

God Condemned Sin in the Flesh of Christ: Romans 8:3 – 4 and Medical Substitutionary Atonement

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τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου, ἐν ᾧ ἠσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός, ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί, ἵνα τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν τοῖς μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα (Romans 8:3 – 4)

ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος (Philippians 2:7)

Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν Υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν (Galatians 4:4 – 5)

Introduction

Scholars have recognized Romans 8:1 – 4 as a ‘hinge’ in Paul’s argumentation in his *Epistle to the Romans*. In this section, Paul segues from Christ to the Spirit, theology to ethics, the Law’s inadequacy to the Law’s fulfillment. He arranges topics that he has treated in Romans into relation to each other, densely and compactly. I will explore the seams and integration points to explore the way Paul puts these topics together. I will pay especially close attention to Paul’s understanding of the relationship between the atonement accomplished by Jesus and the function of the Law in Mosaic Israel.

How Was the Law Powerless?

Paul says that ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου, ‘the Law was powerless’ (Rom.8:3). In what sense? What do the Hebrew Scriptures say about this? Do any other Jewish writings on the subject besides Christian literature reflect this position? At first glance, it would appear that the answer is ‘no.’ I will argue, however, that perhaps we are not looking for the right search terms.

Since E. P. Sanders published his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977,¹ various scholars of the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ have argued that the apostle Paul ‘reverse engineered’ his theology to fit his experience. In their view, prior to his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul did not perceive Israel to be in a ‘plight.’ Only when he met the risen Christ, supposedly, did he look retrospectively at his life in Judaism and perceive a problem. Sanders, along with other post-WWII scholars who have tried to recover positive elements of Judaism in dialogue with Christianity, argued that Paul worked backward from ‘solution’ to ‘plight.’

Most first century Jews, however, knew their plight perfectly well. They were ‘in exile.’ They had once been ‘in slavery in Egypt’ (Neh.9:17), and, even after the Babylonian Captivity and Cyrus’ decree permitting Jews to return, a form of slavery continued: ‘We are slaves today, and as to the land... we are slaves in it’ (Neh.9:36). Israel’s loss of political sovereignty and lack of agricultural fruitfulness signified spiritual and historical *regression*. God had warned Israel that their lack of faithfulness to Him, and their disobedience to the commandments of the Sinai covenant, would result in ‘exile’ and ‘slavery’ of this sort.² According to Deuteronomy 27 – 30 and other subsequent texts of the Hebrew Scriptures, ‘exile’ consisted of a lack of political independence akin to their time in Egypt, a scattering of Jewish people among the Gentile nations beyond the promised land, a lackluster agricultural fruitfulness for those Jews who returned, foreign occupation in the capital, and the ongoing presence of a problematic ‘heart’ which was prone to sin against God.

¹ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), p.474 – 475

² N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992) especially chs.6 – 10 and N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1996), especially chs.5 – 12; cf. Carey C. Newman, *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999) and James M. Scott, *Exile: A Conversation with N.T. Wright* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017)

In Romans 7:1 – 8:4, Paul then gives his most expansive and generous treatment of the importance of the Sinai covenant. In this section, he explains much about why God chose Israel, why the Jewish experience took the shape that it did, and why it continues to be important.

Paul speaks here to those ‘who know the Law’ (Rom.7:1). He uses the metaphor of marriage – which he feels more comfortable with than the metaphor of bondservice (Rom.6:19) as he gives no overt qualification to the metaphor – to illustrate the relationship Jewish Christians have with Christ, in view of the Sinai covenant. After establishing from the Jewish Law that only the death of a spouse frees the widow/widower to marry again (Rom.7:2 – 3), Paul moves to his main point. He says that the Jewish Christian has been marriage-united to Christ twice: once at his death and once at his resurrection (Rom.7:4). The effect of being joined to Jesus when he died to the Law is that the Jewish Christian also, by participation in Christ, died to the Law. The effect of being joined to Jesus when he rose from the dead is that the Jewish Christian also by participation in Christ, can bear fruit for God without having our ‘sinful passions’ in ‘the flesh’ aroused by the Law (Rom.7:5). Consequently, we are ‘released from the Law, having died to that to which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter’ (Rom.7:6).

Paul names the chief problem Israel experienced under the Sinai covenant, which he expounds on: it stimulated the sinful passions in the flesh. He also infers that Jesus’ victory over the sinful passions is also in view here. For when Paul mentions serving God ‘in newness of the Spirit,’ he has a ‘union with Christ’ by the Spirit in mind.

Why then did God ever initiate the Sinai covenant with Israel, if it only served to aggravate the problem of ‘the flesh’? Was God cruel to Israel? No. Paul gives a semi-autobiographical account of his experience of the Sinai covenant. In it, he reflects on his experience of himself before he came to believe in Jesus. Paul had been an upstanding Jew who outwardly upheld Jewish law and tradition with scrupulous zeal (Philippians 3:1 – 6). Yet, he looks back to his pre-Christian Jewish days (Romans 7:8 – 25), and says that inwardly, he experienced ‘every kind’ of lust and jealousy (i.e. ‘coveting’): ‘But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead...’ (Rom.7:8). Even if Paul is speaking as Israel personified, then he was surely including himself in that community, and implicating himself.

Then, Paul explains his inner conflict over this. To show this more clearly, I place his statements into a table:

‘I myself’	‘Sin which indwells me’
But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it... (Romans 7:16 – 17a)	
	but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh... (Romans 7:17b – 18a)
for the willing [of the good] is present in me, but the doing of the good is not... (Romans 7:18b)	
	I find then the principle that evil is present in me... (Romans 7:21)
...me, the one who wants to do good... Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free... (Romans 7:21b, 24)	
	from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24b – 25a)
So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God... (Romans 7:25b)	
	but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:25c)

For Paul and for Israel, the human person, including her/his human nature, was still made in the image of the good

Creator God (Gen.1:26 – 28). But Adam and Eve fell into sin; they internalized into human nature a corruption, a disorder by which they became beings who wanted to use the language of good and evil in an absolutist sense, but control the definitions and therefore be relativists. This created deep contradictions at the heart of human existence, because it was an internal problem which needed an internal resolution, for which human beings would constantly seek other explanations and therefore, propose superficial solutions.

Paul's exploration of the tenth commandment, which prohibited covetousness, is especially poetic since Adam and Eve coveted something that was not theirs. It would seem that the primal sin, then, was coveting (not pride per se, although that was close behind); coveting was reproduced in and through all of the children of Adam and Eve, and diagnosed with special vigor by Israel under the Sinai covenant. Paul's autobiographical comments in Philippians 3, where he says he had confidence in the flesh under the law, and 'as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless' (Phil.3:4 – 6) can be reconciled with Romans 7:14 – 25 if 'blameless' refers to his social standing in Judaism on the level of its praxis.³ The 'social' interpretation of Philippians 3 is likely correct, given that Paul's other points of boasting are marked socially: circumcised on the eighth day, which really refers to his parents' Jewish piety and his upbringing, not something he 'achieved' individually or could claim individual credit for; his lineage in the tribe of Benjamin, which historically was closely allied to the tribe of Judah and the house of David; his membership in the Pharisee group and his persecutorial activities of the church were socially recognized. But his high Jewish social standing did not protect him from violating the tenth commandment over and over again. Something was wrong with his heart, something he shared in common with every other human being.

Paul says that the Sinai covenant helped him, and other Israelites, accurately distinguish between the 'I myself' and the 'flesh.' So, far from saying that the human being is purely and wholly 'evil' because 'nothing good dwells in me,' Paul is actually clarifying that 'nothing good dwells in me, *that is, in my flesh.*' 'Evil is present in me' but that evil can be conceptually distinguished from the 'me' speaking. Of course, Paul feels like a prisoner in his own body, which he calls 'the body of this death.' This is why Paul believed he needs the Spirit of the victorious Messiah Jesus also in his own body.

From this point, I will explore where Paul derived his view of the Sinai covenant, 'the law.' I will argue that Paul is not mining a few quotations here or there, but is drawing from the entire sweep of Israel's Scriptures. He reads the Scriptures in a way that he deduces from them Israel's inability to live according within the Sinai covenant.

Sources of Paul's View of the Sinai Covenant: The Pentateuch

The Hebrew Scriptures themselves provided a diagnosis for Israel's 'exile.' The hearts of the Israelites – that is, their human nature – was corrupted and disordered. Until this internal problem was resolved, Israel would remain in 'exile.' The Torah, which I will henceforth call 'the Pentateuch' for the sake of clarity, says this:

'If their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.' (Lev.26:41 – 42)

'So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer' (Dt.10:16)

'Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.' (Dt.29:4)

When, or as, God brings the exile to an end, He promises to resolve that internal, fundamental problem:

'The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise

³ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2016 second edition), p.346 simply says that different autobiographical accounts permit this range of expression. 'At one point, it suits Paul to present his own past as that of an exceptional Jew, a Pharisee who practiced the righteousness required by the law with extraordinary diligence (Phil.3:4 – 6, cf. Gal.1.13 – 14). At another point, Paul presents his own experience as characteristic of life under the law in general, and as determined by Israel's disastrous encounter with the law at and after Sinai. Within the formal conventions of autobiographical writing, there is scope both for the highly individualized 'I' of Philippians 3 and for the more representative 'I' of Romans 7, just as there is scope for the more optimistic self-presentation of the first and the more pessimistic self-presentation of the second. The claim that Romans 7 cannot be autobiographical, since it would then conflict with Philippians 3, rests on the naïve assumption that there can only be one way of telling one's own story.'

your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.’ (Dt.30:5 – 6)

What the logical and chronological relationship is between the restoration from exile and ‘circumcision of the heart’ is unclear. ‘Circumcision of the heart’ might be prior to, subsequent to, constitutive of, or an element of, the restoration. The narration and grammatical construction of Deuteronomy 30:1 – 6 leave some ambiguity about that.

Paul’s negative experience of the otherwise good commandments – in the framework of the Sinai covenant – can be understood more clearly if I am correct in discerning the Pentateuch itself as a diagnosis of human nature, including the human nature of the Israelites who bound themselves to the Sinai covenant. This subject appears to be the center of a chiasm running through the entire Pentateuch:

1. God’s Spirit ‘hovers’ as God creates heaven and earth; God places humanity in a garden land, but they leave in exile and with a corruption in human nature (Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21); origin of all nations: Gen.1:1 – 11:26
2. Covenant inaugurated with Abraham – blessings and curses: Gen.11:27 – 12:8
3. God’s faithfulness to the chosen family: Gen.12:9 – 50:26
4. Deliverance of Israelites (first generation) from Egypt, arrival at Sinai: Ex.1:1 – 18:27
5. Covenant Inaugurated, Broken, Re-Asserted: Ex.19:1 – 24:11
 - a. God calls Israel to meet Him on the mountain on the third day: Ex.19:1 – 15
 - b. Israel’s failure – to come up the mountain: Ex.19:16 – 23
 - c. God resumes with Moses and Aaron: Ex.19:24 – 25
 - d. God gives Israel the Ten Commandments: Ex.20:1 – 17
 - e. Israel’s failure – Israel afraid of God’s voice: Ex.20:18 – 20
 - f. God gives all Israel 49 laws (7x7): Ex.20:21 – 23:19
 - g. God and Israel agree to a covenant, and Moses, Aaron, and 70 elders see God, and eat and drink in His presence: Ex.23:20 – 24:11
6. Tabernacle instructions given to house the **veiled** presence of God: Ex.24:12 – 31:11
7. God commands Israel to observe the Sabbath to imitate God’s original creation Sabbath, and writes the covenant on stone tablets: Ex.31:12 – 18
8. Covenant broken; Israel worships Aaron’s golden calves: Ex.32:1 – 29
9. Moses mediates for Israel, sees God’s glory, restores the covenant: Ex.32:30 – 33:23
- 8’. Covenant affirmed: Ex.34:1 – 17
- 7’. God commands Israel to observe three annual feasts and writes the covenant on stone tablets again; Moses is partially purified and transfigured but **veils** his face as a sign of judgment, hiding God’s glory from the nation: Ex.34:18 – 35
- 6’. Tabernacle built to instructions; presence of God comes **veiled**: Ex.35:1 – 40:38
- 5’. Covenant Mediation Inaugurated, Covenant Broken, Re-Asserted: Lev.1:1 – 27:34
 - a. God calls Israel to approach Him, gives priests a Code for sacrifices: Lev.1:1 – 9:24
 - b. Priests’ failure – two of Aaron’s sons offer strange fire, are consumed: Lev.10:1 – 7
 - c. God resumes with Aaron’s two others sons: Lev.10:8 – 20
 - d. God gives Israel’s priests a Priestly Code for the community: Lev.11:1 – 16:34
 - e. Israel’s failure – God addresses worship of goat idols: Lev.17:1 – 9 (cf. Acts 7:42 – 43)
 - f. God gives all Israel a Holiness Code: Lev.17:10 – 25:55
 - g. God and Israel agree to a covenant: Lev.26:1 – 27:34
- 4’. Departure from Sinai, deliverance of Israelites (second generation) from sins (of the first generation): Num.1:1 – 36:13
- 3’. God’s faithfulness forms the basis for Moses’ exhortation: Dt.1:1 – 26:19
2. Covenant offered to Israel – blessings and curses: Dt.27:1 – 29:29
- 1’. God must circumcise human hearts after Israel’s exile (30:6); ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ (32:1) witness destiny of Israel and nations; God’s Spirit ‘hovers’ (32:11) over Israel as they enter garden land: Dt.30:1 – 34:12

My point here does not hang on the validity of the chiasmic structure, though the chiasm is helpful to visualize; John H. Sailhamer makes the same points without it simply by following the narration.⁴ What is significant here is the patterned approach God takes towards humanity and towards Israel.

⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992)

God begins His covenant partnership with humanity and then Israel on mountains. Eden was a mountain. That is implicit because of the four diverging rivers in Gen.2:10 – 14, which implies elevation because rivers naturally converge, not diverge. Ezekiel explicitly states Eden is a mountain in Ezk.28:13 – 14. God had intended humanity to bear His image and reproduce human life and garden life rippling out from Eden. Since Adam and Eve sinned and corrupted human nature, God had to begin again: with Noah and his family (Gen.8), as the ark of Noah came to rest on the tops of mountains (Gen.8:4), so life would spread out again from a mountain. As humanity failed again, God began again with Abraham and Sarah (Gen.12:1 – 3) as a newer variation on Adam and Eve, and Abraham built an altar on a mountain (Gen.12:8); Abraham also returned to another mountain to enact the most profound of sacrifices (Gen.22:2). By the time God brings Israel out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai, the pattern can be well understood. God called Israel up onto Mount Sinai, in an encounter meant to retell and recall Adam and Eve on Mount Eden. Israel was then to reproduce – in some sense – that covenant moment on Mount Zion, by carrying God’s life, wisdom, and glory into the world.

Unfortunately, Israel failed to approach God and make the covenant. Israel believed God enough to be delivered from Egypt (Ex.4:31), but failed to trust and obey God at Sinai. Note that Exodus 19:13 reads in the *Jerusalem Bible*, ‘When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up *on* the mountain,’ not ‘*to* the mountain’ as they were already encamped around the base of the mountain. Moses confirmed this when he reflects on their failure by saying, ‘For you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain’ (Dt.5:5). Moses’ account demonstrates that God did expect them to ‘go up the mountain’ at first.

Instead, God made the covenant with Moses, as mediator for Israel. Moses’ mediation allows for the presence of God to remain with Israel, but in a veiled way. Without Moses, God would simply give up on the nation and start over with Moses. The impact of Moses’ choices on his relationship with God was unusual. He had the intimacy of seeing God’s glory ‘face to face’ (Ex.33:11) yet not quite ‘face to face’ (Ex.33:20 – 23). The corresponding impact of Moses’ choices on his own human nature was partial purification and transfiguration. As God’s face shone with the glory of the divine light, so also Moses’ face shone with the glory of the divine light, to a lesser degree (Ex.34:29 – 35). Moses became ‘like’ God. This is the closest indication of anyone bearing the ‘likeness’ of God, which was God’s original intention from Genesis 1:26 – 28. Israel does not experience God ‘face to face’ as Moses did. The mediation of Moses is therefore central to the Pentateuch, and to the Sinai covenant. In fact, the progressive growth of mediation is what stabilizes the covenant between God and Israel, because even the best human leaders are mortal and need replacement.

However, the Sinai covenant brings death, according to Paul in 2 Corinthians 3. But is that what the Pentateuchal narrative intends to say? Francis Watson notes that Paul’s remarks about Moses and the Sinai covenant in 2 Corinthians bear out when we read not just his quotations but the context surrounding his quotations.⁵ Following the golden calf incident, Moses orders the sons of Levi to kill three thousand men (Ex.32:27 – 28). In the preceding biblical story, idolatry never brought about such a swift divine or human response. God protected the family of faith from being slain by violence, as in the case of Noah, and probably preemptively in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, given how quickly they were willing to use rape as a tool of dominance less than twenty-five years after Abraham courageously rescued all of the inhabitants of those cities, while their kings fled, from the hands of other conquerors, and accepted no reward (Gen.14:1 – 24). The case of the Egyptian firstborn can also be understood as God gathering those children to Himself to await Jesus’ appearance to them in Sheol/Hades (1 Pet.3:18 – 19; 4:6), as a severe warning that Pharaoh was in danger of destroying its own future if they destroyed Israel, because destroying Israel meant destroying the possibility of Jesus’ redemption of human nature. In any case, God had not taken the lives of people for an act of idolatry in any straightforward and direct sense. Upon the Sinai covenant being enacted, this changes for Israel. In addition, the entire first generation of Israelites out of Egypt are sentenced by God to die in the wilderness (Num.14:20 – 38). Even Moses dies before entering the promised land and enjoying God’s sabbath rest, because Moses failed in his leadership and violated a command of God (Num.20:8 – 13), confirming that Moses, as a leader *under* the Sinai covenant, was still a flawed human being, could not bring Israel fully into rest even under the very covenant he mediated (Heb.4:8 – 11).

Francis Watson carefully considers the apostle Paul as a reader of the Pentateuch, and compares his handling of Scripture to the way other Jewish authors handle it. Watson finds that unlike Jubilees, Philo, Josephus, and other

⁵ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p.263 – 267

Jewish commentators who make very selective use of Pentateuchal material to praise the virtue of Abraham, Israel, etc., Paul does not read the biblical material selectively. Paul does not treat Scripture like a buffet line, sampling from this or that dish, and arriving at a dinner plate just as 'valid' as someone who constructed a plate made of all the options Paul did not select. Paul was always considering the totality of the larger swath of biblical literature he inherited, trying to make sense of larger passages – the entire offering, so to speak. Hence, Paul was much more willing to make use of biblical periscopes that are, frankly, unflattering to Abraham or Moses or Israel. Unfortunately, Watson does not cite John Sailhamer in his bibliography, because these two scholars would find substantial agreement in the way they read the Pentateuch. Somewhat unfortunately in my opinion, Watson is reticent about the prospect that Paul's reading of Scripture is 'the correct one.' Yet Watson gestures towards what Sailhamer expresses in full. Namely, Paul appears to have a literary-canonical methodology in reading Scripture. His hermeneutic was not the result of convictions about Christ that he awkwardly retrofitted onto the Scriptures, as if he could simply project Christian assertions retrospectively into the Hebrew Scriptures, and proof-text to make his case. Rather, his quotations emerge from a careful reading of the biblical text, and a way of honoring the text *in its totality*.

Given Moses' own failure and mortality, God had to stabilize the Sinai covenant for Israel. God called for a hierarchy of priests who would mediate the covenant on behalf of all for Israel after Moses' departure. As a result, Israel as a whole remained outside the Tabernacle, and at a remove from the presence of God. Only the high priest of Israel was allowed to enter through the 'veil' of the Holy of Holies, and only in great peril at that, once a year on the Day of Atonement when the sins of the nation were addressed for that year. Moses institutionalized God's veiling of Himself, even though the veiling was a temporary measure that would become obsolete in and through Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant. Significantly, both the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle to the Hebrews both describe Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat sacrifice appropriate to that event, the tearing of the veil, and the new covenant that God always wanted to enjoy with His people, where He would relate to all His people 'face to face,' not through a hierarchy of priestly mediators, exactly Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 3 when he discusses Moses and his veil, the glory of the new covenant, and the equality of all believers rather than additional status and prestige given to exceptional leaders.

The sanctuary and its calendrical sacrifices became the way to reenact Moses' covenant mediation every year. The sanctuary resembled the event at Mount Sinai. The horizontal partitions within the tabernacle represent the different vertical levels of Mount Sinai. Israel as a whole stayed at the foot of the mountain; the elders come up the mountain part-way, and Moses alone ascends to be 'near' the Lord at the top (Ex.24:1 – 2). This vertical pattern (Ex.25:40) was reproduced in the sanctuary horizontally: the Israelites could enter the outer court, the priests could enter the holy place, the high priest alone could enter the holy of holies. The sacrifices offered at the tabernacle (and later, the temple), especially on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Lev.16), retold the story of life flowing out from Eden. The uncorrupted animal blood symbolized a river of life offered by God, for Israel to settle the garden land, and perhaps for the entire Gentile world to remain on the earth. Ezekiel would later envision the Temple originating a river of fresh, life-giving water (Ezk.47). God was in the sanctuary, as the 'Sin-Eater.' In the sanctuary, and especially on the Day of Atonement, God related to Israel like a dialysis machine (Lev.1 – 10; 16). God received their impurities, as they laid their hands on animals as if they carried into God the corruption of their human nature, and gave back purity, in the form of uncorrupted animal blood. The animal sacrifices were not legal-penal in nature, but medical-ontological. The sacrifices were for unintentional sins and having an unclean human nature (Lev.12).

The problem of the corruption of human nature had not yet been solved. Although God wanted 'a temple people', a people with whom He talked face to face, He had to settle – via divine accommodation – with 'a people with a temple,' temporarily. God veiled His glory via the tabernacle as a concession and a judgment on Israel. To also express this, Moses veiled his face because his face shone with the glory of God to communicate to Israel that God was also veiling Himself among them. But the Sinai covenant narrative itself raised the question of how long Israel could maintain with stability their side of the covenant. Moses was pessimistic, and foresaw Israel's failure in Deuteronomy 27 – 29. If Adam and Eve had sinned despite having a yet-uncorrupted human nature, then how long could Israel resist temptation? If God had exiled Adam and Eve from the original garden land, albeit to protect them from immortalizing the corruption within themselves by eating from the tree of life in a corrupted state, then how much longer until God exiled Israel from their garden land? God would have to restore Israel from exile, and 'circumcise their hearts' (Dt.30:6) to undo the underlying reason for the exile. Paul would concur that God's commandments were good, but placed within the certainty of eventual exile that loomed in the framework of the Sinai covenant, death would result. The commandments alone would not be enough. But in time, at least quite a

few of the Israelites would agree with God's and Moses' 'medical diagnosis' of the human spiritual condition, our need for spiritual healing, and our need to participate in God's mission 'from the mountain' to cure, not just fellow Israelites, but those living even 'at the ends of the earth.'

Sources of Paul's View of the Sinai Covenant: The Prophets

The Prophets also reflect the failure of God's commandments to achieve their purpose in Israel within the Sinai covenant. Here, I follow the traditional Jewish grouping of eight books of the Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. Each of these books forecasts the failure of the chosen people, yet insists on God's faithfulness to the covenant.

Joshua is not an encouraging note on which to end the first book appended to the Pentateuch. Joshua the character had seen Israel fail under Moses' leadership, and had seen Moses himself err. In the book that bears his name, Joshua saw the sin of Achan and his family (Josh.7). He watched the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh not drive out the Canaanites (Josh.16:10; 17:13). The book ends with an elderly Joshua repeating to Israel the pessimistic assessment of Moses. This aged Joshua says,

'You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.' (Josh.24:19 – 20)

The Israelites in Joshua's audience deny this, affirming their commitment to God. But Joshua maintains his pessimism. He says, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the Lord, to serve Him' (Josh.24:22). He then places a stone by the sanctuary as 'a witness against us' (Josh.24:27). The Israelites then go home, Joshua dies, and they bury him, along with the bones of Joseph, and the body of Eleazar the priest (Josh.24:29 – 33). Joshua ends on a sour prediction about Israel's coming faithlessness.

Judges adds to the historical case against Israel. Arguably, the narrator of Judges uses Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 as a literary template upon which to pattern the story, especially with the theme of how men treat women as a patterned decline. Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 begins with the wedding of Adam and Eve (Gen.2:24 – 25), in a garden with a wellspring of four rivers (Gen.2:10 – 14); it ends with Cain and family defying God and practicing violence and polygamy. Similarly, Judges begins with an honorable wedding by springs of water (Judg.1:12 – 15), akin to Adam and Eve by the water source, and finds a high point in the judge-prophetess Deborah (Judg.4 – 5) as a 'prophet like Moses,' but ends with Samson being seduced by Delilah (Judg.16), a dismembered concubine triggering a civil war (Judg.19 – 20), and the tribe of Benjamin being short on women and therefore marrying foreign women (Judg.21). Judges narrates such a quick spiritual downward spiral in Israel, and ends with such a negative refrain, it can only mean impending doom. The narrator closes his book with: 'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (Judg.21:25). This kind of moral relativism is what one would expect from human beings who ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and internalized the power and desire to define good and evil out from themselves, with a center in themselves, rather than leave that power with God. The hope of Judges is not 'kingship' as a human institution, but the *kingship of God* reasserted through His word.

