiles, will be vindicated in God’s final judgment. Boasting is their preserve since it is from the Gentile autocrats that they hope to be saved from. For Paul, however, Judeans cannot hold onto that privileged status, for although they have and know the law they nevertheless don’t keep it. This is the rhetorical effect that the question in 2.21-24 achieves. Paul questions their

commitment to the law – you who instruct the Gentiles against stealing, adultery and idolatry, do you do the very same things? You who boast (*καυχᾶσθαι*) in the law, do you dishonour God “by breaking the law” (*διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου*)? These are vices that the law censured and Judaism abhorred, but individuals would have been culpable (cf. Byrne, 1996:98–100; Schreiner, 1998:131–133). The point that Paul emphasises is that Judeans are transgressors of God’s law and therefore may not lay any claim on it against God’s judgment or ethnic superiority. As a matter of fact, their behaviour of preaching one thing and living another has brought the name of the Lord into disrepute among the Gentiles, the same peoples who are the objects of their proselytization.

Thirdly, Paul deals with circumcision. In chapter III I have argued with Barclay (1998:545) that circumcision was the *sine qua non* of Judaism. It was practically the most unambiguous sign of belonging to the family of Abraham. It was also a sign of commitment to the law (cf. Gen 21.4; Ex 4.25; Lev 12.3; Jos 5.2; Jer 4.4). The ritual was particularly important for the Roman Judeans as can be gathered from Tacitus and Juvenal among others. Roman Judeans were as scrupulous with the ritual as they were about Sabbath observance and fasting (cf. Cohen, 1999:41–42; Williams, 2004:8–18). Furthermore, I also highlighted Marcus’ (1989:67–81) argument that Paul’s ubiquitous use of “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” in Romans reflects the socio-historical tension that existed between Judeans and Gentiles in the imperial capital. Both words were pejoratively hurled at Gentiles and Judeans by members of the opposite group.

Paul however, unequivocally rejects this important Judean symbol as providing any basis for ethnic boasting or sense of ethnic privilege. For him, as it is with Torah possession that lacks matching obedience and practice (2.12-24), so it is with a mere sign of the covenant (circumcision) if unaccompanied by what it signifies - the practice of the law. Circumcision is of no benefit (*ὠφελεί*) if one is *παραβάτης νόμου* (2.25). Its value is tied up with keeping the whole law. But as it stands, Judeans are transgressors of the law and therefore the very symbol of their unique identity cannot provide any immunity. Paul’s point is further sharpened by the two rhetorical questions he asks in 2.26-27. The point of the questions is that possession of circumcision or not is irrelevant, for an uncircumcised Gentile, who keeps the righteous requirements of the law his uncircumcision, can be reckoned as circumcision and even stand in judgment against the circumcised Judean, who, though possessing “the law and circumcision” (*γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς*), is a transgressor of the law.

Furthermore, in 2.28-29 Paul also reinterprets the true meaning of circumcision and being a Judean. For just as possession of the law without the corresponding practice avails for

nothing, so is Judaism if it is merely outward (i.e., marked only by the possession of the Torah and a physical mark of circumcision). Paul insists that true Judaism is a secret reality. It is marked by the circumcision of the heart, which is effected by the Spirit and not the letter. His argument therefore completely flattens the ethnic distinctions between Judeans and Gentiles. For him, if any of these peoples can keep the law they would count as circumcised before God. In other words, both can equally count before God as circumcised, provided that the Spirit has done a work in their hearts (cf. Barclay, 1998:550–552; Hultgren, 2011:130–131).

By the end of Romans 2, Paul's ethnic rhetoric has achieved a common ground between Judeans and Gentiles. Any feelings of ethnic or moral superiority emanating from both Judeans and Gentiles are eliminated. Both groups suffer a common problem: Gentiles are immoral idolaters; Judeans are transgressors of God's law. Paul will invoke his summary charge "all are under sin" in 3.9, but owing to the radical redefinition of circumcision and Judaism, he must first deal with a few problems that his argument has generated thus far. This is the subject of 3.1-8. The first problem Paul deals with is whether there is any point in being a Judean. So he asks: "*What, then, is so remarkable in being a Judean, or what benefit is there in circumcision?*" (3.1). Paul has been in conversation with a Judean since 2.1, cf. 2.17), and based on his argument this far the logical answer to this question is "none whatsoever! It is almost incongruous that he retorts: "Great (πολύ) in every respect!" But certainly, as a Judean himself, Paul would never equate Judaism to Gentilism. He still maintains that there is an advantage in being a Judean, both in terms of the priority in salvation (cf. 1.16-17) but also their election (cf. 11.28-29). By entering into covenant with their ancestors, God bestowed on them special privileges (cf. 2.17-20), chief among them to be the custodians of τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ (3.2). By possession of "the oracles of God" (cf. Acts 7.38; Heb 5.12; 1 Pet 4.11) Israel has had access to the revealed knowledge of God otherwise unreachable by other peoples. In this way, they have an advantage over everyone else (Seifrid, 1998:125). Nonetheless, whether this advantages them over the Gentiles soteriologically, Paul categorically denies (cf. 3.9).

The second question deals with Israel's unfaithfulness, since there are transgressors of the covenant, and God's faithfulness (3.3-4): "What then? If some (Judeans) did not believe, will their unbelief nullify God's faithfulness?" In other words, will God renege upon his commitment to the covenant he signed with Israel's ancestors? For Paul, this is unthinkable. So he summarily rejects such a proposal: "by no means!" The force of this denial, as both Dunn (1988a:132) and Jewett (2007:245) observe, rests on the premise that God's promises and covenant with Israel are in continuity with Paul's gospel. Immediately following the

denial is a strong interjection: “Let God be true though every person a liar, as is written ‘so that you may be vindicated in your words and prevail when you are judged (cf. LXX Ps 115.11 & 51.4). In other words, it is not possible for God to lie or be unfaithful. Fault must be sought elsewhere (cf. Johnson, 2001:44).

The twin themes of Israel’s unfaithfulness and God’s faithfulness are a matter of great concern in Romans. Later in chapters 9-11, Paul faces a similar dilemma but provides a similar solution: “God’s word has not failed” (9.6). Paul proceeds in 3.5-8 to show that Israel’s unfaithfulness does not annul the faithfulness of God. In fact, their unrighteousness (*ἀδικία*) demonstrates God’s righteousness (his faithfulness to the covenant), which raises an objection regarding God’s character: is God who inflicts wrath, then, unrighteous? Jewett (2007:247) rightly notes that the Judean interlocutor attempts to make Paul concede that his position carries with it a fatal inconsistency. The challenge against God’s very character is so blasphemous that Paul is compelled to introduce a disclaimer: “I speak in human terms”. For Paul, however, such human reasoning cannot stand. He therefore summarily rejects such a supposition using his unique formula (*μὴ γένοιτο*), “for otherwise” (*ἐπεὶ*), God would not be able to judge the world.<sup>26</sup> The same objection is stated differently in 3.7-8, this time using first person singular: “But if through my falsehood (*ἐμῷ ψεύσματι*) the truth of God has abounded to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not, as we are slandered and some affirm that we say: ‘let us do evil so that good might come?’ whose condemnation is deserved.” The “I” here rhetorically represents a Judean (cf. Cranfield, 1975:185; Moo, 1996:193–194; Schreiner, 1998:157). The objection therefore is, if their falsehood works to the glory of God, why then should God treat them as if they were sinners like the Gentiles (cf. Rom 1.18-32; Gal 2.15)? The Judeans’ assumption is that judgment is reserved for the Gentiles. They were the elect people of the covenant, but Gentiles were outside the benefits associated with such a privileged identity (cf. Eph 2.11-12). However, for Paul, if the Gentiles would not escape the judgment of God, neither would the Judeans (Schreiner, 1998:157–158).

#### **4.3.4. Judeans and Gentiles essentially suffer a common predicament (3.9-20)**

In 3.9-20 Paul comes to the concluding statement of his prophetic indictment that places both Judeans and Gentiles on an equal footing, with none able to make any claim or

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<sup>26</sup> According to Büchsel (cited in Jewett, 2007:248–249), “It is one of the cardinal articles of faith in Judaism that God judges, that he does not just let evil occur without resisting it, that he upholds with punishments and rewards his holy law and its demands and prohibitions, that he enforces it irresistibly in face of those who despise it. This belief, whose roots go back to the very earliest days of Israelite religion, was inseparably related to the Law, and was transmitted with it.”

advantage before God or each other. According to him, no one has an advantage over the other; “all are under sin” (πάντας ὑφ’ ἁμαρτιαν εἶναι) (3.9). Certainly, as 3.1-2 has claimed, Judeans have a salvation-historical advantage over the Gentiles, but that does not provide immunity when it comes to God’s judgment. The summative charge against Judeans and Gentiles is then followed by a lengthy catena of Israel’s scripture (3.10-18). The chain of quotations is rhetorically orchestrated to show that *all* are under sin and none is righteous! Paul still has his eyes on the imaginary Judean(s). This is apparent when he claims that whatever the law says, it speaks to those “under the law” (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ), so that every (πᾶς) mouth may be silenced and the entire (πᾶς) world may stand answerable to God, for by the works of the law no flesh will be *righteoused* before him, for through the law is the knowledge of sin” (3.19-20). Commenting on the significance of the use of πᾶς in this verse, Tobin (2004:121) rightly emphasises that “Paul’s argument here is not about all individuals but about all groups, that is, about Jews and Gentiles. Since both occurrences of πᾶς in 3.19 take up the use of πᾶς in 3.9 (as well as the πᾶς of 1.18; 2.1, 6-10), the point of the πᾶς is that both Jews and Gentiles as groups are similarly liable to God’s judgment.”

