

# Climbing Mount Romans

## *A Rough Wright Guide to Paul's Greatest Letter*

David P Field – March 2007

Paul's letter to the Romans is almost universally recognized as one of the most grand, profound, complex, and breath-taking pieces of writing in all history. One of the leading New Testament scholars of our generation, N.T. Wright, has, across many of his writings, provided a series of detailed maps, beautiful photos, and climbing instructions to aid those making an attempt on Mount Romans. (His article "Paul and the Theology of Romans" is a readable and sophisticated summary treatment.) He acknowledges that there are bound to be omissions, fuzzinesses, and mistakes in what he has produced but many people, myself included, have found his work to be hugely helpful as a guide to Romans.

For what follows I have cut out various portions from Wright's map-book, enlarged some and reduced some, re-arranged them, glued them together, and taken a photocopy of them to produce the following *Rough Wright Guide to Romans*. For those who know Wright's work, it will be recognizably Wrightian (many of the words are his, whole chunks are simply copied from his works, and it wouldn't surprise me if up to 75% of what follows is to be found word for word in his published writings – I make *no* claim that this is *my* work). But the process of photocopying a series of glued together extracts may well have introduced inaccuracies and misrepresentations. Blame me for the inaccuracies, and thank Wright for the help you receive. More than that, respect and thank the apostle Paul for this astonishing work, the letter to the Romans. More than that, praise God the Holy Spirit for causing Paul to write each and every word that he did. More than that, praise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the great gospel which Paul's letter to the Romans expounds, explores, and celebrates.

### **Chapters 1-4**

The first four chapters of Romans give an explanation of how, in the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, God's righteousness (his consistency with his own justice and his faithfulness to his covenant) is revealed. Generic human, and pagan, and Jewish unrighteousness is exposed, God's judgment described, and the helplessness and guilt of fallen humanity declared. God's action in and through Jesus (in particular, through the faithfulness of Jesus as true Israel who rendered ultimate Obedience in his atoning-death) enables him to keep his promise to Abraham and thus, at one and the same time be consistent with his own justice and faithful to his covenant. Thus God brings into being a single Jew-Gentile family, a renewed covenant people, and these people are declared to be right with God not on the basis of human endeavour, Jewish privilege, or "works-of-torah" but purely through faith in Jesus. And looking back, this is seen to be God's intention all along as revealed in his covenant with Abraham and Abraham's own prefiguring of restored humanity.

## **Chapters 5-8**

Chapters five to eight further explain God's gospel accomplishment and revelation already described in the first four chapters. Showing that God's people in Christ is the true humanity, these chapters set out the achievement of Jesus in such a way as implants in the worldview of the Gentile church the scriptural narrative through which they may discover their own place on the map of God's purpose. God's renewed covenant people is a Christ-people and no longer an Adam-people. These people, through Jesus's messianic atoning death and the work of the Spirit have experienced a new exodus, have become the true *torah*-keepers (God's redemptive-historical use of *torah* and the relationship of Adamic Israel to *torah* are explained along the way), and are now being led through the wilderness to the glory inheritance which is not just for them but for the whole cosmos. Salvation is assured.

## **Chapters 9-11**

This, of course, raises (again) the question of Israel, the called and privileged people of God, the chosen instrument by which he intended to keep his promise to Abraham and thus restore the world. If God has accomplished the true exodus in the work of Jesus and the Spirit, what about the people of the original exodus? How can the gospel be a revelation of God's faithfulness and justice if Israel is left out or rejected? Chapters nine to eleven address these questions, demonstrating, by a retelling of the Israel story from Abraham through to Paul's day, that God was sovereign in and through the hardness of heart and the misdirected zeal of Israel, using them to bring about his purpose which was a renewed covenant and a deeper and truer way of keeping *torah*. This deeper way of keeping *torah*, namely, obedient trust in and loyalty to Jesus was, of course, open to Jews and Gentiles alike. But just as, mysteriously, Messiah was rejected and then raised, so Paul is confident that Israel's rejection will be matched and followed by resurrection as, over time, many (though not all) Jews come, by faith in Jesus, to be part of the true Israel reconfigured and redefined in Jesus.

