

## Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the Shema

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*Shema Israel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad:*

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

The Shema Israel has arguably been the most important ideological claim of Judaism since early Israelite history.<sup>1</sup> This call to listen to God is followed by the injunction to love God, that is, to be loyal and serve with all of the effort one can summon. This call includes both observance, and reflection, *kavannah*, the intention of the heart. It captures the very essence of Torah, the Teachings of God that Israel is, on behalf of all humankind, privileged, but also responsible, to listen to, and embody.<sup>2</sup>

To this day, the Shema Israel is uttered in sacred prayer twice a day. Jewish children learn it as their first prayer, and Jews hope that it will be the last words on their lips. R. Akiva recited the Shema when executed by the Romans following the failed Second Revolt against Rome, understanding the commandment to loyalty "with all thy soul" to signify "even if He takes thy soul," and the call to martyrdom continues in subsequent interpretive tradition.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Shema includes Deut 6:4-8; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41. For discussion of all of the elements of the prayer, see Lawrence A. Hoffman ed. *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries* (Vol. 1: The *Sh'ma* and Its Blessings; 1st ed.; Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997). My reflections on the Shema are informed by the observations of many others, e.g., Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism From the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel* (New York: Harper, 1959), 102-7; Norman Lamm, *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism as Exemplified in the Shema, the Most Important Passage in the Torah* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> *m. Abot* 3.14.

<sup>3</sup> *b. Berakhot* 61b; *y. Berakhot* 9.5; Lamm, *Shema*, 3, 135-40.

The claim that God is "One" affirms Israel's choice of her God "alone," or "only," and this God's choice of Israel, regardless of the claims of other nations on their gods, or their gods upon those nations. The natural sense of the declaration of Deut 6:4 in its own context is not the denial of the existence of other gods, but the prescription for Israel to only look to her God (cf. Exod 15:11). It is analogous to a person declaring that a certain mate is the only one for him or herself.<sup>4</sup> Such a proposition does not rest upon denying the existence of other men or women, but affirms, in spite of their existence, that the one in view is singularly of interest to themselves, the one he or she loves like no one else, to whom he or she will be loyal, regardless of the circumstances. Marriage rituals are constructed around just this dynamic. So too is the Israelite conception of the covenant relationship between God and Israel.

Although the Shema is mentioned only once in Torah, the redactor of the Mishnah, R. Judah the Prince, made it the opening halakhah for the Talmud.<sup>5</sup> The call to hear is a call to obey. Yet we do not always "do" as we ought according to what we have "heard" to be right. Thus the midrash of Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:11, reminds that even when Israel failed to "do" (*naaseh*) what it ought by making the Golden Calf, it was nevertheless still responsible to "hear" (*nishma*), to "listen." The Shema thus includes both the call to obedience, and to reflect on the meaning of that calling in spite of falling short of perfection, for as Ecclesiastes 7:20 recognizes, "there is not a just person on earth who does good and sins not."<sup>6</sup> Yet Israel is called—on behalf of all humankind—to attend to the doing of that which is right. Hence, the

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<sup>4</sup> Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 10.3; Lamm, *Shema*, 162; R. W. L. Moberly, "Toward an Interpretation of the Shema," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (ed. Christopher Seitz and Katyryn Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 124-44 (132-33).

<sup>5</sup> Lamm, *Shema*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Lamm, *Shema*, 9-10.

Talmudic expression for the Shema is *kabbalat 'ol malkhut shamayim*, "the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven."

The Shema reminds not only of God's loyalty and promises, but of the love of God that is central to Jewish identity, and the responsibility to do God's will and serve one's neighbors (cf. Mal 2:10). It embodies the ideals of Jewish spirituality. In Biblical Hebrew, there is, surprisingly enough, for a religious tradition so attentive to the obligation of obedience, no specific word for obedience, but rather, words such as this one. In English, it is highlighted when a parent rebukes a child with, "Did you *hear* what I said?," an ironic turn of phrase from one who knows the child heard it, yet feigns ignorance to rebuke them, meaning, "you did not respect my intentions," "do you *understand* the responsibility to which hearing this by definition committed you to loyally observe, as a member of this family unit?" Indeed, the Sages ruled that the recitation of the Shema is more concerned with "understanding" than "hearing." Thus, while the ideal is to announce the Shema with intention, nevertheless, even if it is recited inaudibly one can fulfill this halakhic requirement.<sup>7</sup> Obedience is intended to express heartfelt commitment to the ideals embedded in the action, even when the heart is heavy, or distant.