Significantly, for the first time in Romans we encounter the phrase “works of *the* law” (ἔργων νόμου) juxtaposed with the verb δικαιόω (to *righteous*) in 3.20. According to Paul, “by the works of the law no flesh will be *righteoused* (δικαιωθήσεται) before him”. This statement is adapted from Ps 142.1b-2 where David in prayer invokes God’s truthfulness (τῆ ἀληθεία) and righteousness (τῆ δικαιοσύνη), pleading that he may not enter into judgment with him, “for no one living (πᾶς ζῶν) will be *righteoused* (δικαιωθήσεται) before you.” However, he adjusts the text by replacing “no one living” with “no flesh” and then adds “by the works of the law”. In the previous section, Paul has consigned Judeans as transgressors. They are unrighteous since they do not keep/fulfil the requirements of the law. It is therefore proper that he reiterates that by the “works of the law” – i.e., those practices that mark them as them as God’s people - no one will be vindicated before God. The corollary of that is Judean ethnicity, which is defined physical descent from Abraham and those culturally distinctive practices, is rendered irrelevant when it comes to God’s final tribunal. No one will play the “ethnic card” to merit a righteous status. As things stand, a righteous status, both now and in the *eschaton*, is anchored elsewhere; not in the law or its requirements. Indeed, the law now assumes a different purpose: to remind both Judeans and Gentiles that they are transgressors of its moral requirement. Jewett (2007:267) is helpful here: “the law itself conveys the truth for everyone: whether Jew or Gentle, barbarian or Greek, educated or uneducated, ‘weak’ or ‘strong’. Every boastful mouth must be closed in view of the righteousness of God.”

In conclusion, the net effect of Paul's prophetic criticism of Judeans and Gentiles is not only consigning all humanity under sin. As I highlighted in the beginning of 1.18, it knocks down every claim or feeling of ethnic or moral superiority. The guilt and answerability of the Gentile world was established in 1.18-32. Their pretensions were silenced. From 2.1, through to the end of the catena (3.19), Judeans' pretensions have been unmasked and declared null and void with regard to the impartial judgment of God. All are captured in this denunciation and relegated as sinners and enemies of God. In other words, Paul's ethnic rhetoric has equalised them under a negative condition. The extant social distance between "Judeans" and "Gentiles"; "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" "the weak" and "the strong" is flattened and in fact, abolished. The honour and prestige associated with the 'works of the law', which defined Judeans' righteousness is also abolished. No one can lay claim on them. In fact, the shameful epithets - "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" - have become meaningless since it does not matter whether one is circumcised or not. Those who were 'far off' and those who are 'near' have become one thing: sinners. When the text of Romans was read aloud in the house-gatherings in first-century Rome, believers would have hardly missed Paul's attempt to equate them that in way. This would not only have shattered any ethnic prejudice each group harboured against each other, but would also have formed the searching ground upon which Paul's next argument would rest. He will further equalise them in the gospel, which proclaims a new way is now available to *all* - Judeans and Gentiles alike – by which they can find righteousness and a bond unity as the grand family of Abraham.

#### **4.4. A righteous status for Judeans and Gentiles through faith**

Having established the antithesis that all people - Judeans and Gentiles – are under the power of sin - and cannot gain a righteous status before God through the law and its practices, in this section Paul returns to his programmatic statement (1.16-17). Here he reprises it while filling it with the necessary content. He will contend that the sacrificial death of Jesus has inaugurated "a new world order," in which God's righteousness is made available to *all* – Judeans and Gentiles - who have faith in Jesus, without any distinctions (3.21-26). The corollary is that Judeans' ethnic boast is excluded; the God of Israel emerges as the God of the Gentiles too, who will confer the honourable position of righteousness to both parties by faith (3.27-31).

##### **4.4.1. Judeans and Gentiles have equal access to righteousness (3.21-26)**

Νυνὶ δὲ (3.21) marks the decisive boundary between the previous argument, where Judeans and Gentiles find themselves in a common impasse, and the present one where the stalemate is removed by the manifestation of God's righteousness apart from the practices

of the law.<sup>27</sup> It contrasts God's fury in judgment and his free offer of righteousness that is clearly stated from this point on. If no one will be *righteoused* by the works of the law (3.20), then it makes sense that in the new order of things a righteous status be found outside the boundaries of the law and its practices, although the law and the prophets are witnesses to it (3.21)<sup>28</sup> The human means through which the righteous status is accessible is "faith in Jesus the Christ" (πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ),<sup>29</sup> which now extends to "all who believe" (πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας). The scope is necessitated by the fact that there is no distinction between Judeans and Gentiles, since *all* have sinned and fall short of God's glory (3.22-23). Conversely, all are "being *righteoused* freely as a gift of his grace through the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) which is in Christ Jesus (3.24). In the previous section (1.18-3.20), Paul equates Judeans and Gentiles in terms of the problem, but here he equates them in terms of the solution. If there is no distinction in terms of the problem, there need not be any distinction in the rectification of the problem.

The divine means by which the problem is addressed is "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". The word ἀπολύτρωσις is derived from its social context of slavery. According to Arndt *et al.* (2000:605–606), the noun λύτρον, means a "price of release"; or "sum paid for redemption of a pledge". The verb λυτρόω means "to buy-back" (cf. Ex 21.8), and metaphorically "to liberate" or "set free," while the noun (ἀπολύτρωσις) means "ransoming" or "redemption by payment of ransom" (cf. Zeph 3.1 LXX; Lk 1.68; 2.38; 24.21; Heb 9.12). In Mk 10.45 and Matt 20.28, the noun retains a sense of the literal meaning since Jesus asserts that he has "come to give his life as a ransom (λύτρον) for many". In other words, Paul identifies the death of Jesus as the cost which delivers Judeans and Gentiles from the enslaving plight that he laboured to demonstrate in 1.18-3.20 (Johnson, 2001:56–57).

<sup>27</sup> Χωρὶς νόμου = χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου - 3.28 (cf. Schreiner, 1998:180; Carson, 2004:122).

<sup>28</sup> The law and the prophets designate the OT scriptures (cf. 4 Macc 18.10; John 1.45; Acts 13.45).

<sup>29</sup> How the phrase πίστει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should be translated is contested. A current discussion on the matter is available in Hultgren (2011:623–661). Some commentators argue that the phrase should be rendered in the *subjective* – i.e., "the faith of Jesus Christ" or "faithfulness of Christ" (Hooker, 1989:181–185; cf. Hays, 2002; Wright, 2002:470). Others contend that it should be rendered *objectively* – i.e., "faith in the Jesus Christ" (cf. Dunn, 1988a:166; Fitzmyer, 1993:345–346; Schreiner, 1998:181–185; Hultgren, 2011:155). Here I follow the arguments of those who argue for "faith in Christ" instead of the "faith/faithfulness of Christ". Jewett (2007:276–277) is particularly helpful in this regard when he says that, although the recent attempt to translate the phrase in the subjective is a reaction to the individualised and intellectualised understanding of faith, it fails to capture "the social dimension" of faith in its early Christian usage, in which it broadly functioned as jargon for participation in the community of those who had been converted. Faith itself "has a social function related to conversion and participation in a new community, it entails more than an individual's intellectual, emotional, or existential stance."

Paul then proceeds to explain the process by which God paid the price. He states in Rom 3.25 that God set forth (προέθετο) Jesus as “a *hilastērion* in his blood, through faith” (ἱλαστήριον διὰ πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι).<sup>30</sup> In other words, God accomplishes the redemption of his people through the sacrificial-blood of his son (cf. Schreiner, 1998:194; Morris, 1965:124). The meaning of ἱλαστήριον is ambiguous and contentious.<sup>31</sup> However, the sacrificial dimension of the word cannot be expunged. The mention of Christ’s blood (αἷμα) makes this even more pertinent. OT sacrifices involved blood (cf. Morris, 1965:112–121). The NT itself asserts that Christ’s blood is the price of our redemption (Acts 20.28; 1 Cor 6.20; 7.23; Eph 1.7; Heb 9.11-15). Paul speaks of the Christ as “our passover *lamb* sacrificed” (1 Cor 5.7). In other words, what Paul asserts is that God presented Jesus to be martyred as the sacrifice of atonement. His death/blood is the means by which Judeans and Gentiles are redeemed and makes the righteous status available for both. Yet, intricately intertwined with God’s redemptive agenda, something else was also at stake: his character - which needed to be vindicated. Accordingly, in 3.25b-26 Paul asserts that God did what he did in order to demonstrate (ἐνδειξιν) his righteousness (1) since in his forbearance (cf. 2.4) he had passed over sins previously committed and (2) so that in the present he might be righteous and therefore one who *righteouses* those who have faith in Jesus.