Samuel almost certainly indicates that God's commandments within the Sinai covenant have been weakened by the flesh of Israel. Samuel is the most literarily sophisticated narrative book after the Pentateuch. The author conveys the paganization of Israel by deploying literary motifs from Genesis, but in reverse, such as the insensitivity of Elkanah to his barren wife Hannah as the inversion of Abraham's concern for Sarah and Jacob's concern for Rachel; or the rape of Tamar by Amnon as the inversion of the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers.⁶ This matches the author's interest in portraying Israel as regressing spiritually. The kingship, while promised by God and theoretically honorable in principle, nevertheless becomes part of that process of paganization in practice. But kingship is not the only problem. The author demonstrates a skeptical attitude towards father-son dynastic relations (the institutional dynastic relations of priest, prophet, king all disintegrate), the taming of God's wandering presence (the roaming ark is more effective and entertaining than the fixed stone temple discussed by David and Nathan), the building of the capital city of Jerusalem requiring a standing army (like the cities of Cain and Nimrod, and unlike the tabernacles of Israel's wandering), and other aspects of Israel's life. Elsewhere, I have advanced Robert Alter's

⁶ Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p.114 – 117

observation that the book of Samuel as a whole is a thematic inversion of the book of Genesis.⁷ If Genesis is the record of God calling the chosen family out of paganism, then Samuel is the record of paganism creeping back into the chosen people. Moreover, Thomas Leclerc argues that the Word of God intensifies its presence when the kingship begins: Once Saul is anointed king, there appear groups of prophets called variously a ‘band of prophets’ (1 Sam.10:5 – 12) or a ‘company of the prophets’ (1 Sam.19:20).⁸ Yet the intensification of prophecy is not enough. The Davidic monarchy is foreshadowed by David himself, who wavers on a knife-edge at the conclusion of Samuel.

Kings *begins* with significant uneasiness about King Solomon and Israel’s spiritual condition. King Solomon’s building projects and severe tax policy invite the narrator of the book of Kings to dress him up as a type of Pharaoh: ‘forced labor’ (1 Ki.9:15); ‘storage cities’ (9:19); ‘slave labor’ (9:21); and even an explicit alliance with Pharaoh via marriage to ‘Pharaoh’s daughter’ (9:24). As a direct result of the oppression of this ‘new Pharaoh,’ God breaks the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel from the house of David and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom degenerates because of its faulty, compromised leaders. God sends Elijah and Elisha to the North as a new type of Moses and Joshua. Elijah even goes to Mount Horeb/Sinai to reenact Moses’ covenant making moment in some sense (1 Ki.19); Elisha splits the Jordan River to reenact Joshua’s conquest (2 Ki.2). These symbolic acts signify that the North is some sense ‘Canaanite,’ and the prophets are God’s method to stir up faith again to ‘conquer’ the people by His word. But the North collapses and ‘goes away into exile in Assyria’ (2 Ki.17:6, 23). The South follows a similar spiritual trajectory, and were ‘carried away into exile’ in Babylon (2 Ki.25:11, 21). The Davidic line endures by the grace of God (2 Ki.25:27 – 29), so there is a note of hope for a messianic king, but a very thin one. The roles of Elijah, Elisha, and the other prophets – especially the symbolism of Moses and Joshua, and the Sinai covenant – are deployed in such a way that one questions whether they were all that effective to begin with.

Isaiah foresees the coming of the singular Servant who will be, in some sense, a ‘new Israel,’ complemented by God’s future modification of the Sinai covenant laws, especially to welcome Gentiles. These two themes are remarkable, and the New Testament interest in Isaiah is notable by the many times the apostles quote from him. The canonical placement of Isaiah after Kings also seems thematically appropriate. Kings ends on the thin thread of hope in God’s promise to David and his house, despite the corruption they brought to Jerusalem. Isaiah begins by demanding the fiery purification of Jerusalem in a new manifestation of God’s cloud of glory (Isa.1 – 5), like the purification of Isaiah’s lips with the fiery coal (Isa.6), and the purification of the Davidic line down to the messianic Servant. Hence, Isaiah structures his book around twelve prophecies of the Servant: four prophecies about the Messiah as King in Isa.7 – 35 (8:14 – 9:7; 11:1 – 16; 32:1 – 8; 33:17 – 24); four about the Messiah as Servant in Isa.36 – 55 (42:1 – 4; 49:1 – 6; 50:4 – 9; 52:13 – 53:12), which have the greatest clarity about the Messiah undergoing a new exodus, and bringing one about, like Israel of old; four about the Messiah as Anointed Conqueror in Isa.56 – 66 (59:15 – 21; 61:1 – 3; 61:10 – 62:7; 63:1 – 6).⁹ Correspondingly, Isaiah sees that the Sinai covenant laws will be modified in remarkable ways. Eunuchs and foreigners will be fully welcomed (Isa.56:8) whereas Moses excluded them from the worship assembly (Dt.23:1 – 4). God will take non-Levites to be ‘priests and Levites’ at the restoration from exile (Isa.66:18 – 21), which was not what Moses institutionalized. But Isaiah speaks of a new temple with a new cornerstone, who appears to be the Servant himself (Isa.8:14 – 9:7; 28:16 – 22; 66:1 – 2), whose relation to the temple in Jerusalem is ambiguous. For the first time, we read of God personally expressing frustration that His previous words to Israel – within the Sinai covenant – fell flat: ‘And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?’ (Isa.5:3 – 4) ‘Oh, rebellious children...who carry out a plan, but not mine; who make an alliance, but against my will, adding sin to sin.’ (Is.30:1)

Jeremiah takes up the question of the Sinai covenant’s impotence most directly. Echoing Moses, he calls Israel to ‘circumcise their hearts’ (Jer.4:4) but recognizes the enduring condition (Jer.9:25 – 26). Jeremiah speaks most directly against the temple in Jerusalem, revisiting the narrative of the Sinai covenant to restate God’s priorities:

⁷ See Mako A. Nagasawa, *Who Will Intercede? The Book of Samuel as Cautionary Tale About Politics, Institutions, and Control*, available here: <http://www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-prophets-samuel>; see also Joel Rosenberg, ‘1 and 2 Samuel,’ edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990)

⁸ Thomas L. Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings, and Scrolls* (Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), ch.4

⁹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993) assembled the tables on the Servant (Isa.36 – 55) and Conqueror (Isa.56 – 66); I added the one for the King (Isa.7 – 35).

²² For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²³ But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.’ ²⁴ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. ²⁵ Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. ²⁶ Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers. ²⁷ You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you. ²⁸ You shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God or accept correction; truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.’ (Jer.7:22 – 28)

In literary and human terms, Jeremiah reads the Pentateuch and sees that God’s intention was to speak face to face with all of Israel, dwelling in their midst in the roaming, flexible cloud. God did not want the tabernacle structure and the system of offerings. But He made a concession to them based on ‘the stubbornness of their evil heart.’ They ‘went backward and not forward.’ God became frustrated by His many attempts to speak to Israel, including through Moses (‘since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt’) onward to the exilic prophet Jeremiah (‘until this day’). Jeremiah uses a literary device, implied by the Pentateuch and made explicit by Proverbs, that we write on our own hearts like on a tablet. More on this below. By the time of the exile, Jeremiah sees that the Israelites have written sin so deeply into their hearts – ‘The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus; with a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart’ (Jer.17:1 – 10) – that God must write His laws on their hearts in a fresh way: ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’ (Jer.31:31 – 34). Because God has always wanted to write on the human heart as a tablet, and with our partnership, and not tablets of stone, neither does God want to continue the temple, the sacrifices, and implicitly, the Sinai covenant. Paul is almost certainly incorporating Jeremiah 4:4 and 9:25 – 26 into Romans 2:28 – 29, and Jeremiah 31:31 – 34 into 2 Corinthians 3. Jeremiah sees that the Sinai covenant was powerless to overcome the evil in the human heart. God must bring His people back from exile when He fulfills His promise to give them a new heart: ‘I will give them one heart and one way’ (Jer.32:37 – 41) tied somehow to the house of David (Jer.33:17 – 22).

Ezekiel casts very significant doubt on the Sinai covenant as a whole. The prophet vividly develops the imagery of Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai, along with God’s descent into Solomon’s temple, but puts them in reverse. Ezekiel sees the glory of God leave the temple in a fiery vision, to go with the exiles to Babylon spiritually (Ezk.1, 10). Significantly, Ezekiel reads the Pentateuch in the same way Jeremiah does. He sees the limitations of the Sinai covenant due to the state of human hearts, and understands the sacrifices as a compromise God made with Israel:

²¹ But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. ²² But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out. ²³ Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands, ²⁴ because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers. ²⁵ I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; ²⁶ and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD.’ (Ezk.22:21 – 26)

The phrase ‘statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live,’ in 22:25 refers to the temple and sacrificial laws. Ezekiel contrasts them with an earlier set of ‘ordinances’ and ‘statutes’ inclusive of ‘sabbaths’ and ‘idols’ in v.24, by which the Israelites could ‘live’ (Ezk.20:11, agreeing with Lev.18:5). Ezekiel appears to agree with Jeremiah’s assessment of the Sinai covenant – that the sacrificial laws were an appendage given after the more substantive moral and spiritual commandments. Ezekiel, in fact, goes beyond Jeremiah’s acknowledgement of chronological separation, and calls the sacrificial ordinances ‘not good’ and not oriented to help Israel ‘live.’ Unfortunately Ezekiel does not elaborate on why he gives this verdict. Perhaps they confused the Israelites, who

thought they could diminish the moral laws and manipulate God via the ceremonial laws. But Ezekiel does say in 11:18 and 36:26 – 36 and 37:1 – 14 that human nature needs a radical internal change. Ezekiel develops the ‘new heart’ and ‘new Spirit’ language; he longs for God to place a ‘heart of flesh’ in us to displace the ‘heart of stone.’ Apart from this internal change, the moral laws of the Sinai covenant are ineffectual. He wraps this future event of restoration from exile with ‘new creation’ language: water and Spirit in Ezekiel 36 recalls Genesis 1. And the resurrection of dry bones recalls the ‘death’ of exile outside the garden. Meanwhile, Ezekiel also hopes for a new David (Ezk.34) and a new temple (Ezk.40 – 47). I believe Paul utilizes Ezekiel’s language of temple building dimensions with reference to the new temple of the church in Ephesians 3:14 – 19. Although he rarely quotes from Ezekiel (possibly Ezk.36:20 in Rom.2:24; Ezk.20:11 in Rom.10:5 and Gal.3:12; Ezk.37:27 in 2 Cor.6:16), Paul is probably informed by Ezekiel’s vision of a ‘new temple’ humanity with a ‘new heart’ empowered by the Spirit. All this lends significant weight to the thesis that Paul’s assessment of God’s commandments and the framework of the Sinai covenant were not sufficient to help the Israelites completely undo the corruption within their own human nature.

Concerning the Book of the Twelve, I will focus my comments on Habakkuk. The prophet Habakkuk figures prominently in Paul’s writings. Paul places his quotations of Habakkuk 2:4 (‘the righteous by faith shall live’) in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. In Romans, Paul uses Habakkuk 2:4 as a theme, which he develops and expounds throughout Romans 1:18 – 3:20. In Galatians, Paul uses the Habakkuk quote to argue against law-observance being sufficient to bring about the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, the blessing from Abraham. But is this what Habakkuk originally meant?