Defining the "oneness" of God is the subject of a rich interpretive tradition. Deut 4:39 tells how Moses taught the people to "realize today and turn it over in your mind: the Lord is indeed God, in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other." Maimonides (1135-1204) emphasized that God is incorporeal, indivisible, and completely unique. Rashi (1040-1105) observed that oneness includes the recognition that Israel's God is the only God of all the nations. The Shema became the rallying cry for Israelites in the face of polytheism. The call is

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<sup>7</sup> Lamm, *Shema*, 15-16.

to hear, not to see. There is no statue to behold. The sense of hearing involves not only cultivation of one of the senses apart from the others, but also the commitment to that which others have not similarly witnessed. When Isaiah proclaimed that Israel's God declares, "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil" (45:7), this was a polemical challenge to the regime of the Persians, with the two gods of Zoroastrianism, one of light and goodness, and another of darkness and evil. Later, this declaration naturally expressed a polemical sense of number in the face of Christian Trinitarian claims. The Shema functions not only theologically, but also socially. It defines group identity and values.

What does all of this Jewish tradition about the oneness of God have to do with Paul?

I submit that the Shema Israel is the central conviction of Paul's theology.<sup>8</sup> He often refers to God's oneness at critical points in arguments. It functions theologically and polemically. But he does not really explain the Shema as much as appeal to it, suggesting that for Paul the concept of God's oneness functions at the ideological level. Its explanatory power is assumed to be self-evident. This is true not only for himself, but his arguments presume it to be the case for his audiences also. Yet that would not work for those unfamiliar with its propositional bases, or importance in Jewish communal life and liturgy.

In other words, while most interpreters of Paul and most discussions of a topic like "Paul and the Jewish tradition" would be concerned to show how Paul emerged from the

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<sup>8</sup> For reflections on the oneness of God theme in Paul from which I have benefited, see e.g., Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 178-91; Anthony J. Guerra, "The One God Topos in Spec. Leg. 1.52," in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (ed. David Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 148-57; N. T. Wright, "One God, One Lord, One People," *Ex Audito* 7 (1991): 45-58; Idem, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 125-36.

Judaism of his time, they would do so from a conceptual framework in which Paul is no longer a representative of Judaism, but of a new religion, Christianity. Instead, I suggest that Paul practiced Judaism,<sup>9</sup> and his groups represented a Jewish coalition upholding that the end of the ages had dawned, and thus, that the awaited day when members of the other nations would turn to Israel's God as the one God of all humankind had arrived. He spoke for a Jewish subgroup that upheld faith in Christ, to be sure, but this was not a new religion, nor did he imagine that it would ever be one. He was a reformer, involved in the restoration of Israel, and the gathering of the nations initiated thereby.

If we turn to Paul's letter to the Romans, we can see Paul's direct appeal to the Shema as the basis for his judgment about the standing of non-Jews within the community of the people of God. The text of Romans 3:29-31 reads:

Or is God the God of Jews only? Not the God of members of the other nations also? Yes, of members of the other nations also, since God is one, who will justify the circumcised out of faithfulness and the foreskinned through the faith. Do we then nullify the Torah by the faith? By no means! On the contrary, we establish the Torah.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For deeper discussion of this topic, see Mark D. Nanos, "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm: Why Not 'Paul's Judaism'?", in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle* (ed. Mark Douglas Given; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, (forthcoming 2009); a version is available at: <<http://www.marknanos.com/Paul'sJudaism-5-28-08.pdf>>.

<sup>10</sup> This translation of *ethnē* as "members of the other nations" instead of "Gentiles" is to bring out the logic here where Paul is working around a contrast between Israel and the other nations. The choice of "faithfulness" for *pistis* without the article in the case of the circumcised, and "the faith" for the case of the foreskinned, which includes the article, is based on Paul's grammar and argument here and throughout the letter; see esp. Rom 15:8-9, and discussion of that passage below. From Paul's perspective, a Jew faithful to Torah will undertake the faith of Christ, and concomitant faithfulness to this, to which Torah points.