In the previous argument (1.18-3.20), Paul equalised Judeans and Gentiles under a negative condition – sin, transgression, wrath and judgment. Here he has reiterated that they have all fallen short of God’s glory. To ‘fall short of glory’ reverberates with the Greco-Roman

<sup>30</sup> Although the word order of the sentence favours a reading that takes ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι as the object of faith, I take it to be a modifier of ἱλαστήριον.

<sup>31</sup> Scholars are divided when it comes to what the word *hilastērion* in this context. Some suggest “sacrifice of atonement” or “propitiation sacrifice” (cf. Cranfield, 1975:215–217; Mounce, 1995:116–117; Moo, 1996:263; Kruse, 2012:186–187). Others argue for “expiation” (cf. Barrett, 1957:77–78; Dunn, 1988a:170; Esler, 2003:159–160; Tobin, 2004:135). Still others argue for “a place of atonement” or “mercy seat” (cf. Fryer, 1987:99–116; Bailey, 1999; Hultgren, 2011:153). The OT background to the word is the “mercy seat” - the cover of the ark of the covenant over which Yahweh would appear on the Day of Atonement and on which sacrificial blood was sprinkled (Lev 16; Ex 25.16-21). On this day, the high-priest would kill a bull, and then spray some of the blood upon the ‘mercy-seat’ seven times. By so doing, the priest would have “made atonement” (ἐξιλάσεται) for the holy place because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, their wrong-doings and sins (Lev 16.14-16). The noun *hilastērion* is among a group of cognate words from which the verb *hilaskesthai* – “to appease” - either gods or humans derives (cf. LXX Ex 32.14; 2 Kgs 5.18). Furthermore, other than the temple context, the idea of human death and blood being a propitiatory sacrifice is not foreign in ancient Judaism. The Maccabean literature evidences such understanding (cf. 4 *Macc* 6.9.20; 10.8; 17.21-22; 27-29; 2 *Macc* 6.13-16; 7.18, 32-33, 37-38). 4 *Macc* 6.27-29 records Eliezer’s prayer, in which while being martyred together with others, he pleads with God to be merciful to the nation and to be propitiated by their punishment on behalf of the nation. He prays that his blood will be for the purification of the nation. Commenting on this death, the author of 4 Maccabean says that the martyrs became a “ransom” (ἀντιφυχον) for the sin of the nation and through their blood and their “propitiatory death” (ἱλαστήριον θανάτου) God preserved Israel. In other words, it was perfect for Paul to think of Jesus’ death in propitiatory terms (17.21-22) (cf. Wright, 2002:475; Schreiner, 1998:192).

peoples' competition for honour. With regard to God, they had fallen short of the ultimate prize – the glory of God. Paul reduces Judeans and Gentiles into an equal level of creatureliness. None can claim superiority or place the other in a position of inferiority (Jewett, 2007:278–280; cf. Moxne, 1996:34–36). Conversely, to be freely conferred with righteousness in this context suggests a reinstatement of honour and covenant relationship with God and with his people. Paul is practically engineering a complete “new social reality” in which the revelation of God’s righteousness defies any form of distinction. The new status, which originates from God and is accorded to Judeans and Gentiles who have faith, shatters any extant claim to righteousness based on conformity to particular social or cultural norm (Jewett, 2007:275, 281).

#### **4.4.2. Implications of the new reality for the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide (3.27-31)**

Having established the presence of a new reality in which Judeans and Gentiles are being *righteoused*, Paul begins to draw up the key implications of the new reality for the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide. The implications come in the form of rhetorical questions and answers. The first question is obvious, for if Judeans and Gentiles are now being *righteoused* on on similar basis, where then is the boasting (ἡ καύχησις)? The straight answer as Paul provides is that boasting is totally excluded. The boast in view here is primarily Judean boasting associated with the possession of law and its practices and a monopolistic relationship with God (2.17f) (cf. Stuhlmacher, 1989:48, 99; Wright, 2002:480; Moxne, 1988:71). However, the boasting of the Romans may not be ignored here. As I have argued in Chapter III, Romans were themselves xenophobic and boastful towards the immigrant communities in the city. Indeed, many of them had arrived as slaves and belonged to ethnicities that Rome had conquered. Jewett (2007:296) is apt when he says that Paul’s preceding insistence on ‘grace alone’ challenges all forms boasting: “While the reference to ‘works’ and ‘doing the law’ (3.27) clearly imply that if Jewish boasting is illegitimate, so is the Gentile boasting. By its very nature, honour granted through grace alone eliminates the basis of all human boasting... With the provision of a new system of atonement available to Jews and Gentiles alike, the door is firmly barred against any kind of boasting.”

Having asserted that boasting is excluded, Paul then probes what law excludes it: “By what law? The law “of works” (τῶν ἔργων)? To which he responds: “No, but by the law of faith (νόμου πίστεως).<sup>32</sup> Then he provides a reason why that is so: “For we maintain that a person is

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<sup>32</sup> The meaning of the word νόμος in 3.27 is ambiguous. Many scholars argue that the word should be rendered as “principle”, thus: “principle of the law” (νόμος τῶν ἔργων) and “principle of faith” (νόμου πίστεως) (cf. Fitzmyer, 1993:263; Byrne, 1996:136–137; Witherington, 2004:111; Moo, 1996:248). Those opposed to such understanding argue that here, as elsewhere in Romans, Paul should be

*righteoused* by faith apart from *the* works of the law” (χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου) (3.27-28). By asserting that “we reckon” (λογιζόμεθα) this is how a people are *righteoused*, Paul acknowledges that this position is not of his invention. He believes that this is the position Judean believers hold. Indeed, in his earlier letter to the Galatians, while defending a similar position Paul invokes the belief he shares with the rest of the Judean believers saying: “We ourselves who are Judeans... knowing that no one is *righteoused* by the works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus, we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be *righteoused* by faith in Christ and not by works of the law; since by the works of the law no flesh will be *righteoused*” (2.15-16). Commenting on this, Hays (2005:71) points out that Paul’s argument is directed towards those who confess to be *righteoused* ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ but fail to draw the logical corollary of the confession, that is, Gentiles need not become Judeans in order to be *righteoused*. This is a position agreed upon by the apostles and is the basis upon which Paul builds his interpretation of the Judean-Gentile relations. If God confers righteousness to those who believe in Jesus without having to observe the works of the law then, Gentiles, who hitherto are lumped together as pagan sinners and proselytes treated as second class citizens, are placed on equal footing with Judeans.

The third rhetorical question is introduced by the logical disjunctive “or/otherwise” (ἢ) in the beginning of 3.29. The question, hypothetically, suggests what would actually be the case if righteousness was conferred on the basis of the law of works (cf. 3.27). Paul asks: “or is God *the God* of Judeans only? Is he not *the God* of Gentiles also? In other words, if people (Judeans and Gentiles) were *righteoused* by the works of the law, then that would be tantamount to God being a local God – God of the Judeans only. But for Paul, and probably the interlocutor, of course God is the God of the Gentiles too! This question lands Paul at the centre of Judean monotheism which confesses that “God is one” (cf. Deut 4.39; 6.4; Philo, *Special Laws* 1.52). If God is one, then, the corollary is clear: He is the God of Gentiles too. And the corollary of that is also clear: he must impartially confer righteousness to the Judeans and Gentiles by faith. In Chapter III it was argued that monotheism was one of the

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understood to be speaking of the ‘law’ and not merely a ‘principle’ (cf. Dunn, 1988a:185–186; Wright, 2002:480–481; Schreiner, 1998:201–202). Somewhere in between the two approaches is Hays (1996:153–154), who while cognizant of the ambiguity, argues that since Paul coins νόμου πίστεως spontaneously to counter a νόμος τῶν ἔργων perspective, the latter should be understood to mean “Torah construed through the hermeneutical filter of distinctively Jewish practices,” while the former as “Torah construed through hermeneutical filter of πίστις”, the law as read through the eyes of faith.” Hays’ proposal is plausible. According to him, those who interpret the word νόμος as ‘principle’ under-interpret Paul’s theologically imbued language and disregard the fact that he uses νόμος consistently to refer to Israel’s law. Certainly, he continues, “The law that excludes boasting is precisely the law that Paul has already called as witness to humanity’s universal implication in sin (3.10-20) and as witness to God’s saving righteousness (3.21-22). In other words, the law *read as Paul has already claimed it should be read* is the νόμος πίστεως.”

distinctive hallmarks of Judaism. Its confession meant the rejection of alien, pluralistic and iconic cult. The doctrine itself pervaded all other aspects of Judaism, including sanctions in regard to how and with whom they worship, eat or engage in social discourse. Certainly, Judeans believed God was the God of the whole world. However, Gentiles could not relate to the God of Israel in a similar manner as Judeans. Limitations were placed all around them by the law. Furthermore, I also argued that, the proselytes themselves, though having gone through severe re-socialisation that effected a change of ethnicity, at least in the eyes of the outsiders, remained inferior to native Judeans. In fact, in some places they were prohibited from being involved in the temple cult. Their liturgy was also limited, for they could not call God, *our* God, but only *their* (Judeans) God, all because they could not trace their ancestry back to Abraham, even though they had fulfilled all the necessary cultural requirements (cf. Cohen, 1999:160, 323f., 2006:47).