Francis Watson examines Paul’s use of Habakkuk 2:4 and concludes that in Romans, Paul gives the quotation a meaning which it did not originally have in Habakkuk the prophet. Watson says:

‘It is one thing to articulate the principle that ‘the righteous person will live by his faithfulness’ within the context of the Babylonian imperialist aggression; it is quite another to assert on the basis of this text that righteousness is by faith and not by works of law, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Despite the similar wording, the text that Habakkuk wrote and the text as Paul cited it seem fundamentally alien to one another.’¹⁰

I disagree with Watson in his assessment, however. First, Watson does not treat the book of Habakkuk as a whole literary unit, especially to explore the relation between ‘the law is numbed’ or ‘ineffective’ in 1:4 and ‘the righteous will live by his faith/faithfulness’ in 2:4. Habakkuk 1:4 is quite germane to the question of where the apostle Paul derives his view that the law was ‘weakened’ in Romans 8:3. To Habakkuk’s complaint that ‘the law is numbed’ and ‘ineffective,’ God replies that His answer is ‘the Chaldeans’ and ‘the Babylonian captivity’ (Hab.1:5 – 11). Since this is not the message of comfort he expected, the prophet asks plaintively, ‘Why?’ (1:12 – 17) and implicitly returns to his original cry, ‘How long?’ (1:2)

God’s reply puts Habakkuk into the position of waiting on the guard post (2:1) to record the vision of what God will do after the Babylonian captivity (2:2 – 4). Habakkuk’s declaration that the righteous will live by his faith/faithfulness, occurs precisely in the chronological sequence which the Pentateuch calls ‘the restoration from exile’ (Dt.30). On the other side of exile is the restoration, and those who will ‘live’ (Hab.2:4; Dt.30:15 – 20). G. Michael O’Neal argues:

‘Therefore torah is impotent, and justice is never extended. (1:4) The passage is built around the word נָקָה, ‘therefore.’ It is a conjunction which points the reader back to the preceding verse as the explanation for why the situation exists in the following clause. The result of unchecked mayhem, violence, strife and contention is that first of all, torah is impotent. The word used for ‘impotent’ is נִבְּטָה, from the root נָבַט meaning ‘to grow numb, be feeble, be helpless, unable to function, be benumbed.’ M. D. Johnson translates the word as ‘paralysed.’ Samuel Balentine notes that the verb נִבְּטָה is intransitive, and argues that it conveys the sense that torah has become paralysed not from misuse by persons, but rather from some inherent failure or weakness in the torah itself.’¹¹

¹⁰ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p.118

¹¹ G. Michael O’Neal, *Interpreting Habakkuk as Scripture: An Application of the Canonical Approach of Brevard S. Childs* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), p.81; cf. Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,

Samuel E. Balentine, cited by O'Neal above, introduces more uncertainty about *whose* faithfulness Habakkuk was primarily envisioning:

'As the oft-quoted text of 2:4 puts it: "the righteous shall live by its faithfulness." The crucial word here is *be'emunato*, commonly translated (e.g., RSV) "by his faithfulness." The suggestion implicit in this traditional rendering is that the righteous are to live faithfully. This sense is clearly part of God's admonition to Habakkuk. But the pronomial suffix for "his" is perhaps better understood as referring to God: the righteous shall live by *God's* faithfulness, or, perhaps more indirectly, by the faithfulness or the reliability of God's promised intervention. It is this latter sense that is suggested in the translation: "by *its* faithfulness." Implicit in this rendering is the idea that faithfulness in the midst of suffering is not self-generated. It is God's loyalty, God's reliability, that summons a simultaneously patient faith and an active, expectant living.'¹²

Haak, also cited by O'Neal, comments on the phrase '*is weak ... does not go forth ... crooked*' in Habakkuk 1:4 as follows:

'The close parallel between v. 4a and v. 4d is continued in these words. The verb *tpwg* has generally been associated with meanings which imply 'coldness' which led to the connotation of 'numbness and/or weakness' (cf. BDB 806a).¹³ The connotation of 'coldness,' if it ever existed, has been completely lost in later Hebrew.¹⁴ In all cases it refers to some type of 'weakening.' In fact, a reading of the various forms within Biblical Hebrew also shows that in no case is any connotation of 'coldness' involved (cf. Pss. 38:9; 77:3; 88:16?; Gen. 45:26; Lam. 2:18; 3:49). In spite of possible etymological considerations, it is best simply to translate 'to weaken' within Biblical Hebrew. The meaning here would be that the law did not properly order the country.¹⁵ For a similar theme, cf. Zeph. 3:4 and Ez. 22:26 which speak of *hms twrh*. The translation 'is weak' is confirmed by the near parallel in v. 4b. The parallel between 'law' and 'order' ties these lines together (cf. also v. 4d). The close parallel to 'the law being weak' is that 'order does not go forth.'¹⁶

If Haak is correct, then Habakkuk 2:4 should read, 'the righteous shall live by His faithfulness.' While not the only possible reading, this would be the strongest possible complement to the assertion in 1:4 that the commandments of the Sinai covenant were weak.

Second, and relatedly, Francis Watson does not ask whether *Habakkuk* read the Pentateuch or the canonical material before him. That is a surprising and critical oversight because Watson's project in *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* is to determine that, and how, the apostle Paul read the Pentateuch and the Prophets meaningfully and contextually. That project should have inclined him to ask whether Habakkuk did the same. Unfortunately, Watson appears to take Habakkuk as a literary given effectively on par with the Pentateuch in its originality. That is, Watson approaches the Hebrew Scriptures as a scholar of Paul and pursues the meaning of Old Testament texts to the extent that Paul engages with them. This approach is meaningful and important yet is not identical with understanding the Old Testament independently of Paul's engagement with it or not.

When we read Habakkuk in its full literary context, the relationship between Habakkuk 1:4 and 2:4 becomes much more likely to coincide with how we are reading Habakkuk here. That is because Habakkuk speaks of the failure of the law, not simply the failure of the Israelites to observe the law. John Calvin regards the 'the law' as 'weakened' on account of the Israelites *esteeming* it poorly.¹⁷ Calvin sees the circumstance, and reads the disposition, but not

1993), p.184

¹² Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: Overtures to Biblical Theology*, p.187. Balentine in footnote 114 on p.187 says, 'For the argument in support of this translation, see J. Janzen, "Habakkuk 2:4 in the Light of Recent Philological Advances," *HTR* 73 (1980): 53 – 78, esp. 61. G. Michael O'Neal, p.160 footnote 64 writes, "The range of scholarly opinion on the content of the vision is surveyed by Marshall Johnson, "The Paralysis of Torah in Habakkuk I 4," *Vetus Testamentum*, 35 (1985), 259."

¹³ Haak's original footnote: The LXX (*dieskedastai*) probably reflects a reading from *pws*. Cf. Marshall D. Johnson, "The Paralysis of Torah in Habakkuk I 4," *VT* 35 (1985) 259 – 260, who concludes that a translation of 'paralyzed' is preferred.

¹⁴ Haak's original footnote: Jastrow, *Dictionary*, pp. 1138 – 1139.

¹⁵ Haak's original footnote: Cf. Filteau, 'La racine YS', p. 151; and Janzen, 'Eschatological Symbol,' pp. 397--399

¹⁶ Robert D. Haak, *Habakkuk* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p.34

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on Habakkuk*, writes, 'This rule the Prophet now follows, 'Weakened,' he says, 'is the law.' We know that when a

the underlying human condition. Curiously, Calvin does not integrate his famous ‘doctrine of total depravity’ into his treatment of Habakkuk 1:4, and vice versa. However, as I have argued in the above exegetical remarks, the failure of the law (of the Sinai covenant) in Habakkuk 1:4 and elsewhere has direct bearing – logically, historically, and theologically – on the need for faith/faithfulness directed not at the Sinai covenant once again, but specifically towards God’s intervention *after* Israel’s exile, not surprisingly mentioned in Habakkuk 2:4. It would not make much sense for Habakkuk to simply exhort the Israelites to redouble their efforts to live under the Sinai covenant if he has already concluded that ‘the law is numbed’ and ‘ineffective.’ Opposing my argument, Watson attributes to Paul – but not Habakkuk – a dichotomy between ‘faith in God’ or ‘faithfulness to God’ on the one hand, and Sinai law-observance on the other. In continuity with his position, Watson argues that the apostle puts the words of Habakkuk (in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11) to a use that the prophet himself would not have recognized. But Watson is mistaken. Prophet and apostle are in agreement. Paul is more faithful to Habakkuk than Watson recognizes.

Moreover, when we read Habakkuk in its full canonical context, this conclusion is strengthened. The first major literary-canonical consideration for Habakkuk is as part of ‘the Book of the Twelve’; the second is as part of ‘the Prophets,’ the second section of the Hebrew Scriptures following the Pentateuch. Christopher Seitz, in his study of the role of association in the formation of the biblical canon, remarks:

‘The final editing of Malachi (“Remember the teaching of my servant Moses” [4:4]) is clearly meant as an inclusion, reaching back to Moses and Torah. But the concern with marriage and divorce, proper worship, and proper conduct in the face of forgetting God’s ways or of despair over his command of history are matters the last book of the Twelve shares specifically with Hosea, the first book. The labor and the methods of association are prodigious and effective; there is nothing casual or happenstance about it.’¹⁸

Space and time do not permit me to explore the many other associations that we might explore within the Book of the Twelve. Suffice to say that by this canonical placement, Habakkuk’s orientation towards a divine intervention on the other side of exile is brought into close association with other facets of God’s promise of restoration from exile: the passionate love of God for His people; the coming re-inclusion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel back under David’s rule (Hos.1 – 3), which the apostle Paul takes as a type for the inclusion of the *Gentiles* (Rom.9:23 – 26); the promise of the Davidic messiah and his message rippling out from Zion (Am.9:11 – 15; Mic.4 – 5); the mission to the Gentiles (Am.9:11 – 12 is quoted in Acts 15:15 – 18) and the critique of Israel’s temptation towards nationalism (Jonah); and so on. Habakkuk contributes to this constellation of prophetic hopes by highlighting the weakness of the Sinai covenant, and the possibility of living by faith in God’s own faithfulness, oriented towards His restoration from exile. By being placed in the same grouping as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, moreover, Habakkuk’s criticism and concern for the Sinai covenant grows ‘louder,’ as it were, and even a bit more precise.

Sources of Paul’s View of the Sinai Covenant: The Writings

The third traditional partition of the Hebrew Scriptures is the Ketuvim, ‘the Writings.’ Here again I believe we can perceive a critique of the Sinai covenant, this time as the Ketuvim turns to focus on the Davidic covenant. In effect, in the Ketuvim, the Davidic covenant eclipses the Mosaic Sinai covenant in importance. Emerging from within the Sinai covenant, the later Davidic covenant somehow becomes the locus or repository of God’s activity which will somehow fulfill the former. Again, limits of space and time do not permit me to provide a fuller account of this thesis. I will limit my comments to the Book of Psalms and the Book of Proverbs, after first considering what John Sailhamer calls ‘compositional seams’ linking and holding together books of the Bible.¹⁹

sinful custom prevails, there is but little authority in what is taught: nor are human laws only despised when men’s audacity breaks through all restraints, but even the very law of God is esteemed as nothing; for they think that everything erroneously done, by the consent of all, is lawful. We now then see that the Prophet felt great anguish of mind, like holy Lot (Genesis 19:1 – 38.), when he saw every regard for God almost extinct in the land, and especially among the chosen people, whom God had above all others consecrated to himself.’

¹⁸ Christopher Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p.91

¹⁹ John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995)

Pentateuch (Torah, Teaching)		Nevi'im (Prophets)		Ketuvim (Writings)	
Moses		Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Treisar (the Twelve Prophets)		Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Megillot (Ruth, Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles ²⁰	
'The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...' (Gen.2:16 – 17)	Ending: God will restore Israel from exile (Dt.30 – 33)	'Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the [garden] land which I swore to their fathers to give them... This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night... ' (Josh.1:8)	Ending: God will restore Israel from exile (seen especially in Isa.40 – 66; Jer.31 – 34; Ezk.36 – 47; Mic.4 – 5; Hab.2 – 3; Zech.9 – 14; Mal.4)	'But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water , which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither...' (Ps.1:2 – 3)	Ending: God is restoring Israel from exile through the line of David (2 Chr.36).

After Moses gives the Pentateuch, or Torah, 'the Teaching' (also unfortunately called 'the Law' through the Latin translation 'lex,' although this title tends to emphasize the 'commands' and not the narrative and poetic portions), Joshua read it and meditated on it constantly (Josh.1:8). As a result of this deep study of the Torah, Joshua is portrayed as the great wise man reflecting on the Torah. He reflects on what was given before. And Joshua begins the second section of the Old Testament called The Prophets, or the Nevi'im. Interestingly enough, at least in this ordering, when the third section of the Old Testament, the Ketuvim, starts, we find Psalm 1, which praises the person who meditates on God's Torah constantly. That person is wise. We always reflect on what was given before.

Furthermore, the Pentateuch ('Moses') begins with the garden land (Gen.1 – 2) and ends with the prediction of exile and the hope of restoration (Dt.27 – 33). The Nevi'im ('the Prophets') begins with the garden land in Joshua but ends with the reality of exile and the hope for restoration in Ezekiel. And the Ketuvim ('the Writings') begins with a motif of the garden land (the 'well watered tree' of Psalm 1) but ends with the reality of exile and the hope for restoration at the end of Chronicles. This is one way the entire Old Testament arrangement demonstrates having been intentionally ordered. The Ketuvim also directs our attention towards David.

The Psalms celebrate David and God's promise to David. A plurality of them is written by the warrior-poet-king David, although a few are attributed to other authors. According to Gerald Wilson and other scholars self-consciously following in the footsteps of Brevard S. Childs, the entire Book of Psalms has a structure involving the past, present, and future of the royal house of David.²¹ The 'compositional seams' between the five books of the Psalms are: (1) attributed to David, or (2) are about David, or (3) are reflections on God's covenant promise to David.