One might expect Paul to reason from the oneness of humankind, that we are all one, or to elaborate at least that because God is one therefore humankind is one, neither Jewish nor non-Jewish; but he does neither of these things. Rather, Paul simply appeals to the logic of God's oneness without further explanation. Paul pronounces a statement that is at once simple and complex—one that, for a Jew, is almost too close to the bone to be able to explain, because it is self-evident, and at the same time, one that is too all-encompassing to ever finish explaining.<sup>11</sup>

The discovery of the Shema Israel as central to Paul's theology was a profound moment for me, and has shaped my reading of him ever since. If I were writing a theology of Paul, it would be the center around which all the other topics turned. Here we see it employed clearly and in a pivotal point in his argument in Romans for why non-Jewish believers in Christ must remain non-Jews and not become proselytes, and by the implication of his logic, why Jews remain Jews after faith in Christ: "since God is one."<sup>12</sup>

Now, one unfamiliar with Jewish logic based on this "oneness of God" theme might find it difficult to follow. After all, what does "God is one" have to do with the warrant for the inclusion of non-Jews? If they became proselytes, that is, Jewish converts, how does it follow that God would not be one? But now for Paul, with the coming of Christ to redeem Israel *and*

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<sup>11</sup> Consideration of Greco-Roman ideas of a supreme deity emerging among Stoics and other philosophical groups should also be undertaken (e.g., Frederick E. Brenk, "'We Are of His Race.' Paul and the Philosophy of His Time," in *With Unperfumed Voice: Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* [ed. Frederick E. Brenk; Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge (PAWB) 21; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007], 402-40), but telling are the features of those traditions versus with the very similar elements and developments of themes in Paul, as discussed here, and in the rabbinic tradition, as discussed in, e.g., Lamm, *Shema*; cf. Dahl, *Studies in Paul*, 178-91.

<sup>12</sup> See Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 179-201.

the nations, the answer would logically be for him and other Christ-believers, "No." Why? Because, then it would signify that even in the awaited age God is only the one God of Israelites, including those who join the people Israel by way of proselyte conversion, leaving the members of the rest of the nations turning to God in Christ without a legitimate claim on Israel's God, as if there were more than one.

One of the critical questions in Christian theology is the relationship of its members to Jewish identity and behavior, an identity concern, which, for the original audiences, supports the claim that they understood themselves to be participants in Judaism, albeit not Jews. In Paul's time, although no longer, for Christ-believers who were not Jews, the first question was whether they could or should become members of Israel, Jews, which is accomplished by completion of the rite of proselyte conversion. For males, this includes circumcision at the conclusion of the conversion process. Circumcision thus functions in Paul's time as a metonym for the rite of proselyte conversion. It is a rite or work or deed prescribed by Torah to become a member of Israel, and thereafter, a person obliged to observe Torah, that is, responsible to practice Jewish behavior.

Since the Church Fathers, the traditional Christian answer to whether proselyte conversion should be undertaken by Christ-believers has been a definitive "No." The traditional reason offered has been because the time of Judaism and Torah has ended with the coming of Christ. They are finished—at least for Christ-believers—and Christians should not, indeed, cannot become Jews or observe Torah as a matter of faithfulness. This has been applied to Jewish believers in Christ as well as to non-Jewish believers. It has been universalized, so

that Christianity has no place for Jewish identity or Torah defined lifestyles.<sup>13</sup> It is thereby made clear that Christianity is not Judaism. And Jewish tradition has answered that ideological stance in kind, making it clear that Judaism is not Christianity. And they have become very different, indeed. Obviously, then, when the topic of Paul and the Jewish tradition arises, it does so on the basis of an essential contrast or in terms of Paul's former religion, one that perhaps continues to surface in his life and teachings because of his past, or occasionally when seeking to mimic Jews in order to evangelize among them, but not because he seeks to be faithful to it in his "Christian" life.