Paul, however, takes this basic tenet of Judaism and turns it against any monopolistic tendency to own God. For him, both the law and monotheism no longer function as separating wall(s) between Judeans and Gentiles. As he has come to understand them, they no longer define the new people of God. God is the God of *all* ethnicities and will accord to them *all* the honourable status of being righteous on the basis of faith (3.30). Jewett (2007:301–302) rightly posits that the multicultural implications of this text are unmistakably visible, especially in the insulting ethnic epithets. With the Gentiles calling Judeans the περιτομή ('circumcised penis') and Judeans calling Gentiles the ἀκροβυστία ('uncircumcised penis') (cf. Marcus, 1989), Paul shatters the shameful connotations associated with these ethnic slurs when he contends that God will *righteous* all by faith in the gospel. Similarly, Moxne (1980:233) observes that Paul's argument here coheres fittingly with the socio-historical situation in Rome. In his efforts to mitigate the ethnic tension between Judeans and Gentiles in Rome, Paul invokes the oneness of God as an argument that serves the inclusion and co-existence of both Judeans and Gentiles in Christ within the same community of faith.

The last question (3.31) deals with whether Paul's position about righteousness of faith—nullified the law, as it seems to have done, while anticipating the next argument. Certainly, God gave Israel the law (cf. Ex 20, Deut 5). It is therefore unthinkable, if not blasphemous, for Paul to think that his position invalidates God's law. Hence he denies such a possibility and emphasises that faith establishes or confirms (ιστάνω) the law. In other words, Paul's understanding of the gospel and its implications for the Judean-Gentile divide is not opposed to the law, but rather establishes it. Indeed, in the first four verses of Romans (1.1-4), Paul draws from Israel's scripture, which can be summarised as the law and the prophets (cf.

3.21), to bring about the continuity between his gospel and the OT promises. The law has also been the primary weapon in his criticism against Judeans and Gentiles and what attests to the availability of God's righteousness that avails for both Judeans and Gentiles. Furthermore, the law continues playing the role of reminding Judeans and Gentiles of their plight and need of the gospel. Believers also fulfil its requirements (8.2-4; 10.8-10).

Pertinently, Paul will now turn to Abraham's fatherhood in order to show that the law always anticipated this new reality. As a matter of fact, Israel's scripture (the Torah) "foreseeing that God would confer righteousness to Gentiles by faith preached the gospel in advance to Abraham saying, 'in you all the nations will be blessed'" (Gal 3.8; cf. Gen 12.3). In this next argument, Paul, having equalised Judeans under sin and the gospel, proceeds to unite them under a common ancestry. He will show that the God's primordial promise and covenant to Abraham of a multi-ethnic family, consisting of Judeans and Gentiles, had finally reached its maturation in the sacrificial death of Christ. The corollary of that is that Judeans and Gentiles in Christ not only share a common honourable status, but also kinship, which can be traced back to the noble ancestor – Abraham.

#### **4.5. Creating kinship between Judeans and Gentiles under Abraham's fatherhood**

##### **4.5.1. Romans 4 in contemporary scholarship**

The role that the figure of Abraham plays in Paul's argumentative purposes in Romans is contested. Schliesser (2007:222–239) provides an apt summary of the debate. According to him, various themes have been suggested as what holds Romans 4 together:

the righteousness of God now revealed, the universality of God's grace, the significance of faith, the order of salvation, etc. – or: the inclusion of Gentiles, the religio-sociological dimension of the Christ-event, the two equivalent elections of both Jews and Gentiles, etc. This enumeration insinuates that the central issue of the controversial assessments of Paul's intention can be narrowed down to two poles, the first of which is signified with the phrase 'justification' by faith', and the second with 'inclusion of Gentiles'. More pointedly... the alternatives are 'faith' and 'fatherhood' (Schliesser, 2007:222).

Extrapolating from Schliesser, one can see the debate between the new perspective and the (neo)traditionists regarding Paul's doctrine of righteousness projected here. On the one hand, there are scholars who argue that Paul essentially invokes the figure of Abraham in Romans 4 in order to provide an example of the Christian faith. This way, Abraham's faith is understood as a 'prototype' prefiguring the Christian faith. His story anticipates that of the Christian who conceives the righteousness of the ungodly only in terms of faith. From this perspective, Romans 4 is predominantly concerned with the relevance for the doctrine *so/a*

*fide* (Schliesser, 2007:225–228). Gathercole (2002:233) for example, embodies this when he says: “Abraham is the paradigm *par excellence* for God’s people. He is not *an* illustration from the Old Testament; rather, presupposing in the ancient (and not least, the Jewish) world that children imitate their parents, as ‘our forefather’ he is *the* example. If Paul’s theology cannot accommodate him, it must be false” (cf. Fitzmyer, 1993:369–371; Mounce, 1995:120f.)

On the other hand, scholars who emphasise the Judean-Gentile theme Paul’s writings and the *polemical* nature of his doctrine of righteousness, shift the focus of the figure of Abraham from his *faith* to his *fatherhood*. Michael Cranford (cited in Schliesser, 2007:232–233), for example, argues: “Abraham’s faith is meant not as an example of Christian faith... but rather as the reason why uncircumcised Gentiles can receive the forgiveness reserved for those in the covenant,” “why Gentiles can be considered members of God’s people,” “why Gentiles can be considered his progeny as much as Jews.” Similarly, Wright (2002:487) contends that Romans 4 “is not simply, as it has so often been labelled, a ‘proof from scripture’ or even an ‘example’ of Paul’s thesis of justification by faith... The chapter is, in fact, a full-dress exposition of the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15, showing at every point how God always intended and promised that the covenant family of Abraham would include Gentiles as well as Jews.”

Perhaps driving a wedge between the two approaches has not been helpful. In fact, Schliesser (2007:222) himself argues that the structure of the chapter itself naturally gives rise to the two thematic centres (*faith* - 4.1-8, 19-25; *fatherhood* - 4.9-18). He insists that only an interpretation that takes seriously both poles would do justice to the text. Similarly, McFarland (2012:114–116) argues that the two seemingly divergent views are not mutually exclusive. “Paul’s emphasis in Rom 4 is about Abraham’s *faith in the promise*, fulfilled in the Christ-event, by which an ungodly Abraham is justified and an ‘inclusive’ family created, which can only be accomplished because of the fact that the Christ-event is an unfitting gift”. Both Schliesser and McFarland’s suggestion are recommendable and worthy to be pursued. Paul introduces Abraham in order to confirm the arguments of 3.27-31. There he has made it clear that both Judeans and Gentiles receive a righteous status only through faith, hence Gentiles can be included as Gods people without having to perform the works of the law. Here in Romans 4.1-25 he contends that both his position on righteousness by faith and inclusion of Gentiles in the one people of God are anticipated in the story of Abraham, since by the same faith, promise and covenant, he received righteousness and was established *the* father of many nations.

Yet, as it has been argued throughout this study, what Paul is doing in Romans, whether with the law and its works or righteousness or faith cannot be left abstract. Is Paul not, for example, invoking ancient ethnicity and kinship discourse in this chapter, a discourse that allows for the crafting of kinship for Judeans and Gentiles in Rome now divided along ethnic lines? It has been argued in chapter III that it was common for the ancients to take advantage of the essentialness of blood-relations while creating new ones through adoption or genealogical constructions. Through this, individuals and people groups would construct their ancestry back to well-known ancestors in order to acquire a new status of honour and prestige. I highlighted Dionysius, for example, who was able to construct kinship between Greeks and Romans using territory, ancestry and customs, and by so doing, he transformed the identity of a number of barbaric Roman tribes thereby conferring them with the honour and prestige associated with Greek ethnicity (cf. Hodge, 2007:28–36).