²⁰ The ordering of the Ketuvim varies somewhat among Jewish communities. The order I prefer is that found in most common printed versions of the Hebrew Bible today, which derives from manuscripts written by the Jews of Ashkenaz (medieval Germany). That order is: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the five Megillot scrolls (Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. I prefer this ordering because the pattern it reflects has a precedent in the Old Testament: Namely, after 'the Teaching' comes the 'wise man' who meditates on it. If one follows the Tiberian Masoretic codices and the old Spanish manuscripts, and arranges the Ketuvim with Chronicles first, the pattern still holds and is striking. Chronicles begins with the name 'Adam,' certainly connoting the garden and probably 'wisdom' in the sense that he was the first recipient of God's wise commands. If one follows the Babylonian Talmud, and arranges the Ketuvim with Ruth first, Ruth would seem to serve as an introduction to King David, as well as the theme of exile and restoration to the garden land.

²¹ Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1985); Gerald Wilson, 'The Structure of the Psalter,' in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Gordon Wenham, 'Towards a Canonical Reading of the Psalms' in Scott Hahn, Craig G. Bartholomew, Robin Parry, Christopher Seitz, Al Wolters, *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006)

Bk	Start	End	Ending: Doxology of 'Blessed be...'
1	<i>God Anoints and Protects David, Pre-Enthronement</i>		
	Psalms 1 – 2 God anoints a wise king	Psalms 40 – 41 King David enthroned	^{41:13} Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.
2	<i>God Enthrones David as King, Enters the Temple</i>		
	Psalm 42 Hope in God my help	Psalm 72 King Solomon enthroned	^{72:18} Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. ¹⁹ And blessed be His glorious name forever; And may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen. ²⁰ The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.
3	<i>God is the True King, While the Heirs of David Fail</i>		
	Psalm 73 Worship in the Temple	Psalm 89 Israel declines	^{89:52} Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.
4	<i>God Exiles Israel and the House of David</i>		
	Psalm 90 Moses, exile in the wilderness	Psalm 106 God will regather us from exile	^{106:48} Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, 'Amen.' Praise the LORD!
5	<i>God Regathers Israel from Exile Through the Messiah</i>		
	Psalm 107 God regathers us from exile; voice of a 'new David' ²²	Psalms 145 – 150 Praise the Lord <small>146:1; 147:1; 148:1; 149:1; 150:1</small>	^{145:21} My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, And all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever. ^{150:6} Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

The arrangement of the Psalms into five 'books' mirrors the structure of the Pentateuch in five scrolls. Just as the Pentateuchal literature attributed to Moses forms or includes a 'charter' or 'constitution' document for Israel, so the covenant established with David forms a more specific 'charter' or 'constitution' concerning the Davidic king to come, the Messiah. The placement of a five-part literature at the head of the Davidic Ketuvim material resembles the placement of a five-part literature at the head of the whole Hebrew Scriptures. It speaks of God's covenant promise and hopes surrounding the future Davidic king who has been a significant but never dominant thread in the Pentateuch (Gen.3:14 – 15; 17:6, 16; 49:8 – 12; Num.24:1 – 19; Dt.17:14 – 20) although Moses played a kingly role to counteract Pharaoh king of Egypt, and raised the question by his own failing whether another kingly mediator would arise who be fully transfigured by God, not fail, and live eternally. After David endured his pre-enthronement wilderness experience, he ascended the throne and affirmed that his role was prophesied in the Pentateuch: 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book, it is written of me' (Ps.40:7 – 8). The second major section, the Prophets, continued to expand on the meaning of God's covenant with David, mostly after having seen the positive and negative qualities of King David and his heirs (Isa.8:14 – 9:7; 11:1 – 16; 32:1 – 8; 33:17 – 24; 42:1 – 4; 49:1 – 6; 50:4 – 9; 52:13 – 53:12; 59:15 – 21; 61:1 – 3; 61:10 – 62:7; 63:1 – 6; Jer.23:1 – 8; 33:14 – 26; Ezk.34:1 –

²² 'The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended' at the end of the second book (Ps.72:20), yet the voice of 'David' reemerges in Psalm 110 and 138 – 145. This might signify a 'new David.' Another way to understand the reemergence of 'David' is that the ascriptions of the Psalms could be dedications: 'A Psalm to David' (as the Hebrew word can be translated 'of' or 'to').

31; Hos.3:5; Am.9:11 – 15; Obad.1:21; Mic.4 – 5; Hag.2:20 – 23; Zech.9:9 – 17; 11:4 – 17; 12:7 – 14; Mal.1:14). Related to this hope is an expansion of meaning for Mount Zion, upon which was built the fixed, stone version of the portable tabernacle, which itself represented Mount Sinai. Whereas the theme of the Davidic covenant expanded from the Pentateuch and the Prophets, in the Writings, the Davidic covenant becomes the focal point of celebration and hope.

What will this king from David's line do? And what did this mean for Israel as she waited? The fifth group of Psalms is most suggestive. He will restore Israel from exile (Ps.107), be a priest-king like Melchizedek (Ps.110), be generous and lead a generous people (Ps.112), in that he will rebuild a new temple with himself as the new cornerstone (Ps.118), establish the true law in the enlarged heart (Ps.119), lead Israel in singing the Psalms of Ascent on the journey back to God's presence (Ps.120 – 134), which included announcing redemption and forgiveness (Ps.130). So, while Israel waited at the incomplete and imperfect Temple sanctuary for Messiah, in other words, while they were still in exile (Ps.135 – 137), they remembered God's covenant with David (Ps.138 – 145, a Davidic collection). They concluded with five psalms of praise in which they called the nations to the worship of, and obedience to, the one true God, the God of Israel (Ps.146 – 150).²³

The Psalms do not seem to be as critical of the Sinai covenant per se as the Pentateuch, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Habakkuk were. No doubt this is because the king was supposed to be the 'model Israelite,' possessing his own copy of the Pentateuch (or perhaps just Deuteronomy) which he wrote by hand, to know it and follow it (Dt.17:18 – 20). Psalms 1 and 119 celebrate God's commandments, covenant, ordinances, testimonies, etc. in much the same way the apostle Paul would later say, 'The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good' (Rom.7:12). Psalm 1 is linked closely with Psalm 2, the coronation song of the kings of Judah. And Psalm 119 expands on Psalm 1 by an order of magnitude. The Hebrew words for 'try' and 'test' are *ubohen* or *bahan* (Ps.7:9; 11:4, 5; 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 81:7; 95:9; 139:23; cf. Gen.42:15, 16). They are used to describe the metalworker's *intention*: 'The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord *tests* hearts' (Pr.17:3); 'I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and *test* them as gold is tested' (Zech.13:9). The Hebrew word *tsaraph* is synonymous with 'smelt, refine' as a metalsmith would use fire to smelt and refine precious metal (Ps.17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 105:19; cf. Judg.17:4; 2 Sam.22:31; Neh.3:8, 32; Isa.1:25; 41:7; 48:10; Jer.6:29; 10:9). 'For You have *tried* us, O God; You have *refined* us as silver is *refined* ... We went through fire and through water, yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.' (Ps.66:10, 12)

However, the experience and history of the royal house of David also testified to the weakness of the Sinai covenant and the commands of God to bring about the transformative healing of the human heart. David himself, after sinning with Bathsheba and Uriah, said that he 'was brought forth in iniquity' and conceived in sin (Ps.51:5). He acknowledged God wanted truth in the inner being (51:6). Therefore, he cried out, 'Create in/for me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me' (51:10). This penitential psalm, coming from David himself, shows by way of inference that all the Davidic kings carried the corruption of sin in their humanity as well. If the 'progenitor' of the Davidic covenant was flawed, as the Book of Samuel so mercilessly exposes also, how much more is every descendant. And how much does the Davidic line anticipate the Messianic heir of David to fully internalize the law of God into his own heart, to create in himself the 'clean heart,' i.e. the 'circumcised heart'?

If Jesus also read and prayed the Psalms as the prayers of his own voice,²⁴ then perhaps he read and prayed especially the fifth book as pertaining to himself as Messiah; and if so, then Jesus prayed Psalm 119 to ask the Spirit to press the word of God more and more deeply into his own humanity: 'I shall run the way of Your commandments, for You will enlarge my heart' (Ps.119:32). However confidently we glimpse the inner life of Jesus, without a doubt the Psalms invite God to refine, and in that sense try and test, the human heart.

The theme of internalizing God's commandments into human flesh is clear in the Book of Proverbs. Following the Book of Psalms is the Book of Proverbs, a collection of wise sayings attributed mainly to King Solomon, David's

²³ Significantly, Jesus' mother Mary, when visited by the angel who announced her pregnancy, responded with praise involving a quote from Psalm 107 (Ps.107:9 quoted in Lk.1:53). Perhaps this was one place in Scripture in which some hopeful – and wise – Jews were meditating during the time of Jesus. If that is the case, then Zecharias should have considered Psalm 113:9 ('He makes the barren woman abide in the house as a joyful mother of children') before disbelieving the angel's proclamation that his elderly and childless wife Elizabeth would give birth to the herald and forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist.

²⁴ Psalm 22:18 is assigned to Jesus' voice in John 19:23 – 24; Psalm 18:49 is assigned to Jesus' voice in Romans 15:9; Psalm 40:7 – 8 to Jesus' voice in Hebrews 10:5 – 7; etc.

son and heir. The Book of Proverbs is written like a letter of wisdom from father to son. Both father and mother have taught this child from youth (Pr.1:8). Just as wisdom is something God gives to humanity, so we must pass on wisdom to our children. For God's people need God's wisdom to live in His blessing. Reflecting on God's commands constitutes 'wisdom.' Just as Joshua was a wise man by reflecting on Moses' teachings in the Pentateuch (Josh.1:8), so Solomon was the quintessential wise man by reflecting on David's teachings in the Psalms. The pattern is: A prophet is followed by a wise man; the covenant teachings are written, and then studied. It happened after Moses, and it happens after David. David was given a covenant-forming word from God, and Solomon's job was to meditate on it and live it out. As I mentioned earlier, the book of Psalms may symbolically represent the Davidic covenant, as its division into five parts recalls the Pentateuch containing the Sinai covenant. What comes after both books? After the Pentateuch comes Joshua, and after the Psalms comes Proverbs.

There is, however, an even deeper point being made by Proverbs. Since God created the world and humanity with His 'wisdom' (Pr.8:22 – 36), God's commands are not arbitrary but are rather directing us to the fulfillment of our nature and purpose as God's creatures. To suggest otherwise would mean that (1) God commands things that are strangely inappropriate for His creation, or that (2) God made the creation in some way that is disconnected from His commandments and moral character. Either hypothetical case would boggle the Jewish mind. 'Wisdom' in this sense seeks to intrinsically link God's commands with His *creation*, not simply the Sinai covenant made in history; it asserts that God's commands are not fundamentally foreign to God's creatures and imposed from without, but organically and intrinsically bound up with the creation from *within*. There is a hidden unity in which God's commands are seen as the means by which God shepherds humanity and creation into more life. This will become part of Paul's argument in Romans 2:12 – 16 where the internal witness of the conscience within all human beings functions for each in a similar way that the Mosaic commandments functioned for Israel. Yes, sin has tarnished human nature, but human nature in its origins and in its continued existence, in a limited but persistent way, recognizes the wisdom of God in what God commands.

Proverbs indicates to Israel that her awareness and possession of God's commandments are a form of stewardship entrusted to all humanity from creation, for our development and fulfillment. In the ideal case, Israel would be obedient to God's commands; the Gentiles would admire Israel and come to know God through the wisdom manifested in Israel. This was Moses' own hope: 'So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' (Dt.4:6; cf.1 – 8). Not surprisingly, then, 'wisdom' in Psalms and especially Proverbs is portrayed as being present from the beginning of the world, from creation itself. As the Genesis story suggests, Adam was given a word from God, and he was given the task of meditating on it and living it out, in particular with his wife Eve and then, implicitly, their children, who were to do the same with their own children, and so on and so forth. Therefore, the picture of humanity in paradise involves being given a word from God to meditate on, to obey, and to pass on. Israel, as God's partial restoration of humanity in a new garden land, has been brought into a more intensified relationship with God's commandments.