## **Chapters 12-16**

The last section of the letter, chapters twelve to sixteen, brings the announcement of the gospel and the exposition of redemptive history contained in the preceding eleven chapters down into the lives of the mainly Gentile congregations of Christians in Rome. Living as the people of the renewed covenant will means worship, holiness, and unity, looking back to what God has done and forward to his worldwide purposes for the future. Christians learn to relate to each other and to outsiders in the light of the gospel and this means mutual love, as well as challenge to and gratitude for the civil authorities. In particular, justification on the basis of faith alone requires fellowship on the basis of faith alone so that matters which previously divided Jews and Gentiles must do so no longer. God's purpose of a worldwide people united in praise under Messiah's rule is to be worked out in little congregations in Rome and, through Paul's mission, far further afield too. Even the paragraphs of personal greetings illustrate and reinforce the Christian unity of God's renewed covenant people.

## NOW IN MORE DETAIL

### CHAPTERS 1-4

The first four chapters of Romans give an explanation of how, in the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, God's righteousness (his consistency with his own justice and his faithfulness to his covenant) is revealed. Generic human, and pagan, and Jewish unrighteousness is exposed, God's judgment described, and the helplessness and guilt of fallen humanity declared. God's action in and through Jesus (in particular, through the faithfulness of Jesus as true Israel who rendered ultimate Obedience in his atoning-death) enables him to keep his promise to Abraham and thus, at one and the same time be consistent with his own justice and faithful to his covenant. Thus God brings into being a single Jew-Gentile family, a renewed covenant people, and these people are declared to be right with God not on the basis of human endeavour, Jewish privilege, or "works-of-*torah*" but purely through faith in Jesus. And looking back, this is seen to be God's intention all along as revealed in his covenant with Abraham and Abraham's own prefiguring of restored humanity.

**1.1-7** – Paul introduces himself in terms of his vocation and defines that vocation in terms of the gospel. The gospel is the announcement of the risen Jesus as Messiah and Lord, under whose covenant rule all nations are to come by rendering obedient allegiance and loyal submission, that is, faith.

**1.8-17** – In his service of this rapidly spreading new regime announcement, Paul desires to come to Rome. The good news announcement of the saving rule of Jesus as Lord is the power by which God restores all who believe – whoever they are. And it is an expression and demonstration of God's promise-keeping covenant faithfulness.

**1.18-32** – How so? Starting with human rejection of God and embrace of corruption, Paul declares that the world has worshipped idols and reaped a harvest of dehumanisation, moral deterioration, and condemnation. Looking back and looking out we see unclean desires, dishonoured bodies, darkened minds, and darkened behaviour.

**2.1-16** – Paul produces a "diatribe" as if addressed to a pagan moralist. He insists that God's coming judgment will be impartial, the same for all, and that what God looks for is plain – working good (7, 10) not disobedience and evil (8, 9). This is what final judgment will be like - this is neither hypothetical nor introducing a non-gospel way of salvation but simply describing the reality in particular terms which will later be filled out. In fact, that filling out begins straightaway: the evil-doers are "sinners" and there are some who work good even though they are not *torah*-people, namely Gentile Christians who do the law because they have new covenant hearts.

**2.17-24** – Already in some of the terms used in the description of fallen humanity in 1.18-32, in the

insistence on God's impartiality (2.10-11), and in the choice of Gentile Christians to illustrate new covenant obedience, there has been an implicit critique of the Jews. This is now made explicit and the condemnation of Jews who have failed in their covenant obligations is announced, showing that their claims on the basis of privilege are useless. Israel has become part of the problem.

**2.25-29** – In fact, this itself confirms that real covenant membership is not a matter of Jewish privilege but of renewed hearts which is, after all, the promise of the new covenant. If we are to understand God's covenant faithfulness in the gospel then we must understand that it is covenant-renewing and covenant-redefining faithfulness. That there are those who do not share Israel's ethnic privileges, in whom the purposes of God as expressed in *torah* are coming to fulfillment, only serves further to condemn the Jews.

**3.1-8** – Two problems arise from what has just been said. The first is whether, then, Jewishness is a waste of time or no privilege at all – was it always an empty “gift”? If the answer to that is “no, the Jews' privileges were real”, then the second question is how God can be regarded as faithful? If the promise to Jews was a real promise and yet the Jews are, along with everyone else, condemned, then how can God claim to be faithful to his promise? Paul affirms that God is true, just and faithful – just watch and see. But this sets up the further problem: if God is to be true to character and if the promises are to be fulfilled, then what is needed is a faithful Israelite who will act on behalf of, and in the place of, faithless Israel.