Furthermore, religious sacrifice or ritual was also an important part of these kinship mechanisms. According to Hodge (2007:17, 26, 28) religious sacrifice worked together with the construction of identities to reconfigure and maintain ethnic identities. For example, in adoption, kinship between parents and the adoptee was established by the means of a religious ritual. Similarly, Eisenbaum (2004:683–684) argues that many societies in ancient antiquity maintained their generational continuity through patrilineal descent, a mechanism, in which genealogies would be constructed back to a single male progenitor, designed to provide the society with the necessary group's social identity. She helpfully notes that sacrifice was an important aspect of the mechanism since it regulated the ancestry claims of the people. It made it possible for the establishment of social relations as different groups of people were brought into a common lineage or a new social order. This way, the determination of ancestry and inheritance was made not by proving one's fleshly descent but by proving one's participation in the requisite sacrificial rite.

Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 4 manifests similar mechanisms. While Paul does not explicitly use the word 'adoption' in the chapter, Gentiles in Christ emerge as legitimate children of Abraham. Indeed adoption is a major theme in Rom 8. And while also Paul does not explicitly state that the sacrificial death of Jesus plays the role that religious ritual played in ancient kinship and ethnicity discourse, it is certainly implied, since through Christ's death, Judeans and Gentiles not only find a righteous status before God, but the wall(s) of separation between them is finally dealt with and they emerge as the one true family of Abraham and the one people of God (cf. Eph 2.13f.). In fact, both Eisenbaum (2004:687–688) and Hodge (2007:17, 41) argue that Paul's kinship rhetoric is derived from the contextual patrilineal logic and is aimed at finding a solution to the problem of the unity

between Judeans and Gentiles. It is my contention, therefore, that Paul introduces Abraham at this point in Romans not only as scriptural proof or mere analogy of his view of righteousness by faith, but also as the patriarch in whose call was the destiny of ethnic Judeans and Gentiles in Christ. He rhetorically invokes him to demonstrate that God had always planned that Judeans and Gentiles *in* the Messiah would come together in one family, under Abraham's fatherhood. The sacrificial death of Jesus unleashes God's righteousness for everyone regardless of their ethnic background, but it also constitutes the moment when kinship between two peoples who by nature don't share such affinity can be created.

#### **4.5.2. The primordial basis for Abraham's fatherhood (4.1-8)**

I argued in chapter III that Abraham was a key figure in ancient Judaism. As an ancestor of the Judeans he provided Judaism with a social identity. This resonates well with the honourable title that both Josephus and Paul use for him: "Abraham our forefather" (Ἀβραάμ προπάτωρ δὲ ἡμέτερος) (Josephus, *Judean War*, 5.380); "Abraham our forefather according to the flesh" (Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα) (Rom 4.1). The figure of Abraham is also significant in the rest of the NT (cf. Matt 3.8-9; Lk 3.8; Acts 7.1-8; Gal 3; Jms 2; Heb 11). In fact, in John 8.31-59 descent from Abraham and its implications is a point of contention between Jesus and Judeans. By invoking Abraham's fatherhood right at the beginning of the chapter Paul sets the tone of his long discourse on this important figure of Judean history and memory. Central to his exposition is the biblical sequence of the events that catapulted Abraham into that honourable space. The way those events follow one another in the Genesis narrative (especially chapters 12-17) is critical for Paul for it both legitimises his contention about his views about righteousness of faith and the inclusion of Gentiles into the family of Abraham.

According to the Genesis story, God called Abraham and promised to make him a great nation; to bless him and make his name renowned (Gen 12.1-3). Paul presupposes this background together with how the promise begins to unfold in Gen 12-14, but picks up the story from Gen 15.1-6. Here, God's promise to Abraham is reprised in the words: "Fear not Abram, I am your shield and your reward shall be very great" (15.1). Abraham understands the promise, but does not see how it can happen since he is childless and without an heir. He therefore complains to God saying, "You have not given me a seed but a slave-born in my house will be my heir" (15.2-3). God replies to Abraham's complaint by assuring him that one from his loins will be his heir. Immediately, he invites him to gaze upon the sky to see whether he could count the stars. At this point God pronounces the promise: "so shall your descendants be" (οὕτως ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου - which Paul cites in Rom 4.18 as a reference to

Abraham being “the father of many nations”) (15.5). Abraham then believes this promise of countless progeny, and God reckons it to him for righteousness (*ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραμ τῷ και ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην*) (15.6). The promise is then followed by a covenant-ceremony that ratifies it (15.7-12) and a further clarification of the promise vis-à-vis Abraham’s descendants is made (15-13-21) (cf. Wright, 2013:210–213).

For Paul, this sequence is important. For by the same event, Abraham is conferred with a righteous status, but also a promise is made to him – all apart from works (circumcision). Circumcision comes only in Genesis 17 as the permanent sign of the covenant, or as Paul reinterprets it: as the “seal (*σφραγιδα*) of the righteousness of faith which he had while still uncircumcised” (4.11). This understanding of the Abraham’s story has clear implications for the new social reality that Paul is establishing. First, as in 3.27, it excludes any form of boasting. Abraham himself could not boast before God for he was *righteoused* by faith. Work came later as a confirmation of his pre-existent honourable status (4.2-3) (cf. Moo, 1996:296; Witherington, 2004:126). Secondly, Abraham, the first Hebrew or Israelite, is a representative of both a Gentile and Judean. For before he received righteousness he was something else, a godless Gentile (4.4). In fact, Joshua, while calling the Israelites to commitment to the covenant, reminds them that their ancestors, specifically Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River (Euphrates) and they were worshippers of other gods. But God took their father Abraham and brought him to Canaan (Jos 24.2-3; cf. *Jub* 12). In other words, before his call, Abraham was as hopeless and ungodly as any other Gentile (cf. Rom 1.18f), but because he trusted God’s promise he received righteousness (4.5).

This understanding is largely contrary to how contemporary Judaism viewed Abraham and his faith. In much of its literature, Abraham is held up high as a hero, who rejected idolatry and astrology in order to become the worshipper of the one true God. By rejecting idolatry he was being faithful to the unwritten Torah through which God eventually blessed him. The tradition had its social function – legitimising Gentile proselytes within Judean communities. Abraham was held as the quintessential proselyte (Philo, *Virtues* 39.212-17; *Abraham* 68-72 cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.7, 155-556; 2.159-160; *Jub* 11.16-17; 12.1-21; *Apocalypse* 1-8) (Adams, 1997:55–59). For Paul, however, Abraham was not *righteoused* through such a process. God made promises to him while still a Gentile sinner; he believed them and as a result, righteousness was conferred to him. He therefore, as Eisenbaum (2004:689) affirms, is a representative Judean and Gentile. The corollary is that he cannot be exclusively the father of οἱ ἐκ τῆς περιτομῆς or οἱ ἐκ νόμου. He is the ancestral patriarch of Judeans and Gentiles.

This is further supported by Paul's appeal to Psalm 31.1-2 (LXX) in 4.6-8, where David announces the blessed status of a man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered, and whose sins the Lord will not take into account. The status of blessing which David declares compares to (as the Greek conjunction *καθάπερ* indicates) the righteous status reckoned upon Abraham in Gen 15.6. The reckoning of righteousness by faith includes forgiveness, covering of sin and not taking to account the sins of the recipients. All these come as undeserved gifts (cf. 3.24).

#### 4.5.3. Abraham the father of the circumcised and uncircumcised (4.9-17a)

Paul's mission of crafting kinship for Abraham's seed (Judeans and Gentiles in Christ) reaches its peak in this section. The intricately intertwined motifs of righteousness of faith and Abraham's patriarchy, reinterpreted as a "state of blessedness" by David, merges together in 4.9. The connection has got to do with not *how* the blessing is received (i.e. by faith), but by whom it is received (i.e. Judeans and Gentiles). Paul proleptically probes whether the state of blessedness that David announces avails for the circumcised only? To which he replies, "to the uncircumcised also". Then he resorts to Gen 15.6 again as the evidence for that reality: For we affirm that faith was reckoned (or blessed status was reckoned) to Abraham as righteousness before he was circumcised. Circumcision came only as a confirmation of the righteousness of the faith he already had before he was circumcised (4. 10-11a) (cf. Witherington, 2004:126). Then for the first time in Rom 4, Paul spells out clearly in kinship language the reason he has told Abraham's story the way he has: things happened this way *in order* that Abraham might be: (1) "*the father of all who believe* (*πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων*) while uncircumcised, so that righteousness may be reckoned to them," and (2) "*the father of the circumcised to those who are not only circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had while he was uncircumcised*". In other words, Paul retells Abraham's story in the manner that he does, not only to put him forth as an example of faith, but more importantly to show that he is the father of Judeans and Gentiles, not because they are descended from him *κατὰ σάρκα* but because their destiny was anticipated (Hays, 2005:76).