Proverbs, from the start of the book, picks up a pattern in the Pentateuch linking God's word and God's Spirit, but applies it to the individual person. 'Turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you' (Pr.1:23). God's Spirit hovered over the earth, and God spoke His word, 'Let there be light.' God organized creation and made it a place where life could flourish (Gen.1:1 – 2:3). Similarly, God breathed His Spirit into the earthen Adam to give him a living soul (Gen.2:7; Ps.104:29 – 30) and then entrusted him with words. The Pentateuch concludes with Joshua, the inheritor of the words, wisdom, and leadership of Moses, who is described in terms of spirit and wisdom/word: 'Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom...' (Dt.34:9). Proverbs envisions the faithful child internalizing the teaching, so that it shapes his or her heart (Pr.2:1, 10).²⁵ Then, it enlists the idiom of the heart as an earthen tablet, and writing on it: 'Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart' (Pr.3:3); 'It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones' (Pr.3:8). The motif of the heart being a clay or stone tablet occurs again:

^{6:20} My son, observe the commandment of your father

²⁵ In principle, the Proverbs bear the closest resemblance to Psalms 1 and 119. Psalm 1 also begins encouraging people to delight in the Torah of the Lord and meditate on it day and night (Ps.1:2). The Psalms celebrate the Torah's role as teacher (Ps.25:4 – 10; 27:11; 32:8; 34:11; 51:13; 78:1 – 8; 86:11). Psalm 119 notably expands on Psalm 1. The Torah is a delight (Ps.119:16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174). The Torah, notably, will enlarge the human heart: 'You will enlarge my heart' (Ps.119:32), for 'I will walk in a wide place' (Ps.119:45). The prayer to God, 'Teach me,' means internalizing word into the heart (Ps.119:10 – 12, 26, 33, 64, 66 – 68, 73, 124, 135, 171).

- And do not forsake the teaching of your mother;
- ²¹ Bind them continually *on your heart*;
Tie them around your neck.
- ²² When you walk about, they will guide you;
When you sleep, they will watch over you;
And when you awake, they will talk to you.
- ²³ For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light;
And reproofs for discipline are the way of life.
- ^{7:1} My son, keep my words
And treasure my commandments *within you*.
- ² Keep my commandments and live,
And my teaching as the apple of your eye.
- ³ Bind them on your fingers;
Write them on the tablet of your heart. (Pr.6:20 – 23; 7:1 – 3)

The language of ‘internalization’ of God’s commandments (Pr.2:1 – 10; 3:1 – 8; 6:21; 7:1 – 5; 22:18; 23:12 – 19; 26:21 – 26; 27:19 – 22; 28:14) comes largely from Deuteronomy. Moses encouraged the Israelites to bind the truth on their bodies on pieces of paper or cloth. In one of the greatest passages in the Torah, Moses reminded the Israelites:

- ⁴ Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Dt.6:4 – 10)

Binding the words of God onto one’s body and house was to help those words go deeper into the heart. The act of God writing the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone probably reinforced this sense that the human heart can be written on as well. This language may even reflect that God’s higher priority at Mount Sinai was to meet with Israel ‘face to face’ and speak His word directly to all of them, and so inscribe His word – with their partnership – onto their hearts. The prophet Jeremiah later picked up this motif of the heart containing what people had written on it, one way or the other. Of the Israelites in his generation, he says, they wrote sin on their human hearts with the hardest substances known to man (Jer.17:1 – 10). Therefore, to renew the covenant, God must reinscribe and rewrite His law on the tablets of the human heart (Jer.31:31 – 34).

Like Psalms, Proverbs also uses the motif of the refining fire to underscore the significance of internalizing God’s words:

- ^{17:3} The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the LORD tests hearts. (Pr.17:3)

A very intriguing difference between the Hebrew Masoretic text and the Greek Septuagint translation emerges at one point. The LXX amplifies the motif of partnership with God in the formation and healing of one’s own human nature:

- ^{18:9} He also who is slack in his work [LXX: he that does not heal himself in his own works]
Is brother to him who destroys. [LXX: is the brother of him that destroys himself] (Pr.18:9)

The LXX makes specific that, given the fall into corruption, the human vocation is not simply to ‘work,’ but to work towards her/his own healing by internalizing God’s wisdom. Not doing so is not simply to bear a family resemblance to ‘him who destroys,’ but to ‘him that destroys himself.’ In the end, however, Proverbs acknowledges that something still seems amiss with human nature, even among the most faithful of the Israelites:

- ^{20:9} Who can say, ‘I have cleansed my heart,
I am pure from my sin’? (Pr.20:9)

From Proverbs' engagement with creational categories from the Pentateuch, we can see human nature as a gift from God entrusted to us, which we must develop with His partnership (Gen.2:4 – 25). We can also see human nature as corrupted by the fall (Gen.3), and even more corruptible from there (Gen.4). Cain corrupted himself further by killing Abel, making his human nature incompatible with bringing forth fruit from the land (Gen.4:11). He enclosed himself in a city of his own making, implicitly forcing his son and descendants to defend, guard, feed, and justify him (Gen.4:16 – 24). Then, the people of Noah's generation were so violent, following in the trajectory of the violence of Cain's family, that God diagnosed their hearts as being completely corrupt (Gen.6:5 – 6). This is also described as 'hardness of heart' in the Pentateuch and here in Proverbs:

28:14 Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD,
but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble. (Pr.28:14)

The entire purpose of the Sinai covenant, in the view of Proverbs and the Jewish wisdom literature as a whole, was to foster a genuine partnership with God on the part of Israel towards the restoration of their human nature. It was genuine and not a farce or trick God deployed. The Sinai covenant was, in effect, the demanding health regimen which the Great Physician called upon Israel to undertake. They did take significant steps towards spiritual health, but never completely. They never succeeded at internalizing God's commandments fully. Moses' command to 'circumcise your heart' (Dt.10:16), which appears to be a summary commandment encompassing the internalization of all the other commandments, was never fully completed by any Israelite, except one.

Ultimately, the Sinai covenant was designed to guide the Davidic heir, the one who would represent Israel in his own human journey from infancy, and to develop conviction among Israelites that God would have to cure them in some deeper way, through the messiah who would be faithful when they were faithless, all the way through death as the full extent of exile, into resurrection life and the return to the original garden. The cultivation of 'wisdom' as a special responsibility of the Kings of Israel from the house of David fits a pattern Israel discerned. They saw symmetry between the Davidic King and Adam. David and Solomon built the temple sanctuary, a new Eden from which the presence of God was made known to all Israel, and indeed the world. In that sense, David and each of his heirs are seen as a recurrence of Adam, the original man who was specially charged with being in the original Eden, from which the presence of God would have been made known to the world. To reflect on God's wisdom was a uniquely Davidic task because it was an Adamic task, as is the task of explaining and expositing it. True 'wisdom' is the gift of God through the Davidic kings to the rest of the world. It is no surprise that the New Testament writers saw Jesus as the fulfillment of David, of God's temple presence now dwelling in the human person, and of course God's wisdom personified because he alone uniquely perfected his human nature by God's wisdom, word, and Spirit.

Parallels to Paul's View of the Sinai Covenant: Extra Biblical Jewish Literature

If I am correct in my assessment of the entirety of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the canonical arrangement of those books and the patterns that emerge from it, then the view that 'the law was weakened by the flesh of Israel,' as the apostle Paul said, or 'the law was numbed/ineffective' as Habakkuk said, is not just one possible view that can emerge from the Hebrew Scriptures based on a few selective but relatively isolated quotations. Rather, it is the view of the entirety of the Pentateuch, the entirety of the Prophets, and arguably the entirety of the Writings as well. Methodologically, this approach is satisfying. One arrives at this understanding not by looking for isolated prooftexts, but by engaging with as much of the biblical data as possible. One reads the entirety of a book – not just sections, even large sections, and certainly not just individual verses – and then even considers the book's reception and placement in the structure of the Hebrew Scriptures, along with its diachronic placement in the narrative of the biblical story. If this is correct, then Brevard S. Child's literary-canonical hermeneutic is the hermeneutic that is appropriate to the task of responsible exegesis itself.

Before returning to the apostle Paul and the New Testament, I pause to consider the following question: If this is indeed the most faithful way to read the Hebrew Scriptures, then did any other Jewish writers or commentators demonstrate such an understanding?

Francis Watson's analysis demonstrates that Jewish extrabiblical writers drew upon the biblical material in a highly selective manner. At times, especially with Philo, they pursued allegorical interpretations which imposed meanings upon the biblical text which cannot be fairly said to arise from the text itself. In my admittedly limited estimation,

anyone pursuing this question ought to be fairly pessimistic about its prospects.

However, the Essene community of Qumran is notable and worth extensive consideration. The Essenes, like the Christians, famously refused to sacrifice animals.²⁶ They seem to have regarded themselves as a 'Holy Spirit' community which was an advance guard of sorts to the larger restoration of Israel as a nation. They very clearly believed that they were one stage in God's larger 'restoration from exile' of Israel as a whole. At least one branch of the Essenes, in their *Community Rule* document (1QS), formalized some kind of baptismal rite to signify this:

'For it is by the Spirit of the true counsel of God that are atoned the paths of man, all his iniquities, so that he can look at the light of life. And it is by the holy Spirit of the community, in its truth, that he is cleansed of all his iniquities. And by the Spirit of uprightness and of humility his sin is atoned. And by the compliance of his soul with all the laws of God his flesh is cleansed by being sprinkled with cleansing waters and being made holy with the waters of repentance.' (1QS 3:6 – 9)

As the Essene community understood themselves as a 'Holy Spirit' community. The baptismal rite is described as congruent with, and signifying, moral obedience, drawing on water-Spirit imagery from Genesis 1 and Ezekiel 36. They also believed that they were enacting the internal transformation called for by the Hebrew Scriptures:

'No man shall walk in the stubbornness of his heart so that he strays after his heart and eyes and evil inclination, but he shall circumcise in the Community the foreskin of evil inclination and of stiffness of neck that they may lay a foundation of truth for Israel, for the Community of the everlasting Covenant.' (1QS 5:4 – 6)

The association between this constellation of biblical texts and the community's self-understanding is significant. How were they configuring these texts? The Essenes, like Jesus, Paul, and the early Christians, understood God's restoration from exile in terms drawn from the Genesis fall narrative (the 'evil inclination'), which poses the fundamental problem which needs to be resolved. They also speak of the internalization of God's commandments ('by the compliance of his soul with all the laws of God'), invoking the 'circumcision of the heart' language from Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4 and 9:25 – 26, and deepening their sense of covenant membership through the internalization of what was external through circumcision of the male penis. By speaking of 'all the laws of God' in the 'soul,' and tying it to being 'cleansed of all his iniquities,' we can discern the 'new covenant' passages of Jeremiah 31:31 – 34 and Ezekiel 11:18 and 36:26 – 36. From Isaiah 59:20 – 21, Joel 2:28 – 29, Zechariah 13:1, and so forth, atonement and its cleansing effects on the person are imaged by the water-Spirit promise and the 'circumcision of the heart' promise, in the context of a Spirit-indwelted community. Both terms drew upon outward rites pertaining to the body to portray inward commitments pertaining to one's moral and spiritual life. Both came from passages in Scripture which made them constitutive of the restoration from exile.

Granted the Essenes' *Community Rule* envisions this 'cleansing' and 'circumcision of the heart' as more or less within the reach of the ordinary Israelite, *conditional upon membership in their community, to ostensibly bring them into the work of God's Holy Spirit*. An ordinary Jew could join the Essene sect. He or she would have to perceive the community in a certain way.

How did the Qumranites understand themselves? They believed that they were, in an open supersessionist sense, the 'true Israel,' the beginning of God's restorative work which would draw in other Jews over time. Given that they deliberately invoked the Holy Spirit, rejected the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood as corrupt, and refused to sacrifice animals either at Jerusalem or at Qumran, they also saw themselves as a 'new temple' community.²⁷ On what basis the Essenes refused to sacrifice animals is unclear. Possibly, they read Jeremiah 7:22 – 28 and Ezekiel 22:21 – 26 as relativizing the ceremonial and sacrificial aspects of the original Sinai arrangement, and distinguished them from the moral commands. Whatever their explicit scriptural basis for doing so, their practice was remarkably consistent with the understanding of the Pentateuch which I argued for above. They seem to have recognized that God wanted a 'temple people,' not a 'people with a temple.'

²⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18:18 – 19; cf. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p.205

²⁷ So Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p.205 continues, 'Building on this, and piecing together the ideology of the movement from hints and statements, we reach the clear conclusion that at least one branch regarded itself not just as the true Israel but as the true Temple.'