**3.9-18** – Be patient, we'll hear more about that in a moment. But after the objections of 3.1-8, the verdict on all – Gentiles and Jews alike – is reiterated. This conclusion poses a classic question within the world of Second Temple Judaism. What happens when God's intended covenant faithfulness appears to be in conflict with the demands of impartial justice – when the double meaning of “the righteousness of God” seems to contradict itself? Paul's answer is emphatic in the next section but looking the contexts of the passages he cites here to confirm the guilty verdict on all, there are already hints that because God is righteous he will intervene in the situation where sin prevails in order to judge and yet *also* to deliver and renew.

**3.19-20** – And if a Jew were tempted at this point to protest that *torah* would help, that thought is quickly squashed. *Torah* condemns those who possess it and being a “works-of-*torah*” person will not elicit a “righteous” verdict from God for anyone.

**3.21 – 4.25** – From this point until the end of chapter four, Paul declares that in Jesus the Messiah, God has been true both to the covenant with Abraham and to the demands of justice. As a result there is now a Jew-plus-Gentile people of God, the true children of Abraham, marked out by faith rather than by “works-of-*torah*”. Note that the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant/promise and the creation of a restored and united humankind, far more than individual concerns about being saved, are what dominate these chapters.

**3.21-26** – God has accomplished through Jesus what Israel failed to accomplish. This was a demonstration of God’s righteousness – his consistency with his own justice and his faithfulness to his covenant promise to Abraham. The “faithfulness” of the Messiah denotes specifically his death, seen as the culmination of his whole “obedience.” This dealt with sin which is what stood in the way of the creation of a single worldwide family. With sin dealt with by the atoning death of Jesus, a forgiven people can be a united people because each and every one is marked by faith in Jesus. The badge of membership in the renewed people of God is faith, not “works-of-torah”.

**3.27-31** – It had to be this way because if the identifying badge of God’s people were something possessed by or available to only one sort of person (as would be the case if “works-of-torah” were that badge) then God’s family would either be a Jews-only family or a two-tier family. But there is one God so there must be one people of God.

**4.1-25** – All this has come about in fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. The fourth chapter as a whole is 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. The question of verse one is, “What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?” And, of course, the answer, stated explicitly in verses 16-17, is an emphatic “no”. Of course not, he is our forefather according to faith.

**4.1-8** – “Is Abraham the father of Christians according to the flesh?” No, the promises to him were not conditioned by works. If they were then he’d have been able to boast as later Jews tended to (2.17-20) and as Paul forbids (3.27-30). No, it was a faith thing. And, by the way, that means that it wasn’t a merit thing. In fact, wait for it . . . , Abraham was *ungodly*. So, as with David, it just had to be a faith thing not a works thing. Remember that when God reckons someone in the covenant by faith he is forgiving their sin – these things are functionally equivalent.

**4.9-12** – “Is Abraham the father of Christians according to the flesh?” No, the promises to him were not conditioned by circumcision.

**4.13-15** – “Is Abraham the father of Christians according to the flesh?” No, the promises to him were not conditioned by *torah*.

**4.16-17** – “Is Abraham the father of Christians according to the flesh?” No, the single family that God promised in the first place is the family of faith.

**4.18-25** – Paul echoes his indictment of fallen humanity in 1:18-32 and shows by implication that the problem has been undone. Abraham’s faith is the characteristic mark of genuine, God-honouring humanity. And Abraham’s family is identified by the same mark - faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

## **CHAPTERS 5-8**

Chapters five to eight further explain God’s gospel accomplishment and revelation already described in the first four chapters. Showing that God’s people in Christ is the true humanity, these chapters set out the achievement of Jesus in such a way as implants in the worldview of the Gentile church the scriptural narrative through which they may discover their own place on the map of God’s purpose. God’s renewed covenant people is a Christ-people and no longer an Adam-people. These people, through Jesus’s messianic death and the work of the Spirit have experienced a new exodus, have become the true *torah*-keepers (God’s redemptive-historical use of *torah* and the relationship of Adamic Israel to *torah* are explained along the way), and are now being led through the wilderness to the glory inheritance which is not just for them but for the whole cosmos. Salvation is assured.

**5.1-21** – Although the two main paragraphs of chapter five sum up what has gone before, this is a major new section of the book in which, contrasted to the previous four chapters, we read less about righteousness and more about love, nothing about Abraham and lots and lots about Jesus, little about the Jew-plus-Gentile theme and lots about the role of *torah* and the work of the Spirit.