I suggest that the traditional approach is anachronistic for Paul himself, and his contemporaries, including the members of his communities. I understand Paul to teach non-Jews that came to faith in Christ that they cannot become Jews, members of Israel, but for a very different reason. Paul argues, I believe, not on the basis of the passing of Jewish identity or Torah, but on the basis of their role for Israelites in particular, and not for the members of the other nations. In terms of the Shema, Paul is developing the tension between the special privilege of being Israel: the Lord is *our* God, the God of the covenants made with our fathers, versus that of God's role as the creator of all humankind: the Lord *alone*. God is the God of all the nations, in whose service God has called and set apart the people Israel to demonstrate his righteousness and express his lovingkindness or grace. Here we meet so-called particularism and universalism in unison, not as binary opposites, as they are so often treated. We can thus understand Paul's sharp *denial* that faithfulness to God in Christ nullified Torah, but rather, the

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<sup>13</sup> For confessions extracted from Jews at conversion to Christianity that they would never return to any Jewish practices or assemblies, see James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 394-400. See also Nicea II, Canon VIII.

claim that it established Torah. Torah (God's "Teaching") guides Israel to live faithfully to the one God, which includes bearing witness of God's faithfulness to the nations; for Paul, that includes declaring the good news of God's rescue of the nations in Jesus Christ.

Paul's argument is consistent with other Jewish interpretations of the Shema not connected with Christ-faith. Consider the language of the *Sifre* on Deuteronomy 6:4 (Piska 31), when discussing why the Scripture says the Lord is both "our God" as well as "is One." The rabbis conclude first that "'our God' serves to teach us that His name rests in greater measure upon us.... upon Israel," and then offer this interpretation:

"The Lord, our God," over us (the children of Israel); "the Lord is one," over all the creatures of the world. "The Lord, our God," in this world; "the Lord is one," in the world to come, as it is said, "[T]he Lord shall be king over all the earth. In that day shall the Lord be one and His name one (Zech. 14:9).<sup>14</sup>

The concern for the universal as well as the particular is contextualized in terms of the awaited future. Israel presently has a special relationship with the One God who is the master not just of Israel, but of all of the other nations too.

Similarly, roughly halfway between Paul's time and our own, Rashi explained the repetition of "The Name" (*Hashem*, the Name, a rabbinic circumlocution for YHWH/Lord) in the Shema as follows:

"The Lord who is our God now, but not (yet) the God of the (other) nations, is destined to be the One Lord, as it is said, 'For then will I give to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent' (Zeph 3:9). And (likewise) it is said,

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<sup>14</sup> Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 58-59.

‘And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; on that day shall the Lord be One and His name One’ (Zech 14:9).”<sup>15</sup>

The eschatological expectation explains the confession that Israel makes today, but ultimately that all of the other nations will make too. But they do not do so "yet." And that is where Paul's argument is based upon the same logic, but to a different conclusion because of his understanding that Jesus Christ has brought the dawning of that awaited day.

As Paul brings his argument in Romans to a close, he sets out a graphic social portrait of non-Jews joining together with Jews in praise of the One God with one voice that mirrors the language of Rashi, although predating it by a millennium. In Romans 15:5-12 (NRSV), drawing from Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets, Paul exclaims:

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,  
and sing praises to your name”;

and again he says,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

and again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
and let all the peoples praise him”;

and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,  
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;  
in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

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<sup>15</sup> Lamm, *Shema*, 31, and 31-37.

For Paul, if non-Jews in-Christ become Jewish proselytes, and thereby Israelites, they do not bear witness to the arrival of the day when representatives from all of the nations turn from idols to the worship of the One God, but simply to the truth that in the present age Israel represents the righteous ones of God, members of which they become by proselyte conversion. That identity transformation for non-Jews is available apart from the confession of faith in Jesus Christ in most other Jewish groups of the time. They provide for proselyte conversion to join the family of Abraham, of God, within the present age, and await with Israel the hope of the day of the reconciliation of the nations.<sup>16</sup> Then the wolf (such as is Rome) will lie down to eat with the lamb (Israel) without devouring her (Isa 11:6; 65:25);<sup>17</sup> but *until that time*, such behavior would be foolish for lambs to indulge.