Other literature from Qumran supports the view that the community itself displaced the Jerusalem temple. Martha Himmelfarb and Peter Schafer, in their respective studies of ‘Heavenly Ascent’ stories in Jewish extrabiblical literature like 1 Enoch, the Hekhalot texts, and the Qumranic *4QFlorilegium* and *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* express skepticism (at least) of the earthly temple.²⁸ The Qumran scroll *4QFlorilegium* is particularly interesting because it speaks of both a temple in Jerusalem, now defiled, and an eschatological ‘temple of man’:

‘And he commanded to build for himself a temple of man, to offer him in it, before him, the works of thanksgiving.’ (4Q174.1.i.6 – 7)²⁹

George Brooke argues that this curious phrase ‘can also be taken collectively as ‘sanctuary of men.’’³⁰ Brooke also argues that the phrase should be taken as an elision between the current Qumranic community, who understood themselves to be a temple-people with God in their midst, and God’s original intention from Eden, to make of Adam and his heirs a temple-people. Devorah Dimant adds, moreover, that the Qumran community perceived themselves as an earthly analogy to a community of heavenly and priestly angels worshipping God ‘in the innermost sanctuary of the heavenly temple.’³¹

All this suggests that the Qumran community had to develop some peculiar relationship with the Sinai covenant as a whole. They do not seem to have doubted that the Ten Commandments had eternal value and played a role of continuity between the Israel’s biblical history and their own. Neither did Christians, for that matter. But interesting questions can be raised about how they must have viewed the status of the material from Exodus 35 onward, or even Exodus 19 onward. Clearly they relegated it to relative importance, or contingent status. They express enough skepticism of the temple mechanism itself that they must have had some interpretation for why they could truncate off a significant portion of the Sinai covenant’s ordinances. Combined with their explicit recognition of an ‘evil inclination’ in the human heart (or in human nature) and their clustering of ‘restoration from exile’ passages and motifs referring to God’s promise to transform human nature internally, the Qumranites are not far from Paul’s understanding of both Israel’s dilemma and the human dilemma. I find, then, that Paul’s view of ‘the law’ – whether that means God’s commandments or the Sinai covenant framework – was mostly shared by Qumran. ‘The law was weakened.’

Nevertheless, lingering questions remain, which the Qumranites might have had a more difficult time answering. Did any member of the Essene community, living under the *Community Rule* document, actually succeed in ‘circumcising their heart’? Would they, like Paul, have recognized covetousness as an ongoing problem, and symptom of a yet fallen humanity? Where is the Messianic heir of David? Who is he? What role does he play, both as suffering servant, and as king? Are there in fact two Messiahs, as in one common Jewish approach: Messiah ben Joseph who suffers and Messiah ben Judah who reigns? Or is there only one Messiah? Did they really believe that their obedience would call down the Messiah? How would the apparent exaltation or even resurrection of the Messiah occur? What relevance would that have for his followers? And if the Qumranites are in fact the advance deposit of God’s restoration of Israel, why were they not going out to the Gentiles to proclaim and embody the law of the Lord going forth from Zion? Can Mount Zion and Jerusalem and the temple play their biblical roles given the Roman occupation, corruption of the Jewish leaders, and sinfulness of the city as a whole? Paul’s way of placing Jesus as Messiah at the center of those questions marks him out as a Jewish theologian who was able to give coherent answers to those fundamental questions.

Paul’s View of the Messiah: The Messiah Within the Sinai Covenant

‘What the Law [i.e. Sinai covenant] was unable to do,’ Paul argues, ‘weak as it was through the flesh [of Israel], God did: sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.’

²⁸ See discussion by Ann Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Tabernacle Imagery In Its Jewish and Christian Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.166 – 169; citing Martha Himmelfarb, ‘The Temple and the Garden of Eden in Ezekiel, the Book of the Watchers, and the Wisdom of ben Sira,’ edited by Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Greenwood, 1991), p.67 – 68 and Peter Schafer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), p.66

²⁹ Cited and translated by Ann Conway-Jones, p.167

³⁰ George J. Brooke, ‘Miqdash Adam, Eden, and the Qumran Community,’ edited by Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer, *Gemeinde ohne Tempel, Community Without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und fruhen Christentum* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), p.288 cited by Ann Conway-Jones, p.167

³¹ Devorah Dimant, ‘Men as Angels: The Self-Image of the Qumran Community,’ edited by Adele Berlin, *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 1996), p.98, cited by Ann Conway-Jones, p.168

How can the incarnation and ‘offering’ of the incarnate Son alone suffice to condemn sin? At first glance, Jesus’ death alone could not possibly be decisive for any theological purpose. For Jesus’ human death does not make him exceptional; quite to the contrary, it makes him typical. Even Jesus’ death on a cross does not make him unique; Romans crucified thousands of Jews; Jesus was one among many. Yet Paul connects the death of Jesus to the defeat of sin and the righteousness of God. Why would one man’s death suffice as the mechanism by which God condemned sin?

Martin Luther and John Calvin answered this puzzle by hypothesizing that Jesus died and descended into hell to bear infinite torment in a finite time period. More recent Protestant theologians shift the punitive moment to a period when Jesus, still living, hung bodily on the cross, associated with Jesus’ cry of dereliction, which was a quote from Psalm 22:1, ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’³² Yet this, I have argued elsewhere, has no biblical support, and is far from the apostle Paul’s meaning.³³

In Paul’s understanding, the Son of God, sent from God, came ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh.’ I take this to mean that Jesus took to himself a fallen humanity from conception, and that his union with human nature from conception did not immediately remove the stain of fallenness. Nor did it obviate the need for Jesus to struggle against covetousness and other forms of temptation in his human life. Rather, Jesus’ union with his human nature was progressively deepened; he lived by the power and love of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father through his moment-to-moment decisions. The transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor (Mt.17:1 – 13; Mk.9:1 – 13; Lk.9:28 – 36) marked a moment the Father revealed something about Jesus akin to the transfiguration of Moses’ face in Exodus 34. It was the Father’s acknowledgement that Jesus, as human, had lived an utterly faithful life, and was joining his human nature to the Spirit through his human obedience. At his death, Jesus would later triumph completely over the fallenness in his own humanity, and raise his human nature in his resurrection healed, purified, and ‘circumcised of heart.’ From his own new humanity (Eph.2:15), therefore, Jesus is able to share his Spirit with all who believe in him, that we might participate in his victory over sin, death, and the demonic.

Not a few Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants have resisted attributing fallen humanity to Jesus on various grounds. For some, Jesus could not have resisted the temptations involved in bearing a fallen humanity; he would have necessarily and personally sinned and incurred guilt, in their view.³⁴ For some, influenced by Augustine, fallen humanity bears not just an ‘inclination to evil,’ but a full-blown personal guilt which already occurred ‘in Adam’; therefore, Jesus could not be a bearer of a fallen human nature lest he be personally guilty from conception already.³⁵ For others, the ‘fallen nature’ view of Jesus’ incarnation interferes with the ‘satisfaction’ theories of atonement; if Jesus were fallen, he might not be a perfect vessel from which the Father extracted ‘sufficient human obedience’ (Anselm) or ‘infinite human substitutionary suffering’ (Luther, Calvin) because of God’s supposed need to satisfy His ‘divine honor’ (Anselm) or ‘divine retributive justice’ (Luther, Calvin). For yet others, ideas about Mary’s spiritual status are connected to Jesus’; pietistic claims about Mary’s supposed purification are tied to either Jesus’ conception in her womb, or Mary’s immaculate conception in her own mother’s womb. These claims are made in order to attest to the power of Jesus’ holiness in the former case, or ward off from Jesus the devastating guilt inherited from Adam in the latter case.

Romans 8:3 and Philippians 2:7

While I engage these concerns from biblical, historical, and dogmatic perspectives elsewhere,³⁶ here I wish to make

³² John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.78 – 83; R.C. Sproul, *Christ’s Descent into Hell*, available here: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/christs-descent-into-hell/>

³³ Mako A. Nagasawa, *Atonement Foundations: “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”* | New Humanity Institute, <https://newhumanityinstitute.wordpress.com/atonement-foundations-my-god-my-god-why-have-you-forsaken-me-new-humanity-institute/>

³⁴ Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *Jesus: Fallen? The Human Nature of Christ Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Clearwater, FL: Orthodox Witness, 2013) criticizes his fellow Orthodox theologians Kallistos Ware, John Meyendorff, and Vladimir Lossky for holding to the fallen nature view. Luke Stamps, ‘You Asked: Did Jesus Assume a Fallen Human Nature?’, *The Gospel Coalition*, December 19, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-asked-did-jesus-assume-a-fallen-human-nature/> responds to Protestant theologians Karl Barth and T.F. Torrance who hold to the fallen nature view

³⁵ David Bentley Hart, ‘Traditio Deformis,’ *First Things*, May 2015; <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/05/traditio-deformis> critiques those who hold Augustine’s view because of Augustine’s exegetical mistakes. See also the corroborating evidence from the Order of St. Augustine, ‘1311 Greek Language,’ *Augnet*, <http://www.augnet.org/en/life-of-augustine/augustine-in-general/1311-greek-language/>. Father Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2007)

³⁶ Resources (mine and others) available here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-bible>

a detailed biblical case for the meaning for which I advocate, above. Paul uses the phrase ‘in the likeness’ twice to describe the incarnation of the Son: in Philippians 2:7 and here in Romans 8:3.

Philippians 2:6 – 7

Ὁς...ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν...	ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων	γενόμενος
Who...Himself emptied...	in the likeness of men	having been made

Romans 8:3

ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Υἱὸν	πέμψας	ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας
God His own Son	having sent	in the likeness of sinful flesh

Other than the Son being spoken of as the active subject in Philippians 2:6 – 7 and the passive object in Romans 8:3, the two passages are strikingly similar. Paul’s choice of active subject – God the Son or God the Father – corresponds to his pastoral purpose in each letter. In Philippians 2, he stresses the Son’s humbling himself and entering into the world of others because the Son’s mindset and activity is germane to the mindset Paul wants the Philippians to have (Phil.2:5). Therefore, Paul says in Philippians 2 that the Son is the active subject ‘who... emptied himself... in the likeness of men having been made...’ In Romans, however, especially in Romans 8, Paul is supporting his overarching claim that *God* is righteous (Rom.1:16 – 17), that is, faithful to His promise to Abraham (Rom.4:1 – 25) and His covenant with Israel from Sinai (Rom.3:1 – 8, 21 – 26). Therefore, Paul emphasizes that *God* sent His Son: ‘having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh...’

Some confusion has entered the discussion of fallen vs. unfallen humanity because of Paul’s use of the term ‘likeness.’ In English, the word ‘likeness’ can mean ‘resemblance’ or ‘the superficial appearance of.’ In some uses, it implies an antithetical relation with the actual substance thereof, as if deception were involved. However, in Paul, the word ‘likeness’ cannot possibly mean that. For in Philippians 2:7, he says that Jesus was found ‘in human likeness,’ and, lest we accuse Paul himself of being a gnostic, he clearly does not mean ‘resemblance only’ or ‘the superficial appearance of.’ Rather, Paul uses ‘likeness’ in the more technical, theological sense of ‘image and likeness’ from Genesis 1:26 – 28. For God to make human beings in His ‘likeness’ means something akin to humanity at some point ‘sharing in the reality of’ God. That would seem to be confirmed in Genesis 2 when God breathed into Adam to make him a living being (Gen.2:7) and called humans to grow and mature. So when Paul says in Romans 8:3 that Jesus shared ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh,’ he was not saying that Jesus only appeared human but was not in substance, or that Jesus took human flesh but not sinful human flesh. He was saying that Jesus ‘shared in the reality of’ our sinful flesh.

Galatians 4:4 – 5 and Romans 8:3 – 4

Moreover, Leander E. Keck argues that Galatians 4:4 – 5 and Romans 8:3 – 4 give evidence not only of being parallel statements to each other, but also of being early creedal statements which precede Paul’s apostolic ministry. If so, then Galatians 4:4 – 5 and Romans 8:3 – 4 join Philippians 2:6 – 11 as early creedal statements, all having to do with the incarnation and mission of Jesus, Son of the Father. Whatever might be determined about that, the following comparison is striking:

Galatians 4:4 – 5	Romans 8:3 – 4
When the fullness of time came Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου	What the law was unable to do... τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου
God sent out His Son ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν Υἱὸν αὐτοῦ	God having sent His Son ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Υἱὸν πέμψας
born of woman γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός	in the likeness of sinful flesh ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας
born under the law γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον	and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί

in order that those under the law ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμου	in order that the right requirement of the law ἵνα τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου
he might redeem ἐξαγοράση	might be fulfilled in us... πληρωθῆ ἐν ἡμῖν..
in order that the divine adoption we might receive ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν	who walk... according to the Spirit τοῖς... περιπατοῦσιν κατὰ πνεῦμα

‘Sending’ language applied to Jesus is more strongly associated with John than with Paul, who does not use the term anywhere else in his corpus. That is one factor supporting the contention that Paul was quoting material that existed before him. Another factor is that this highly dense material makes more points than is necessary for Paul’s argument in either Galatians 3 – 4 or Romans 7 – 8. Arguably, Galatians 4:4 – 5 and Romans 8:3 – 4 therefore join Philippians 2:6 – 11 as early creedal statements, all having to do with the incarnation and mission of Jesus, Son of the Father.