**5.1-11** – The first of four paragraphs of equal length all marked by their ending with a Christological formula. These eleven verses state and develop the theme which overarches the next four chapters: because of the love of God effective through the death of Jesus, those whom God justifies, God also glorifies. The three tenses of Christian existence are described: past justification, present enjoyment of grace and peace, future hope of glory. Jesus’s death reveals God’s love and guarantees final salvation.

**5.12-21** – Jesus’s “obedience” has accomplished that for which God called Israel in the first place. Now, in the Messiah, inheritance and glory are given back to the human race. People caught up in sin, death, disobedience, and condemnation are to become truly human at last. The creator, covenant God has successfully dealt with the problem of human sin and death and the asymmetries between Adam and the Messiah bring home the triumphant reign of grace. A problematic one-liner, “*torah* came in with the purpose of increasing the trespass”, will later take the whole of 7.1 – 8.11 to unpack and resolve.

**6.1 – 8.39** – Chapters 1-4 explained how the gospel reveals God’s covenant faithfulness in creating a single family marked by faith. Chapter 5 has summed this up and looked ahead (vv.1-11) and also explained further how the Messiah has solved the Adam problem. Chapters 6-8 are patterned according to

the sequence of that great initial act of covenant faithfulness in the past – the Exodus. In the Exodus God came to liberate his people from slavery, bringing them through the waters (6.1ff), setting them free from a death-tyrant so that they could serve the living God (6.12-23), giving them the law at Sinai (7.1 – 8.11) and leading them through the wilderness by the Spirit into the inheritance of glory (8.1-30). And all of this is to be celebrated in the assurance that comes from God’s love (8.31-39).

**6.1-23** – So where do Christians live on the map of 5:12-21? Christians, Paul says, have left the old solidarity, and they belong to the new; they must behave accordingly. The transfer is affected by dying and rising with the Messiah. And the event in which this dying and rising is accomplished is baptism which is a new exodus. The master-narrative of this new exodus had been enacted when Israel’s history was focused on the Messiah and so in his death and resurrection. And now the life-stories of individual people, Jews and Greeks alike, need to be brought within this larger narrative by the appropriate symbolic means. The Messiah represents his people so that what is true of him becomes true of them. This is the logic of incorporative Messiahship and hence of baptism. So Christians leave the state of sin through baptism (6.1-5), and are now dead to Sin but alive to God (6.6-11). They are therefore called to holy living (6.12-14) which is a “slavery” to obedience and righteousness rather than to sin and impurity. They have left the road leading to death and are on the road of eternal life in Christ Jesus the Lord.

**7.1 – 8.11** – Things said about *torah* in 2.13-14, 2.25-27, 3.19-20, 3.31, and 5.20 really do need further explanation and, following the exodus narrative sequence, Paul comes now to “Sinai”, that is, to deal with the issue of *torah*. He has made it clear earlier that the Abrahamic promise was not conditioned by *torah*, that the covenant people were not identified by “works-of-*torah*”, and that the Jews had themselves failed to keep *torah*. So what place did *torah* have in God’s fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise? What was Israel’s real relationship with *torah*? And, if *torah* was itself a good thing and doing *torah* the mark of renewed covenant people (2.14, 2.27) and the basis of future justification (2.13), then how do these things all come together?

**7.1-6** – These verses introduce the major discussion of *torah* which follows. Renewed covenant people have passed from the Adam-death-sin-condemnation-slavery realm and live now in the Messiah-life-righteousness-grace-newness realm – the realm of new life in the Spirit. But the law, thus far, seems to have been associated with the first of these two realms and so it could be said that Christians are not under law (6.14) and have died to the law (7.4).

**7.7-12** – So are *torah* and sin identical? No, this can be explained through what happened when *torah* came to Israel on Sinai. Israel relived the story of Adam. Jewish rabbis called the golden calf incident the “fall of Israel” and the first word which the *torah* spoke as Moses came down the mountain was a word of condemnation. *Torah* was not same thing as sin and yet as the *torah* arrived sin sprang to life. It wasn’t

that sin and *torah* were identical. Rather sin used the occasion of the coming of *torah* to strengthen Israel's bonds with fallen Adam and thus to bring death. But *torah* itself was altogether good. Paul speaks in the first person singular throughout this section, even though he is telling the story of "Adamic Israel under *torah*", as a way of standing with the Jews themselves – he is not setting himself over against his own people.