Yet for Paul, if all who worship the One God are Israelites or become Israelites, then God is only the God of one nation, not of all the nations. If the non-Jews who turn to Israel's God do so while remaining non-Jews, and thus not members of the nation Israel, then they worship the God of Israel as the one God of all the nations *also*. And that is the point of Paul's argument. No matter how many difficulties this poses for these members from the other nations and the Jews who affiliate with them as co-members of this Jewish coalition, God's oneness cannot be compromised by the proselyte conversion of non-Jews who turn to God by way of Jesus Christ, for this signals the arrival awaited day when all of the nations will worship the Creator God together.

Most other Jewish groups would not likely disagree with Paul's proposition that such reconciliation will occur when that day arrives, so that members of other nations do not then

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2.164-66.

<sup>17</sup> Maimonides, *Hilkhot Melakhim*, 12.1.

join Israel to join alongside of her in worship of the One Creator God of all humankind. Some may believe that day will be accompanied by the conversion of the nations, in the sense of proselyte conversion to Israel; others might await the destruction of those of the other nations as foremost in their hopes. These expectations and others can be gleaned from the Scriptures and other writings of Paul's time.<sup>18</sup>

But even the members of other Jewish groups who hope for reconciliation with the nations and expect them to remain not-Israel would not agree with Paul that this moment had arrived in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or begun to arrive and be witnessed in the life of the communities of believers in that proposition—unless sharing Paul's faith in Christ. In their groups the distinction and membership that follows from it remains between Gentiles (however welcome as friends and guests) and Jews or Israelites, a category that includes proselytes (those who have turned from idolatry to worship the One God and have completed the rite of conversion signaling that they have joined the people of that God in full membership, so that they are no longer regarded as mere guests). It is on *this* matter of where we stand on God's timetable—at the dawning of the awaited day, and thus making halakhic decisions appropriate to its arrival—that Paul's (and other Christ-believing) groups appear to have been “unique” among Jewish groups of his time.

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<sup>18</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 60-74, for discussion of various expectations for non-Jews, including a natural law non-Jew who turns from idolatry but is not identified with circumcision and other special laws for Israelites, e.g., observing dietary customs; righteous gentiles; and eschatological pilgrimage scenarios. Examples include Josephus, *Ant.* 20.41 (34-48); Philo, *QE* 2.2; *Moses* 2.4; *Abraham* 3-6, 60-61; *Virtues* 102, 181-82, 212-19; *Spec. Laws* 1.51; 2.42-48; 4.178; *Joseph and Aseneth*; *t. Sanh.* 13.2. Cf. Paula Fredriksen, "Judaism, The Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 236-47; Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Radical Traditions; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 162-63, 190-95; Lamm, *Shema*, 31-37.

That I believe was “the rub.” Paul sought to proclaim this “truth,” and to bring his communities into conformity with his teaching so that they would exemplify its merits. In his view, it required subordination to the Spirit of God to live in the present age according to the dynamics of the age to come, which is granted to Gentiles in Christ—on the same terms as Jews—apart from their becoming Israelites. In particular, the challenge for Christ-believing Jewish communities is to live out the proposition that while difference continues in this-age between, for example, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and masters, poor and rich, and so on, his audiences are to no longer express the discrimination generally associated with those differences in present age terms. Of course, since they are but humans, and in human society where there is difference there will be discrimination, as Social Identity Theory continues to demonstrate scientifically,<sup>19</sup> Paul recognizes that this ideal can only be achieved by dedication to God according to this proposition, and by yielding to God’s Spirit in their lives together.

I do not agree with the view of many interpreters of Paul—Jewish as well as Christian—that Paul taught the dissolution of differences, that there were no longer Jews and Gentiles in Christ, but a kind of new, third race, as some have phrased it. Paul does write famously in Gal 3:28: "There is not Jew or Greek, there is not slave or free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Here we see again the theme of oneness. But Paul cannot mean that these identities no longer exist among Christ-believers. There are very real biological, cultural, and socio-economic differences that are not dissolved. Slaves are not by definition freed in these groups, and Jews do not become Gentiles any more than Gentiles become Jews. There

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<sup>19</sup> Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

remain fundamental biological differences between women and men, for example, and a man has either been circumcised or remains in his foreskinned state.