Paul in 4.13-17 further explicates the *how* and *when* Abraham and his descendants received the promise to be the heir of the world with particular reference to the advent of the law. In the context of the chapter inheriting the whole world should be construed as reference to Abraham's universal fatherhood as vv.16 and 17 allude to (cf. Schreiner, 1998:227; Witherington, 2004:126–127). Paul insists that the promise was not actualised "through the law" (*διὰ νόμου*) but "through the righteousness of faith" (*διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως*). As is the

case with righteousness of faith, so it is with the reception of the promise. Righteousness came before circumcision (works) and so was the promise, which was announced before the coming of the law 430 years later (Gal 3.17). For Paul, if the promise had been on the basis of “the law” (ἐκ νόμου), then faith would be void and the promise nullified, since it would not avail to *all* Abraham’s seed. The corollary is that Abraham’s fatherhood would also have been rendered void since it would be on the basis of the law, and therefore privileging only the Judeans. But as the Genesis story clearly teaches, the promise was “by faith” (ἐκ πίστεως) and only that way was it “according to grace” (κατὰ χάριν). Moreover, only this way could the promise be guaranteed to “the entire seed” (παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι). The ‘entire seed’ incorporates the seed that is “out of the law” (τῷ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου) and that which is “out of the faith of Abraham” (τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ) – “*the father of us all*” (πατὴρ πάντων ἡμῶν), on the basis of God’s promise to him: “a father of many nations I have made you” (ὅτι πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν τέθεικά σε) (citing Gen 17.5). The perfect tense of the word τίθημι (‘I have made’), clearly confirms that the status that God conferred on Abraham, he effected there and then (Dunn, 1988a:217). Significantly, Paul speaks of a single collective seed (παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι) of Abraham and interprets it to mean the πολλῶν ἐθνῶν of Gen 17.5. The seed in view here then must be the “many nations” promised to Abraham (i.e., Judeans and Gentiles).

Tobin (2004:150–151) astutely observes that the movement from “Abraham our forefather” (4.1) to “Abraham the father of Gentile believers” (4.11) and “the father of Judean believers” (4.12) to the “father of us all” (4.16) reflects the contention of the whole chapter and the way Paul would have wanted his Roman audiences to understand the importance of Abraham’s story in the light of their own socio-historical situation. Abraham is no longer merely the esteemed ancestor of the Judeans, but the father of both Judeans and Gentiles in Christ. Paul has crafted kinship between them. Sechrest (2009:123) aptly captures what Paul has achieved in these verses:

Paul’s discussion of justification through faith in Romans 4 is predicated on kinship logic, but it uses a kinship logic that is completely at odds with modern popular reckoning of descent. In this calculus of kinship, *faith* is the necessary and sufficient cause of kinship... Paul’s argument completely reorders the calculus of ancestry via the principle of faith, by creating a shared history and kinship between uncircumcised Gentiles and circumcised Jews who had no shared history previously, thus anticipating a destiny whereby believing Gentiles participate in the blessing promised to Israel as children of Abraham.”

What is more, despite the fact that the meaning of the Greek preposition ἐκ in Paul is ambiguous, a number of scholars observe that the preposition is ubiquitous in the literatures of antiquity that have to do with kinship and ethnicity. It should therefore bear similar

connotations in the biblical material (cf. Stowers, 1994:237–241; Eisenbaum, 2004:690–691; Hodge, 2007:81–82). According to Stowers (1994:239) the preposition is used among Greek authors in the context of discourses that have to do with lineage and human descent.<sup>33</sup> The LXX too (cf. Gen 15.4; 17.16; 49:10), and the NT (cf. Phil 3.5; Rom 1.3; 11.1; 9.6; Gal 2.15; Matt 1.3, 5; Jn 1.13; Lk 1.27; 2.4; 23.7; Acts 4.6). The scholars emphasise that the phrases that bear the preposition are metaphors that connote origin or source (that which is ‘out of’) and should be rendered “descendent from” or “born of”, echoing the language of lineage from a founding ancestor (cf. Jewett, 2007:329). Connecting this understanding with the olive tree metaphor in 11.11-24, Sechrest (2009:144) argues that the preposition “depicts how both sets of branches, those now connected and those now broken, did or do grow out of (i.e., ‘descend from’) the root of the patriarchs, and it shows that the vital thing is whether or not the branches are attached to the tree”. Certainly, the olive tree metaphor coheres well with the argument that has been advanced here with regard to Romans 4 and Paul’s attempt to craft kinship between Judeans and Gentiles. An ancient audience would not have missed the link between Romans 4 and the olive tree metaphor. As a matter of fact, Fitzmyer (1993:610; cf. Hodge, 2004:88) suggests that the olive tree metaphor must be understood against the background of Romans 4 and Galatians 3.

The implications of Paul’s construction of kinship between Judeans and Gentiles are radical. For many scholars, though, the assumption is that Paul’s language of fatherhood and kinship is merely analogical and metaphorical, designed to elicit faith like that of Abraham (cf. Fitzmyer, 1993:381; Moo, 1996:268–271). However, from the discussion above, it is certain that Paul claims an ancestral kinship between Judeans and Gentiles in Christ. As Eisenbaum (2004:689) posits, “Paul thinks of Abraham primarily as the founding father of a divinely ordained lineage, but, consistent with his cultural context, such a lineage is not constructed on the basis of physical descent”. While Judaism readily entertained the thought that Gentiles could be Abraham’s descendants through proselytism, it was discovered in chapter III that the proselytes did not enjoy every benefit that came with such an honourable position. They were not allowed to call him “our father” but “*your* (i.e. Judeans) father” (Davies, 1974:177; Lincoln, 1992:170). Here however, Abraham emerges as the father of both Judeans and Gentiles. Both can trace their descent to this honourable man of distant memories, not on the basis of ethnicity but on the basis of righteousness of faith. Gentile

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<sup>33</sup> Hodge (2007:81–82) argues that Aristotle uses the preposition in connection with the σπέρμα from which (ἐξ οὗ) life springs. Socrates praises Athenian soldiers for having “sprung from virtuous men” (διὰ τὸ φύναι ἐξ ἀγαθῶν). In a letter in which the Spartan king writes to the Judean high priest, the king says, “We have learned that the Judeans and the Lakedaimonians come from one descent group (ἐξ ἑνὸς εἶεν γένους) (Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.226). The same letter is cited in 1 *Macc* 12.21, where it says that the Spartans and Judeans are “brothers from the lineage of Abraham” (ἐκ γένους Ἀβραάμ).

believers, without having to proselytise, can address him as “our father” and enjoy all the privileges and richness that accompanied such honourable status – “the richness of the root” (cf. 11.17-18; 15.8). Moreover, whereas previously claims of Abrahamic ancestry stood as a wall of separation between Judeans and Gentiles, now he becomes the great rallying point of all who have faith in Jesus. Abraham and his faith ultimately becomes the symbol of unity for the early followers of the Christ in Rome (cf. Lincoln, 1992:170; Watson, 2007:265–269).

#### **4.5.4. Abraham’s faith versus the faith of “the weak” and “the strong” (4.17b-25).**

Having established Abraham as the ancestor of a large multi-ethnic family, Paul turns to the nature and quality of Abraham’s faith vis-à-vis that of the Roman believers. The nature of his faith is not explained in abstraction, but in terms of the prospective son (Isaac), who will be born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Paul affirms that Abraham believed the promise in the presence of God, who in creational terms - “gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist” (4.17b). In other words, as Schreiner (1998:236) rightly says, “Abraham believed in the God who could infuse life where there was none by his resurrection power”. This anticipates Paul’s final word in the chapter where the object of faith is Jesus whom God raised from the dead. But here, the nature and quality of Abraham’s faith is explained in terms of the difficult situation which both Abraham and Sarah face in the journey of bringing forth a son-heir, Isaac, and ultimately, the innumerable seed. The situation they face is well described in 4.18-19: the deadness of their bodies due to old age, and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. It is further analysed as having been “beyond all hope” (παρ’ ἐλπίδα). For that reason, Abraham “believed beyond hope that he would become the father of many nations” (παρ’ ἐλπίδα ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι ἐπίστευσεν εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι αὐτὸν πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν) as was promised to him (cf. Jewett, 2007:335).

But how did Abraham and Sarah conduct themselves in the meantime? This is what Paul describes in 4.19-21. First, according to Paul, while cognizant of his present reality, Abraham “did not become weak in faith” (μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῇ πίστει). Secondly, he “did not waver in unbelief” (οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ), but, thirdly, “grew strong in faith” (ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει), giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised he was able to do.” In other words, Abraham continued to believe beyond all hope that the promise of becoming not only a father (to Isaac) but the ancestor of a multi-ethnic family would be fulfilled, according to what “had been spoken, ‘so shall your posterity be’” (κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον Οὕτως ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου) (4.18; citing Gen 15.5). Paul then reiterates that it was this faith that was credited to him as righteousness, not only for his sake but *for our* sake (his progeny, who now believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead, for he was delivered for our

transgressions and raised for our righteousness (4.24-25). The net effect here is that Abraham's promise to be a father of people from all ethnicities rested solely on God's power to fulfil that promise. God is the one who overcomes the obstacle – the deadness of Abraham and Sarah's body - and calls forth a seed to life, first, Isaac, then, Israel, then Judeans and Gentiles in Christ. While certainly Abraham's faith serves as a model for faithfulness, the model aspect does not conceal the purpose of his faith – to *become the father of many nations* (4.18).