**7.13-20** – The story of Adamic Israel under *torah* is continued. If the arrival of *torah* was the occasion of death was it *torah* that caused death? Again, the answer is "No". Speaking for Adamic Israel during the period of *torah*, Paul says that the whole experience was a contradiction and a mystery: recognizing the goodness of *torah* and yet, because of the power of sin, unable to do good. The law is good despite sin and death in the "I" (vv.13-16). The paradoxical behaviour of the "I" shows that it is sin's fault (vv.17-20). Echoes of the laments of the puzzled pagan moralist in this section are a way of saying that that is as high a level as Adamic Israel under the power of sin has got.

**7.21-25** – Putting these things together, what conclusion can be drawn about *torah*? That there is a double-sided *torah* which corresponds to the double-sided "I". *Torah* has, so to speak, split into two – it is the *torah* of God and yet because "I" am who "I" am – still in sin, still in Adam – the *torah* cannot do what it wants to do. "I" Israel have been freed by the exodus and "I" delight in *torah* – *torah* is good and spiritual and holy. And yet "I" Israel am still in Adam and thus still in slavery to Sin – and my relationship with *torah* in that sense is a relationship with "another *torah*" – a "*torah* of sin and death". (Note: throughout this passage – and in the rest of the section to 8.11 – every appearance of *nomos* refers to *torah*).

**8.1-11** – Messiah Jesus is the true Israel who by his obedience stands over against Adam rather than in Adam. What *torah* could not do (get the "Adam" out of Israel or Israel out of Adam or, to put it another way, deal with Sin) God has done in Messiah Jesus and by the Spirit. The vindication of *torah* (that it was not to be identified with sin and nor was it the cause of death) was also a vindication of God's use of *torah* because he always intended *torah* to increase the trespass. It did so, heaping up sin in one place – Israel – so that in that one place – (the sin-offering of Messiah who *is* Israel, that is, the cross of Jesus) – where sin abounded, grace could superabound. And so the covenant is renewed in Jesus and, by the Spirit's enabling the deeper, truer *torah* obedience (to be further explained in chapter 10), *torah*'s verdict of "life" can now come to those thus liberated and transformed. This "life" is in the Messiah now and flowers in future bodily resurrection. The whole paragraph, then, is about covenant renewal leading to and embodying resurrection. God has done what *torah* could not do – give life. So *torah* looks on at what Christ and the Spirit do and says "that's what I wanted to do but I couldn't because I was working with the wrong material."

**8.12-30** – Moving from "Sinai" to the wilderness wandering on the way to the promised land, the sons of

God are led by the Spirit and must not go back to slavery and fear again but rather on to their inheritance. And what is that inheritance? Not just the land of Canaan but (4.13) the whole world – and a liberated, released, renewed and glorious world at that. Life in this wilderness wandering is one of suffering and hope, of groaning and patience in which Christians live in prayer, as sons and daughters, with utter confidence that the love of God will accomplish his purpose of bringing his children to glory.

**8.31-39** – This major section is rounded off by picking up the themes of 5.1-11. It is the performative expansion of 5.11. Four questions and answers (31-32; 33; 34; 35-37) and a final explanation and summing up: “nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus”.

## **CHAPTERS 9-11**

This, of course, raises (again) the question of Israel, the called and privileged people of God, the chosen instrument by which he intended to keep his promise to Abraham and thus restore the world. If God has accomplished the true exodus in the work of Jesus and the Spirit, what about the people of the original exodus? How can the gospel be a revelation of God’s faithfulness and justice if Israel is left out or rejected? Chapters nine to eleven address these questions, first demonstrating, by a retelling of the Israel story from Abraham through to Paul’s day, that God was sovereign in and through the hardness of heart and the misdirected zeal of Israel, using them to bring about his purpose which was a renewed covenant and a deeper and truer way of keeping Torah. This deeper way of keeping Torah, namely, obedient trust in and loyalty to Jesus was, of course, open to Jews and Gentiles alike. But just as, mysteriously, Messiah was rejected and then raised, so Paul is confident that Israel’s rejection will be matched and followed by resurrection as, over time, many (though not all) Jews come, by faith in Jesus, to be part of the true Israel reconfigured and redefined in Jesus.

**9.1-5** – If God has accomplished the true exodus in the work of Jesus and the Spirit, what about the people of the original exodus? Paul describes the grief that he experiences in relation to his people Israel, a people which has been vastly privileged as the focus of the stages of God’s redemptive and restorative purpose up until the sending of his Son (and which, he implies, has, because of her unbelief yet to experience the deeper, truer exodus accomplished in Jesus and by the Spirit).