Paul recognizes these differences in his arguments. In his letters, he addresses people and groups composed of these different identities specifically, and with different instructions for each. He explains the world from an Israelite-based conceptualization of reality: he does not address anyone as “Christian,” but as Jew or non-Jew, circumcised or foreskinned. Apart from an Israelite worldview such categories do not carry meaning. And it is only within these categories that being named a loyal follower of Jesus Christ (Messiah), or not, arises. Thus his rhetoric must signify something other than the end of difference. Rather, it signals that these different people and groups, although different, are not to continue to discriminate among themselves based on prevailing cultural valuations of those present differences, as they had previously "in the present evil age." They are to live in community, to eat together at the messianic banquet of the awaited age, bearing witness to the propositional claim of the gospel that the age to come had arrived with Christ into the midst of the present age. That is the truth of the gospel to which they are called (cf. 2:14).

Paul's position in Romans 3 and Galatians 3 is in keeping with his argument in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, that everyone who comes into the Christ-believing subgroups should remain in the state in which they were when called. Thus those circumcised remain Jews obligated to observe Torah (following the logic of Paul's argument in Galatians 5:3 [quote it]), while those who are not Jews remain not Jews, and so on. What is paramount, Paul declares, which may surprise many, is not one's relative social identity or status, but that everyone put first "keeping the commandments of God." It is hard to believe that this Paul has become the

apostle of freedom polemically juxtaposed with the value of faithful action, including the observance of Torah, the champion of faith alone, rather than of loyalty.

It should also be recognized that the notions of Christians as neither Jews nor Gentiles, circumcised nor foreskinned, has been settled in Christian tradition in real terms to mean they are not to be Jews or circumcised. It is not a third ethnicity, but a Gentile one, so that Gentile and Christian are conflated in contrast to Jew and non-Christian. This has created a struggle with Jewish identity and behavior, including how—and even in some cases, such as for Marcion, whether—to use the Tanakh. In sharp contrast to Paul's argument and the implicit logic that God is the God of Jews, the logic of the Christian abrogation of Jewish identity and Torah-based lifestyles for Jews, as if their role has ended in Christ, is that God is only the God of non-Jews, of Christianity as a Gentile religion.

But that turns Paul's argument from the Shema on its head. That God is the God of Jews was the logical premise for the question about whether God is also the God of non-Jews. He argued for the inclusion of non-Jews as equal co-members in the people of God, as children of Abraham, but not of Israel—not for the exclusion of Jews thereby! And he argued for the unequivocal continuation of all Israelites in the family of God as "beloved," including those who did not share Paul's faith in Christ, because of the gifts and promises made to the fathers (Rom 9:4-5, note the present tense possession of these gifts; 11:26-29). Indeed, concern to nip in the bud any potential arrogance toward those presently "stumbling" Israelites was one of Paul's central messages throughout the letter, made explicit in the olive tree allegory and other arguments of 11:11-36.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, 239-88; Idem, "Broken Branches: A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? (Romans 11:11-36)," in *Romans 9–11 at the Interface Between the 'New Perspective on Paul' and Jewish-Christian Dialog*, (Göttingen, Germany: May 1-4,

In my view, what Paul believes sets this Judaism (this Jewish community inclusive of non-Jews as more than mere guests) apart from all other Jewish groups, is the maintenance of difference without advantage because of the meaning of Jesus Christ. All in-Christ have stepped-up to the favored status at issue, and become children of Abraham, children of the One God of all humankind, as proclaimed in Israelite terms for the awaited age to come. It is the truth of this proclamation's claims in Jesus Christ to which they must be dedicated in all of their thinking and behavior by the "renewal of their minds" (12:1-2 and following). Otherwise, its witness to the Jewish people and the rest of the nations in Israelite-based terms will not be borne out. In the meantime, regardless of their disputed identity (in Jewish communities in which their subgroups dwell) because of failure to become proselytes, these Gentiles must not think of themselves or try to gain standing in this-age terms as either Jews, or alternatively, as mere guests still obliged thereby to participate in idolatrous practices when among family and fellow townspeople. Rather, they must stand fast in the truth of their identity in the new-age terms of Christ, and thus "out of faithfulness to the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness" (Gal 5:5, the goal of the letter, in my view).<sup>21</sup>

There is not time to discuss other texts in which Paul explicitly or implicitly appeals to the Shema. But I do want to at least read two of the most obvious ones that call for reflection. In Galatians 3:20 (NRSV), Paul writes:

Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

And in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 (NRSV):

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2008; forthcoming in a Mohr-Siebeck conference volume, eds. Ross Wagner and Florian Wilk); a version of this paper is available at <<http://www.marknanos.com/BrokenBranches-8-1-08.pdf>>.