In Chapter III, I argued that “the weak” in Rome included ethnic Judeans, with some Gentiles (proselytes or God-fearers), who although they had come to trust in Jesus as the Messiah, still held strongly to the exclusiveness of Judean ethnicity. “The strong” on the other hand, included Gentiles as majority, who after trusting Jesus, would have come to regard the specific Judean ethnic laws and practices as no longer binding. “The weak” would have regarded their ethnic laws as binding for the emerging “messianic group,” but also through observance of the Judean law, they would have been demonstrating their loyalty to the Roman Judean community. Paul criticises both groups - the presumptions of “the weak” and the arrogance of “strong” - while calling them to end the spirit of judgmentalism and to mutually accept one another as Christ had accepted them (14.1-15.7). But are there indications that Abraham's story was also crafted by Paul to achieve a similar purpose? And what implications would it have had for the situation?

It should not come as a surprise that Paul, aware of that situation in Rome, describes Abraham's nature and the quality of his faith using similar language. On the one hand, Paul speaks of Abraham being “not weak in faith and not wavering in faith,” but “growing strong in faith” (Rom 4.19, 20). On the other hand, he summons “the strong” *in faith*, to accept the “weak in faith” (τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει) and not to pass judgment on their opinions (14.1). He describes “the strong” in faith as οἱ δυνατοὶ (15.1) - an adjective related to the verb ἐνδυναμῶ – “to be strong” in 4.20. Abraham's faith is described as “not doubting” (οὐ διεκρίθη) and the only other place such language appears is in 14.23, describing those that eat while doubting (διακρινόμενος). Doubt is described here as a feature of the weak. When “the weak” eat under the pressure of “the strong,” they are condemned because they do not eat out of faith. Furthermore, Abraham's faith is characterised in terms of “full conviction” (πληροφορηθεὶς) (4.21) and the only other place this language appears is in 14.5, where the Roman believers are urged to be “fully convinced in their own mind” (πληροφορεῖσθω), whether to esteem one day as greater than another or to treat every day alike. Abraham's faith is also described as giving glory to God (δοὺς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ) (4.20), while the expected outcome of the Gentile's faith is to glorify God for his mercy (τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν) (15.9).

Indeed, the mutual acceptance of the weak and the strong brings glory to God (15.6, 7) (cf. Lincoln, 1992:172–175).

From a Judean (“the weak”) perspective, the way Paul has dealt with the figure of Abraham would have been too unpleasant. First, Paul’s argument dislocates Abraham from exclusively Judean domain. He now belongs to both Judeans and Gentiles. Secondly, in the section we have just analysed, Paul locates Abraham as standing in solidarity with “the strong” in Rome, a camp in which Paul also locates himself (15.1). In fact, Jewett (2007:336) rightly emphasises that this “formulation would certainly have been welcomed by the majority of Gentile Christians in Rome, because in that controversial situation it would have appeared that they conformed more fully to Abraham’s example than did the Jewish Christians who bore the insulting title, ‘the weak in faith’.” So, is Paul still interested in persuading Judeans and Gentiles into unity, and if so, why is he (and Abraham) siding with the strong only? Whatever the response might have been in Rome, associating Abraham and himself with “the strong” in Rome should be considered as having been crafted to serve his rhetorical agenda – uniting Judeans and Gentiles in Christ. Indeed, according to Lincoln (1992:173–174), even though Paul and Abraham join the debate in Rome as ones whose faith is strong, the Gentiles are however encouraged to stand in solidarity with Israel and empathise with their unbelief and not turn their back on them. Their arrogance and insensitivity towards them must stop and they must accept them in their weaknesses (14.1f). On the other hand, although Paul tolerates those who feel obligated to express their faith in a manner that is in continuity with Judaism, he does not desire to see them remain in their present level of faith. He hopes that Abraham’s story of faith will coax them to more maturity – so that they may treat all foods as clean and all days the same, without thinking that they have become apostates. Ultimately, Paul wants to see Judeans and Gentiles united in Christ and worshipping the one true God of Israel as he envisions it in 15.7-13.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The purpose for this chapter was to investigate how Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 might have addressed the extant ethnic tensions between Judeans and Gentiles in Rome and realised unity among them. It has been discovered that Paul understood himself not only as an apostle to the Gentiles, which included seeing to it that they are included in the one people of God, but also as a conciliator between Judeans and Gentiles and bringing them together within a new social identity, the church. In Romans, a letter addressed to congregations that were divided along ethnic lines, Paul attempts to address that disunity by first equalising Judeans and Gentiles under a negative condition – the plight of sin: all have fallen short of the glory of God. This would have shattered the corresponding grounds by

which each group harboured feelings of ethnic or moral superiority over the other. His critique undercuts any ethnic or moral pride outside of Christ, deflates any social or cultural pretensions, and renders both Judeans and Gentiles on an equal level of creatureliness.

Furthermore, Paul's ethnic rhetoric equalises Judeans and Gentiles under a positive condition – the gospel. Through the redemptive death of Christ, Judeans and Gentiles are being conferred with a righteous status on similar grounds – faith in Jesus. This new status of righteousness originates from God and bestows it freely to all. It is not dependent on conformity to a particular ethnic or cultural norm. Finally, Paul crafts kinship for Judeans and Gentiles in Christ. He traces that kinship back to the honourable progenitor (Abraham), whose purpose, based on the contextual kinship and ethnicity discourse is to provide the necessary group solidarity and social identity. Significantly, the basis for the new ancestry is not physical descent but *faith*. In Paul's construction, Abraham emerges not only as a representative of Judeans and Gentiles who have faith, but more importantly, as the *father of us all*. Judeans and Gentiles in Christ become equal inheritors of Abraham's honourable righteous status through the death of Christ. Hence, whereas previously Abraham was a point of conflict and a wall of separation, here he becomes the symbol of their unity and one whose faith should be emulated. Modelling their faith after that of Abraham will enable them to overcome the obstacles that now stand between them and move towards the realisation of Paul's envisioned community of harmony.

## CHAPTER V: Summary and conclusion

The stated aim of this study is to investigate how Paul's ethnic rhetoric in Romans 1-4 might have addressed the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide in Rome so as to realise unity among Judean and Gentile believers. One of the key outcomes of the study is that, unlike scholarship prior to the emergence of the new perspective on Judaism and Paul, contemporary scholarship is alive to the ethnic dimensions of Paul's writings. Prior to its emergence Paul's language about Judeans and Gentiles is largely ignored, treated as insignificant or even metaphorised to something else. Little is said about how Paul's rhetoric might have related to concrete socio-historical relations between Judeans and Gentiles. Romans itself, though manifesting great interest in the ethnic circumstances of the early followers of Christ in Rome, is largely read as a theological treatise with nothing or little to offer when it comes to those concrete situations. Furthermore, those who admit that the letter was written to address an ethnic problem insist that the first-half of the letter has its focus on the gospel and its meaning, rather than on the Romans and their needs. Paul resorts to the extant issues the Roman believers were facing only in the paraenetic section of the letter.

The study has emphasised that the new perspective has been effective in accentuating the first-century's socio-historical contexts under which Paul's gospel and theology emerged, particularly, the place of the law and its practices under the new regime inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection, and its implications for the inclusion of the Gentiles as God's people together with Judeans on similar terms. While the law and its practices were important distinguishing markers of Judean ethnic identity, and therefore had a sociological function, in the current regime the social boundaries that it placed upon the Gentiles in order for them to be included as members of God's people no longer counted. In fact, it is such an ethnocentric restrictiveness that Paul polemicises against in the phrases 'not by the works of the law' and 'righteousness by faith' and not abstract 'legalism' or an attack on a *homo religiosus*, now epitomised in the Judean. In this light, a few neotraditionalists attempt to adjust the traditional reading of Romans. The majority, however, insist that Paul is not concerned with social issues but the universal salvation of all humans, who now face God's wrath. For them, Romans offers two ways of salvation: one through faith in Jesus and the other through the meritorious system of the 'works of the law'. In other words, Paul's doctrine of righteousness is not polemical – i.e., contending for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the one family of Abraham, but soteriological. These scholars offer an important check to the contentions of the new perspective, for the occasional nature of Paul's gospel is not all that there is. His teaching on righteousness of faith has at the centre the rectification of the

problem that Adam, the first parent, bequeathed upon all humans; the problem of sin and judgment. However, these scholars, at least many of them, ignore and overlook the fact that Judeans and Gentiles are not abstract categories subsuming a general human epiphenomenon, but speak of real first-century peoples, whose history of ethnic discourse and consciousness was constantly contested.