**9.6 – 10.21** – In order to explain this situation Paul turns to a retelling of the story of the Abrahamic promise from Abraham himself through, by 10.21, to Paul’s own day. In this retelling Paul shows that God was sovereign in and through the hardness of heart and the misdirected zeal of Israel, using them to bring about his purpose which was a renewed covenant and a deeper and truer way of keeping Torah. The stages of the story can be traced through Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Pharaoh, God’s promise to call the Gentiles, and the exile (9.6-29). After a summary of the state of things (9.30-

33), he picks up the story and gives an account of the sending of Messiah Jesus as the renewal of the covenant which was declared in Deuteronomy 30.

**9.6-29** – The story of Israel, from Abraham to the exile, displays God’s justice in judgment and mercy. This is specifically the story of Israel, the chosen people; it is the unique story of how the creator has worked with the covenant people, to bring about the purpose for which the covenant was made in the first place. It is the story, in other words, whose climax and goal is the Messiah; that, as we shall see, is the meaning of 10:3-4. The three major sections of this story relate to the three questions of 3.3, 3.5, and 3.7.

**9.6-13** – Israel’s patriarchal foundation is described in relation to the question of whether God’s word has failed. The answer is that God always intended that only some of Abraham’s descendants would carry forward the saving purpose. This had nothing to do with their respective merits, but only with the divine purpose.

**9.14-18** – Events of the Exodus are described in relation to the question of whether God is unrighteous. The answer is that God’s action upon Pharaoh was part of the means, not only of rescuing Israel from slavery, but of declaring God’s name to the world and that, by implication, God’s action upon Israel would be the means of rescuing the Gentiles who were being brought into the renewed covenant and declaring God’s name to the world.

**9.19-29** – God’s judgment that led to exile and, through it, to the fulfillment of God’s worldwide promise to Abraham is described in relation to the question of why God could find fault with the hardened ones if he was using their hardening in the outworking of his glorious purpose of mercy to others. This is answered by an affirmation both of God’s sovereignty and of his universal purpose.

**9.30-33** – The story so far is summarized. Israel has succumbed to judgment, with only a remnant to be rescued from the condemnation of exile. Meanwhile the Gentiles are coming into the covenant. In all this the strange but God-given negative purpose of the *torah* as seen earlier is picked up in the strange but God-given purpose whereby – through the *torah* – Israel trips and stumbles. God intends this for positive effect. Paul has told the story of Israel in a way which makes it Messiah-shaped – there has been rejection, failure, and exile followed by an astonishing covenant resurrection-renewal. This leads us to expect covenant climax and renewal to come next. As the *torah* problem of 7.7-25 had been resolved by the Messiah and Spirit covenant renewal answer of 8.3-4 and 8.5-11 so the Israel problem of 9.1-29 will be resolved by the Messiah and faith covenant renewal of 10.4 and 10.5-13.

**10.1-13** – The main theme, then, of this passage is the covenant renewal, and covenant redefinition, that has taken place in the Messiah. The paragraph begins and ends with salvation – 1, 13. Paul declares that

his fellow Jews are ignorant of God's righteousness, of what God has been doing all along, in faithfulness to God's own word and promise as described in 9:6-29 and now unveiled in the Messiah. Instead, they have sought to establish a covenant membership that would be for Jews and Jews only. As a result they have not submitted to God's covenant faithfulness, God's decisive action in Jesus the Messiah and fulfillment of the promises. Israel has not "attained *torah*" because the mode of "works" is not the way whereby one can attain it. Rather, *torah*, Israel's covenant charter, leads the eye forward along the storyline from Abraham all the way to the Messiah who is the goal of *torah*.

**10.1-4** – Paul reasserts his heart-longing for the salvation of Israel and since what he just been saying raises the old questions of how God can be consistent with his justice and faithful to his covenant promise and of whether the disobedient can be righteous, we are unsurprised to note the sudden reappearance of "righteousness" from 9.30 onwards.

**10.5-10** – And so to the renewal of the covenant. While Moses does indeed write concerning *torah*-righteousness that the one who does them shall live in them, what "doing" and "living" come to mean, when God restores Israel after exile, is defined afresh by Deuteronomy 30, not in terms of an impossible demand, but in terms of God's gift of God's own word; and this "word" is the word of faith, faith that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead. Verse five is not a statement of a legalism that Paul will then sweep aside, but a redefinition – Paul's point is that those who share Christian faith are, in fact, "doing the law" in the sense that Deuteronomy and Jeremiah intended. (As it happens, there are other extant retellings of Israel's history which also use Deuteronomy 30. They both look to their own generation to see a covenant renewal, one by reasserting the strict observance of a particular selection of "works-of-*torah*" and the other by looking for the arrival of "Wisdom" which is identified with *torah*.) The truer and deeper doing of *torah* in the covenant renewal brought about by the Messiah is identification with this risen Messiah by faith.