<sup>21</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

## **Conclusion**

It represents an understatement, to say the least, to observe that I propose interpreting Paul from a more Jewish perspective than is generally practiced in Pauline scholarship. In a title like "Paul and the Jewish Tradition," the conjunction would usually serve to mark a contrast between Paul, on the one hand, the Christian apostle and founder of a new religion, Christianity, *and* the Jewish tradition, on the other hand, which he supposedly left following his conversion. While some similarities might be noted, it would focus on how different they were, and all the more precisely *because of his influence*, how different they continue to be.

But I maintain that Paul's arguments indicate that he continued to live and teach from within Judaism, albeit from within a specific group affiliation turning around a shared conviction about the meaning of Jesus Christ. Yet Paul still thought and argued and acted from within the Jewish religious system, appealing to Judaism's ideals and seeking to embody them, and he called for the members of his groups to do so as well.

In short, I believe that Paul and his groups practiced Judaism, even though for subsequent generations represented in the tradition known as Paulinism, and in the religion that became Christianity, this proposition is so fundamentally out of step with the prevailing interpretations of Paul that it might seem impossible to imagine, much less maintain.

Nevertheless, I ask you to consider the following eight dynamics of this interpretation:

1. Paul supposes that appeal to Judaism's ideals, and in this case the Shema, will carry authority with his Christ-believing audiences, whether he has been responsible for founding and working among them, or not. Yet he does not explain the theological foundations for such an important assertion as the Shema, around which his arguments turn. He expects them to resonate with this way of seeing the world, and that they will think and behave accordingly.

2. Paul was not against ethnic or gender or other kinds of difference continuing to be relevant in the lives of Christ-believers, including Jewish identity and concomitant observance of Torah. Rather, difference played a role in expressing the fundamental truth of his gospel proposition that the Creator God was not confined to one people or culture. Although the God of Israel, and best exemplified by the righteousness expressed in Torah, the ideals could be expressed in other cultural ways too. What was not to be expressed, however, among themselves, was hierarchical discrimination on the basis of the ways that difference functioned in their present age cultures. Difference was to remain, but God is one, and thus, in the communities of those devoted to God there is to be no intergroup discrimination based upon difference. This particular matter obviously perpetuates the relevance of this interpretation of Paul for Christians today not only concerning the ethnic category of Jew and non-Jew, but for all relationships that take place across lines of difference, including gender, ethnicity, economic means, cultural norms, location, and so on.

3. The Shema was a central aspect of Paul's *eschatological* reasoning. For him, the age to come has dawned in the resurrection of Christ; the messianic banquet has begun. Thus both Israel and the other nations turn to the One God equally. When the Christ-believing sub-groups of the Jewish community meet, they represent the demonstration of this propositional

truth—or they should. It is from this idea that his specific teaching of Jewish values in cross-cultural terms proceeds. Thus we find him explaining the theological premises from which they should think, and by which their behavior should be guided. The Shema involves not only a statement of central theological truths, but also guidance for how to live in the present evil age as if members already of the community of the blessed age to come.

4. Reasoning from these points, rather than from the premise that he regarded there to be something inferior about Jewish identity and behavior, or undesirable about it for Christ-believers, or simply obsolete, explains why Paul opposed the circumcision or proselyte conversion of his non-Jewish audiences. They were, and were to remain, non-Jews, and thus, not to undertake the rite of proselyte conversion. They were thus not to become under Torah, obliged to observe it on the same terms as Jews. At the same time, it follows that Jews were to continue to circumcise their sons; that they were to observe Torah as Jews, including Paul, whom I have argued elsewhere continued to practice prevailing Jewish dietary norms as a matter of covenant faithfulness.<sup>22</sup> Thus the non-Jewish Christ-believers were to respect the righteousness embodied in these Teachings (Rom 13:8-14; Gal 5:13-14), and to respect their explicit practice in the lives of Jews (Rom 14:1—15:13).