This last point was the subject of the third chapter of this study. The chapter has contended that the ancients were alive to their specific ethnic categorisations and prejudices. This is something that impacted not only the general Judean-Gentile ethnic relations in the diaspora, but more specifically, the origin, shape and character of the early Christian movement in Rome. It was emphasised that ethnicity both now and then should not be understood as a fixed and immutable phenomenon, but one that involves a discourse of both fixity and mutability; continuity and probability. Ethnicity was and still is a process that involves a consciousness of difference, anchored in ancestry and culture. Central to the ethnic identity of a group of people are its distinctive character, ancestral claims, ancestral laws and customs. Yet, despite the primordial gravity of the nature of ethnicity, ancient ethnic groups and individuals took advantage of the perceived essentiality of blood and kin relations even as they creatively reorganised and recreated them. Ethnicity and kinship were used strategically to organise individuals and people groups and to shape their self-understanding while defining membership. Adoption was particularly recognised as a means to reconfigure lineage and construct genealogy, something which was always legitimised by a religious ritual, especially an animal sacrifice. Moreover, individuals and communities also constructed genealogies linking them to remote and legendary ancestors. This gave them the prestige and status associated with that original ancestor.

In addition, ethnic conflict was not something that was foreign to ancient communities. As it is today, group loyalties and prejudices play important roles when it comes to ethnic or cultural conflicts. It takes only a few differences between groups and divisions and tensions begin to emerge especially when the differences and prejudices are organized and entrenched in controvertible belief systems, especially those associated with ethnic fervour and fundamentalistic social, political and religious systems. People groups are bound to end in conflict and violence when there are perceptions of danger and threat to group survival; when people groups perceive the 'other' as evil or dangerous or superior; when there is a history of conflict between people groups and discordant social values, and where there is unequal distribution of power and resources. That this is exactly the case when it comes to ancient Judeans and other Gentile ethnicities in the diaspora is something that has been argued for.

Judaism in the diaspora, as it has been emphasised, was an ethnic identity at whose heart was the Judean law and its practices. The Torah provided the Judeans with the utmost symbolic boundary between them and outsiders. It afforded them their ethnic bond that they desperately needed in order to survive as a minority group among the vast sea of pagan Gentiles. It purchased the social and symbolic resources upon which every Judean and their communities depended on, and the practical distinctions that not only defined them as uniquely Judean, but separated them from the rest of the world. The law required them to be holy and separate, organising and defining every aspect of their social life. Gentiles who wanted to become Judeans had to undergo a severe process of resocialisation in Judaism. This clannishness and separateness engendered ethnic animosity from the Gentiles. Rome, where Paul's ethnic rhetoric was directed, was multi-ethnic *par excellence*. Many of the people groups that comprised the ancient Mediterranean world conglomerated there and lived in pockets of ethnic concentrations. In this way, they preserved their ethnic identity embedded in their specific ancestral laws and customs. The Roman Judeans were one of those many immigrant communities. Right from the beginning of their settlement their socio-historical situation in relation to their neighbouring Gentile communities was complex. Their claim to ethnic uniqueness and exclusivity resulted in persecution, restrictions and expulsion. Furthermore, the Greco-Roman literature of the time reveals a people that were a subject of utter derision and contempt. Their ancestral laws are characterised as stupid and humorous and their clannishness and adherence to their customs is heavily criticised. Most significantly, the restriction and expulsion of Roman Judeans from the capital in the 40's AD was related to the preaching of the gospel about Christ within their synagogues. The absence of a central governing body for the synagogues advanced the quick penetration of the gospel, something that constantly evoked conflicts between Judeans who were committed to a strict adherence to their ethnicity and those who had come to believe in the freedom that gospel brings and the inclusion of the Gentiles.

With the expulsion of the Judeans from Rome, the messianic movement began to take a more Gentile shape, and, unable to continue meeting in the synagogues, they began to meet in their tenements. The movement became more *Gentilish* in character as it attracted more Gentiles who previously had not been involved with Judaism and had probably been influenced by "Pauline type missionaries". This would have advanced the already existing anti-Judaic attitude among the Gentiles. The Judeans began streaming back into Rome only to find a completely new environment in which they were a minority in a place where they had previously exercised enormous power and control. Controversy, characteristic of the pre-expulsion days emerged between, as Paul's letter evidences, Judean believers designated in Romans as "the weak" or "the circumcision" who sought to maintain the

important ethno-cultural practices in solidarity with the rest of Judean community in Rome. The Gentile believers designated “the strong” or “the uncircumcision” would have been obstinate in their rejection of the uniquely Judean ethnic practices, considering them unnecessary, not binding and probably impinging on their freedom in Christ.

Under the weight of such evidence, the sociological function of the law and its practices cannot be expunged or even assumed. The law and its practice was the sure sign that one belonged to Israel. It was the demarcating boundary between those who not only belonged to Abraham, but would inherit God’s eschatological promises to him, and those who did not. Paul faced a big challenge in trying to adjust and modify contemporary Judaism by emphasising that Jesus was Israel’s promised Messiah, and through his death and resurrection Gentiles could become the children of Abraham. Christ’s death and resurrection demanded a reconfiguration of the exclusiveness of Judaism. Yet, years of socio-historical antagonism, ethnic differences and conflicts between Judeans and Gentiles made the task difficult. Inclusion of the Gentiles into the one family of Abraham, on the basis of faith in Christ, was endangering Judaism’s hard-won ethnic exclusivity and distinctiveness. However, as a man who lived among Judeans and Gentiles, Paul believed in his special role of not only conciliating between the two groups, but also engineering a new social identity and space that included Judeans and Gentiles in Christ.

Paul’s ethnic rhetoric in Rom 1-4 achieves that purpose. While his language of ‘Judean’ and ‘Gentile’, ‘righteousness’, ‘the works of the law’ ‘boasting’, etcetera, without a question has a universal significance, it has a particular contingency - the Judean-Gentile divide in Rome. In first-century Judaism, righteousness defined the envied and honourable status of the Judeans as God’s people who would form the future messianic kingdom. It gave them their social identity and the criterion by which to interpret and judge Gentiles and Gentilism. The status of righteousness was embodied by the Torah and expressed in the practices of the law, something the Gentiles couldn’t enjoy since they had neither the law nor the works of the law. In essence the practices of the law marked them as uniquely Judeans. They were the signposts distinguishing the righteous from the unrighteous. But for Paul, as this study has contended, at the heart of the gospel, by which God’s righteousness is revealed, is its inclusivity. The gospel embraces *all* – Judeans and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians. It has the capacity to save *all* who have faith and to confer a righteous status to them. It is multicultural in nature, putting *all* ethnic groups on a common ground and relativizing their ethno-cultural claims, while at the same time shattering any sense of distinction and superiority.

Paul's rhetorical strategy in Rom 1-4 appropriately attacks and addresses the ethnic pretensions and arrogance that arises from being a Judean or one of the many Gentiles' ethnicities. It insists that there is no difference between Judeans and Gentiles before God, for both have equally fallen short of God's glory; are under the power of sin, and stand before an impartial God, who will judge them according to their works. Both are completely dependent on God's amnesty. The net effect for Paul's ethnic rhetoric for the socio-historical context is the equalisation of Judeans and Gentiles in both culpability and amnesty. Both are freely *righteoused* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The new status is not dependent on conformity to a cultural system, but freely originates from God. In other words, Christ's sacrificial death practically creates a new social reality and space, whose basis is not ethnicity but faith. Furthermore, having established that Judeans and Gentiles are united in predicament and solution, Paul, following a contemporary ethnic discourse, proceeds to craft kinship between Judeans and Gentiles in Christ by linking them to an honourable ancestor - Abraham. First he establishes the origins and basis of his honorific position and then constructs a new ancestry for Judeans and Gentiles that goes back to him, not on the basis of biological descent, but faith. Through the calculus faith, Paul creates a shared history and kinship between Judeans and Gentiles who hitherto did not share such affinity. Abraham emerges not just as one who represents both Gentiles and Judeans, but more significantly, as their *physical* ancestor.

In conclusion, this study began by observing that the phenomenon called ethnicity is a formidable force in modern societies, and so it was in the ancient times. It can be positively utilised to mobilise people to achieve unity or to attain a common goal. While the challenge to enquire into how the Bible addresses itself to the questions of ethnicity has been voiced by various scholars, this study, particularly, heeded Nyende's appeal to African biblical scholarship to engage with the biblical material with a view to discern ways in which its authors addressed ethnic issues in their own day and time in order to use those methods and skills today. The study has however only fulfilled one part of Nyende's challenge. It has highlighted that Paul addressed the Judean-Gentile ethnic divide in Rome by contending for their equality in terms of the negative condition that they all faced (sin) and a positive condition by which all received a favoured status freely through God's grace. Then, in terms of ethnic and kinship language, he creates an ethnic bond between them that traces its origin back to the legendary and revered ancestor – Abraham. These outcomes can form an important basis for a study that seeks to inquire into how Paul's strategies and skills in Romans can be appropriated in a contemporary situation.

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