**10.11-13** – And, as the declaration in 3.28 that God's covenant people are identified by faith is followed by the celebration of the fact that this means a single worldwide family which is right because there is one God, so the declaration in 10.5-10 that God's covenant people are identified by faith in Jesus is followed by the celebration of the fact that this means a single worldwide family which is right because there is one Lord.

**10.14-21** – Since this covenant renewal leading to a worldwide family of faith has taken place there is now the urgent mission to the Gentiles, leading to Gentile inclusion in God's people (vv.14-18). And yet ethnic Israel remains recalcitrant (10.19-21). By this point the argument has come full circle – Paul has brought the story up to date. From Abraham to exodus, from the exile to the Messiah; and now that the Messiah has come, the new mode of covenant membership, of *torah*-observance, of "righteousness" is open, and

those who confess Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead share not only this status but also the salvation promised as a result.

**11.1-33** – Then what about Israel? The problem remains: hardened and rejected as disobedient in God’s mysterious purposes, is Israel now irredeemable and cast off forever?

**11.1-10** – Can any Jew be saved? Paul’s first answer is “yes, at least a remnant can”. This is seen both in that he, Paul, has believed in Jesus and in that God has always had a remnant chosen by grace. But whereas many remnant theologies were of the “diminishing remnant” type, Paul’s remnant is a remnant *after* the judgment, a remnant on the right side of covenant renewal and so he has hope that rather than coming at the end of a process as the small part of a diminishing number, the remnant of grace (Jews who believe in Jesus) comes at the beginning of a process and is the (currently) small part of an increasing number. And the hardening Paul talks about is what happens to some during a temporary suspension of the judgment that would otherwise have fallen. During the gospel era, some Jews will be hardened but there will be a remnant.

**11.11-24** – Can any more Jews be saved? Yes, because what has happened to Israel has been for the good of the Gentiles, so there is every reason to suppose that Israel herself will become “jealous” and thereby be saved. Additionally, Israel is patterned according to the pattern of Jesus too (unsurprisingly, given that the Messiah is “theirs” according to the flesh) and so it is to be hoped that, like him, their “rejection” will be followed by resurrection. Though they are broken off branches, they can be grafted in again and, certainly, any arrogance on the part of Gentile Christians would be ridiculous and dangerous in the extreme. Gentile Christians, far from boasting, should join Paul in grieving over and praying for Israel.

**11.25-32** – This, then, has been an explanation of how it works during the gospel era. God’s way of saving “all Israel” (all Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus) is that during the Gentile mission there will be a part of Israel which continue to reject Jesus and be rejected. This is how it is. But this does not mean that there will not be plenty of Jews saved. And this is the way, this is how it will look, this is the method that God is using to save his whole Jew-Gentile people – redefined “Israel” (see 9.6) so that as 10.13 declares that “all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” so 11.26 declares that “all Israel shall be saved”. This process by which God deals with Israel’s (and the world’s) sins has already been described in 9.24-26 and is here (vv.26b-27) further confirmed from Scripture. Paul then drives home to the Gentile Christians what their attitude should be first to the Jews and then to God and his ways.

**11. 33-36** – Paul then exemplifies the only fitting response to God and his ways with a rich doxological outburst of praise.

## **CHAPTERS 12-16**

The last section of the letter, chapters twelve to sixteen, brings the announcement of the gospel and the exposition of redemptive history contained in the preceding eleven chapters down into the lives of the mainly Gentile congregations of Christians in Rome. Living as the people of the renewed covenant will mean worship, holiness, and unity, looking back to what God has done and forward to his worldwide purposes for the future. Christians learn to relate to each other and to outsiders in the light of the gospel and this means mutual love, as well as challenge to and gratitude for the civil authorities. In particular, justification on the basis of faith alone requires fellowship on the basis of faith alone – matters that previously divided Jews and Gentiles must do so no longer. God's purpose of a worldwide people united in praise under Messiah's rule is to be worked out in little congregations in Rome and, through Paul's mission, far further afield too. Even the paragraphs of personal greetings illustrate and reinforce the Christian unity of God's renewed covenant people.