5. It is the uncertainties and difficulties proceeding from this Jewish utopian ideal that brought about the kinds of social problems for the people in his groups, non-Jews in particular, that he wrote letters to resolve. We thus have a very limited and highly contextualized corpus

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<sup>22</sup> See e.g., Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*; "What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 282-318; Idem, "The Polytheist Identity of the 'Weak,' And Paul's Strategy to 'Gain' Them: A New Reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1," in *Paul: Jew, Greek and Roman* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; PAST 5; Leiden: Brill, (forthcoming 2009); Idem, "The Myth of the 'Law-Free' Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews," (Guest Lecture, "Paul and Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Theological Society*; Providence, RI: forthcoming, November 21, 2008).

of literature upon which to construct our portrayals of Paul, as well as our histories of the origins of this movement. For most of his statements, "for non-Jews in Christ" should be added to retain the specific focus of his teachings in historical context. Particular care must be taken in moving across the line between the world of Paul and his assemblies, and the movement that sprung from them, which became Christianity. Exegesis, or historical oriented interpretation, and hermeneutics, or contemporary application oriented interpretation, are both cross-cultural enterprises.

6. To the degree that Paul is understood to work from the Shema and the ideals of Judaism, this recognition has profound implications for Christian identity, for how Christians look at their own sense of self and ideals for being in the world. Christian foundational truths, as far as the voice of Paul is concerned, arise from within Judaism, not to oppose it or begin a new religion, but to exemplify its ideals. Granted, within roughly fifty years of Paul's death, Ignatius declared that anyone not named a Christian does not belong to God, and more pointedly, that "It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, in which 'every tongue' believed and 'was brought together' to God" (*Magn.* 10). That this has been the way these religious ideals, including God's oneness, have been developed should provide reason for pause, and reconsideration. If not the probable intended result of Paul's thought and teaching, then when and how this change came about should be the subject of investigation. Instead of attributing to Paul the founding of Christianity as a new religion free of Judaism, perhaps it is time to seek to discover just how and why this change occurred, and to reconsider these decisions, and their implications.

7. Similarly, this historical challenge to the meaning of Paul and the interpretation of Christian origins where his influence is concerned, calls for a reconsideration of the voice of Paul in *Jewish* historiography. Jews should become aware of so-called Paulinism, which represents an interpretive trajectory in Christian teaching and thus in Jewish responses that has seldom been separated from the probable intentions of the original apostle. Jews need not agree with Paul to seek to translate his language and its meaning in historical context, including where that might differ from the prevailing Christian translations and interpretations of him, as I have sought to illustrate today. Just as in the study of Jesus, the study of Paul offers data that is important to filling in the map of the Judaism, or Judaisms, of this critical period, during the time just before the final destruction of the Second Temple, and the subsequent emergence of rabbinic Judaism. And just as Jesus is studied by Jews as well as Christians attentive to the difference between the study of the historical figure and the religious traditions that emerged thereafter, so too should Paul be studied attentive to this dynamic.

8. It follows that, in addition to calling for historical reevaluation of the Judaism of Paul's time and his own expression thereof, this proposition overcomes the obstacle Paul's voice has represented for to those seeking to advance Christian-Jewish dialogue and relations. Today, there are significant differences between these two faith traditions. But the origins of Paul's faith were not based on a fundamental rejection of Judaism, as is so often imagined and taught. Rather, what was at issue was whether this propositional truth was now to be expressed in age to come terms on the basis of the message of Jesus Christ, or not.

What stood between these originally Jewish groups, continues to be the main difference between these two present day religions, one Jewish, and the other no longer so. It

is not their foundational ideals, but the meaning of Jesus Christ that is in dispute. The point is not to ignore all the differences that now exist between these two religions, but to get the differences right. This approach provides a way to recognize and seize upon the similarities from which we can work together to bring about mutual respect, and thus, a level of much needed shalom arising from shared identity in the present age as fellow witnesses to the One God, in spite of different opinions about whether the awaited age has dawned in Jesus Christ, or not.