**12.1 – 13.14** – Paul turns from the exposition of God's saving purposes and the doxology which those purposes produce to exhortations to the Roman Christian to live lives aligned to those same saving purposes. Chapters twelve and thirteen consist of six sections which may be arranged chiastically: 12.1-2 give the introduction to and foundation of all the exhortations which follow and sits over against 13.11-14 which rounds off this section by speaking of living in the light of God's dawning day. These sections locate Christian living in its wider eschatological framework, insisting on the obedience of bodily life in the present period. Moving towards the centre of the chiasm, the next two sections in expound the obligation of love within the Christian community: 12.3-13 urge the unity in the church which is expressed and enjoyed through each Christian exercising his or her gifts and this is mirrored, at 13.8-10, by Paul's insistence on the overriding responsibility of love. Finally, at the centre of the chiasm are two sections describing the believers' stance and conduct towards outsiders consisting, amongst other things of an exhortation to respond rightly to evil (12.14-21) and an explanation of God's intention in establishing the civil authorities and of how believers are to relate to them (13.1-7).

**14.1 – 15.13** – Justification by faith alone must be expressed in fellowship on the basis of faith alone. God's covenant-renewing work to produce a single united family in Christ is to be made concrete in the lives of these Christian congregations. The divisive issues of chapter fourteen are precisely the things that divided Jews and Gentiles and since the Abrahamic covenant was to lead to blessing for all nations and the people of God are identified by allegiance to Jesus as Lord and not by any other "boundary markers" then there can be no place for division on matters such as Jewish food or calendar regulations. Instead there is to be shared common worship and common life; justification says that "all those who believe in Jesus belong at the same table".

**14.1-12** - The weak and the strong must recognize that they have the same Lord, the one who died and rose again to be Lord of all. There will come a judgment at which all will give account, and it is not up to individual Christians to pre-empt God's right in advance.

**14.13-23** – The focus is now on the issue of how to cope in practice: both sides must agree not to condemn the other but must respect, and not make demands on, one another's consciences. Verse 13 is a bridge between the two halves of the chapter. 14.14-18 explains that things that are not unclean in themselves become so if someone believes them to be; 14.19-23 urges Christians to avoid things that make a fellow Christian trip up; and 14.22-23 conclude the section.

**15.1-13** – The strong and the weak unite in the praise of God – these verses close the section which began at 14.1. At the same time they also close the section that began at 12.1, with their emphasis on humility, worship and praise. And their declaration that through the gospel of the risen Messiah, the world's true Lord, Jew and Gentile come together in God single family, demonstrating God's covenant faithfulness show that they also bring all that has come before in the letter, from its very beginning, towards a conclusion.

**15.1-6** – The Messiah leads the way to the united praise which should characterize the faith-children of Abraham in and by his "not pleasing himself".

**15.7-13** – Further insistence on mutual welcome, based on the welcoming ministry of the Messiah is followed by a celebration, in a sudden rush of scriptural citations, of the coming together in worship of Jews and Gentiles under the rule of this risen Messiah, through whom the one God will supply the present church with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**15.14-33** – Paul lays out his apostolic travel plans: first, he describes his plan to go to Spain via Rome (vv.14-24) and in doing so he explains why he has written the letter (vv.14-21) and states his intention to come to Rome and then go on to Spain from there (vv.22-24). He goes on to talk about his forthcoming visit to Jerusalem, in which he will take the collection to the saints there (vv.25-29), and about which he seeks the Roman Christians' prayers (30-33).

**16.1-27** – Paul conveys various greetings to believers in Rome which, in various ways, serve to strengthen and support his appeal for unity across the different congregations of Christians there. Final warnings (vv.17-20) and greetings (vv.21-23) are given and the letter closes with a blessing and doxology which themselves remind believers of the obedience of faith due to Messiah Jesus, the subject of Paul's gospel.

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## **SOURCES:**

All of these are by N T Wright. Full reference may be found on Wright's "Publications List" at <http://www.ntwrightpage.com/PublicationsList.pdf>

## **Books:**

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1. "Romans and the Theology of Paul" - [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Romans\\_Theology\\_Paul.pdf](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Romans_Theology_Paul.pdf)
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## **Audio:**

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[http://www.calvin.edu/worship/idis/theology/ntwright\\_romans\\_part1.mp3](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/idis/theology/ntwright_romans_part1.mp3)  
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