Supporting the above connection, Keck also notes that Galatians 4 and Romans 8 are concerned with the following larger themes in common:

Galatians 4	Romans 8
The sending of God’s Son	The sending of God’s Son
Soteriological result: life by the Spirit	Soteriological result: life by the Spirit
Sons of God	Sons of God
Abba	Abba
Heirs	Heirs, fellow heirs with Christ

So Galatians 4:4 – 5 invites analysis as well, to be coordinated with Romans 8:3 – 4. In the fullness of time, Paul says, God sent out His Son to be ‘born of a woman, born under the Law, so that he might redeem those who are under the Law’ (Gal.4:4). These are terms denoting the participation of the Son in our human condition, and additionally in the Israelite condition.

The phrase ‘born of woman’ is not merely an historical fact but a phrase from Job. To be ‘born of woman’ is to be ‘short-lived and full of turmoil’ (Job.14:1) because of the following question:

‘You also open Your eyes on him, and bring him into judgment with Yourself.
Who [among men] can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!’ (Job 14:4).

It is to ask,

‘How then can a man be just (righteous) with God?
Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?’ (Job 25:4).

I believe it is very significant that Job associates ‘Hebrew legal courtroom’ terminology like ‘judgment’ and ‘be just/righteous with God’ on the one hand with ontological terminology like ‘uncleanness’ on the other. It shows that the one is constitutive of the other. And specifically, the second stanza of Hebrew poetry’s step parallelism typically has the greater weight: The Hebrew (not Western, Latin) legal courtroom terminology is being enlisted to demarcate the ontological. Job does not envision a ‘sequence’ or an ‘ordo salutis’ where forensic justification comes first, and only later leads to a sanctification process of increasing cleanliness/holiness. Rather, the medical and ontological healing of human nature is the deeper, more robust explanation for any declaration of being ‘just/righteous with God.’ They are not chronologically separated, though they can be logically separated, with the ontological-medical reality being the logical foundation for the vindication in Hebraic, legal terminology. This is consistent with Paul’s approach in Romans.

Moreover, remarkably, the phrase ‘born of woman’ in Galatians 4:4 mirrors the placement of ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ in Romans 8:3. For Jesus to simultaneously share in our unclean humanity and yet be the source of the eschatological Spirit who shares with us a cleansed human nature (Dt.30:6; Ezk.11:18; 36:26 – 36; Ps.51:9 – 10; etc.) means that Jesus’ faithfulness (Gal.2:20 ἐν πίστει... τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ; cf. Gal.2:16 διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ) throughout the course of his human life is in view and assumed by both Paul and his Galatian audience.

Romans 8:3, the Sinai Covenant, and Penal Substitutionary Atonement

We are narrowing in on Paul’s view of the Sinai covenant and Paul’s ‘atonement theology,’ which are closely related topics. In Romans 8:3, the giving of the Law and the sending of the Son had the same objective: to condemn sin in us. In this sense, the difference between the Sinai covenant and the Son’s mission is a difference of power, not of purpose.

Yet according to much Lutheran-Calvinist thinking on atonement, the difference *is* one of purpose. The Sinai covenant purportedly condemns, whereas the Son suffers the condemnation and thereby lifts the condemnation from us. For example, penal substitution advocate Thomas Schreiner, a Protestant evangelical theologian, sees a legal-penal and punitive meaning in the death of Christ. He writes in his commentary on Romans that:

‘the sacrificial death of the Son of God, therefore, was the means by which sin was condemned. He took upon himself the punishment that those who violated God’s law deserved... The “flesh of Christ” does not refer to his incarnation... but to the condemnation of sin in the flesh of Jesus as he hung on the cross.’³⁷

Schreiner refers us to Jesus’ supposedly passive obedience on the cross to become our penal substitute, when he supposedly took our legal and spiritual ‘punishment.’ One difficulty with Schreiner’s interpretation of Romans 8:3 is that if condemnation and punishment were what the Sinai covenant required, then why does Paul call it ‘weak’? If the apostle Paul were thinking along the lines of penal substitution, with Israel as an offender and penal sufferer, then Romans 8:3 should read:

‘For the Law was powerful, strong as it was against the flesh of Israel, but God did otherwise: He had mercy by condemning the Son instead.’

Time and space do not permit me to deliver a more extensive critique of penal substitutionary atonement and the assumption on which it rests: that God’s justice is backward-looking and retributive, not forward-looking and restorative. Nevertheless, some comments are important because this framework is so influential and problematic.

The problem may be approached as a Jewish question about, and objection to, Christian faith. In the Christian paradigm, why did God need an Israel at all? Why not just send Jesus immediately after the fall? The poignancy of this objection increases when we recognize that there is a long history of Jewish suffering standing behind it, not only the suffering caused by Gentile Christians, but even the suffering prior to Jesus himself. Many Protestants – like Thomas Schreiner and other penal substitution advocates – argue that one of the primary reasons for God forming an Israel prior to Jesus is to demonstrate that He is very eager and willing to punish people for sinning, whereas with Jesus, He provides a contrast: He punished Jesus for our sins and pardons people instead. In other words, with Israel, God established the principle of ‘condemnation’ based on the theory of divine retributive justice, and with Jesus, God averted the ‘condemnation’ by satisfying that principle and showing mercy. Many advocates of penal substitution assert that the word ‘righteousness,’ which is repeated four times in the dense passage of Romans 3:21 – 26 (v.21, 22, 25, 26) includes the notion that God must, on account of His character, dole out infinite retributive wrath towards the disobedient, measured against His law on the one hand and His infinity on the other. With that understanding, many adherents interpret Israel’s history – and God – in such a way that reads divine motivation and causation into the most intense periods of Jewish suffering. Thus, penal substitutionary atonement requires that Christians tell Jews that a chief reason why God did not send Jesus right after the fall, and formed an Israel in the interim, was to inflict some punitive suffering on Israel. Such is one answer to Jews provided by penal substitution advocates. It is not the totality of the explanation, but it is a non-negotiable part in the penal substitutionary framework. This answer either repulses most Jews, or weaponizes already existing self-loathing in those few Jews who are willing to adopt a theological rationale for their self-loathing.

³⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, edited by Moises Silva, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), p.403 – 404

Exploring penal substitution a bit further helps us see the problems with this view. Advocates of penal substitution often interpret Romans 3:25 as a summary of God's dealing with Israel and others: 'This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.' The interpretation goes as follows: God did not actually punish Israel, at least to the extent that His divine retributive justice required it. The interpretation has its own difficulties: How could Paul possibly phrase his summary of Israel's history as God 'passing over' Israel's sins? As we will see below, other Old and New Testament passages said quite the opposite. Nevertheless, in this interpretation of Romans 3:25, God was storing up the fullness of retributive wrath for the Gentiles and Israel, and thus for Jesus. Moreover, in this theory, God's disciplining of Israel serves as a cautionary tale. God disciplined Israel as a precursor to an eternal hell where human suffering must be infinite because God is determined to satisfy His infinite retributive justice.

Hebrews 2:2 functions as a quite different summary statement of God's disciplining of Israel prior to Jesus. Hebrews, speaking to Jewish-background believers in Jesus, sums up the history of Israel pre-Jesus with this surprising statement: 'every transgression and disobedience [already] received a just penalty' (Heb.2:2). This statement by itself demands an explanation. It is impossible that Hebrews 2:2 could mean that every Israelite faced God's 'just penalty' for her or his individual transgressions as if God were simply the arbiter of personalized legal standards of meritocratic-retributive justice. Some individual transgressions seem under-penalized: We think of King David, for starters; Psalm 103:10 even celebrates God not giving Israel what their sins deserve. Even more puzzling is how Hebrews 2:2 includes Israel's inability to carry out capital punishment and perhaps other disciplinary practices: After 586 BC, when Babylon took Israel into exile, Israel lost the ability because they lost national sovereignty. For nearly half its existence under the Sinai covenant, Israel's leaders could not carry out *any* of the death penalties in the covenant. That fact might lend credence to the interpretation of Romans 3:25 that God 'passed over' sins, but Hebrews 2:2 makes the opposite assertion: 'A just penalty' befell all the Israelites. The puzzle deepens.

The puzzle undermines the theory of penal substitution. How could Hebrews 2:2 say that 'a just penalty' was already experienced by Israel, prior to Jesus? Because if God already executed that 'just penalty' on the Israelites pre-Jesus, then did God pour out 'a just penalty' on Jesus again at the cross? If so, then how could God engage in an exercise in double accounting? When accountants today do that, we call it fraud.

Even more puzzling are interpretations of Israel's history by the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah. Isaiah and Zechariah believed that Israel already suffered *more* than they deserved when the Babylonians took them into exile. Isaiah laments that the city of Jerusalem has received 'double for all her sins' (Isa.40:1 – 2). Zechariah goes even further: remarkably, Zechariah makes explicit that the Gentile nations roundabout inflicted far more damage on 'Jerusalem and the cities of Judah' than God desired: 'I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster' (Zech.1:12 – 15).

Trying to integrate these assessments about Israel's history by various biblical authors is impossible under the framework of penal substitution and the theory that divine justice is retributive. Did God not punish Israel enough, or at all, as one interpretation of Paul would say? Did God punish Israel adequately and perfectly, as Hebrews apparently says? Did God overly punish Israel, and/or let the Gentile nations do so, as Isaiah and Zechariah seem to say? We cannot simply privilege one biblical author above others, or ignore one. All must be considered together. This incongruity suggests that the retributive-justice-penal-substitution framework itself does not arise from these passages but are being imposed upon them, which causes a conflict in interpretation. As I show below, we can avoid the conflict if we drop the framework altogether.

Romans 8:3 – 4 affords us a different answer to this Jewish and Christian question which can integrate the other passages. Schreiner says that 'those who violated God's law deserved ... condemnation.' 'Condemnation,' for Schreiner, then, refers to some experience of divine punishment that Jesus endured on the cross. Advocates of penal substitution like Schreiner typically assert that the divine punishment is 'death' not in the restricted sense of 'mortality,' but in an expansive sense that telescopes far beyond mere mortality. Was this Paul's understanding of 'condemnation'? Decidedly not.

For Paul, God did not add additional retributive punishments upon Israel, but used the Sinai covenant to simply accelerate exile and mortality for Israel, so God could make their experience a microcosm of exile from the garden

of Eden and mortality outside it. Paul's discussion of death in relation to *Adam* in Romans 5:12 – 21 is quite relevant here. Paul speaks of sin as *a condition in human nature* and *not* a personalized record of wrongs rendered in legal-infracture or financial-debt terms (Rom.5:13; 'until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law'). Paul then speaks of God's 'condemnation' upon sin after the Adamic fall as *death*, that is, *human mortality itself* (Rom.5:16 – 18). Paul became conscious of sin under the Sinai covenant (Rom.7:9; 'when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died'). Unlike Augustine, Paul did not become aware of his sin through an actual theft, observable by others, measurable in ordinary economic and legal terms. Rather, Paul became conscious of sin *as a condition* through being triggered to inwardly covet. Wrong desires sprang up in him, and he became aware of them when he measured that covetousness against the laws of the Sinai covenant (Rom.7:8; 'sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind'). Therefore, the death of which he speaks is arguably his awareness of his participation in Adamic death, due to the corruption of human nature: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?' (Rom.7:24).

Contrary to Schreiner, then, God's condemnation is not the retributive punishment in hell that menaces people on account of each person breaking particular commandments. The condemnation is already the mortality we face on account of each person participating in the corruption of human nature. It is a severe mercy, but it is part of God's restorative, not retributive, justice. How could such an act be God's restorative justice? Because God was preventing human beings from eating from the tree of life while we were in a corrupted state. God was preventing us from making human sinfulness immortal, at least before He could offer us the healed humanity of Jesus to undo the corruption. God exiled us from the garden of Eden, therefore, and imposed mortality upon us, because He was forward-looking and restorative: God looked ahead to Jesus. Death may be the last enemy (1 Cor.15:26), but it is not the first enemy, nor the fundamental enemy.

Incorporating an insight outside of Romans will also help us integrate these statements about Israel's experience under the Sinai covenant. Jesus descended to Sheol, the realm of the dead, to awaken those who died before he died, to give them the opportunity to choose him (1 Pet.4:6; cf. 3:18 – 20). In essence, God put people into a "coma ward" of sorts until Jesus could go there and revive them and present himself to them. This was the culminating expression of God's restorative justice. Each person had the opportunity to repent of what they had done, and participate in Jesus' restoration of their human nature. This forward-looking, restorative motivation of God was highlighted in Moses: Even though God took Moses' life, even because of anger (Dt.3:26), God awakened Moses so he could stand with Jesus at the moment when Jesus was transfigured (Mt.17:1 – 13).

The 'just penalty' of Hebrews 2:2 can only mean that 'exile' and mortality was the appropriate experience for Israel, since 'exile' was in fact revelatory. Israel was choosing to forsake God and the garden land, so God simply revealed those hidden choices outwardly. And Israel's inability to carry out the death penalty of the Sinai covenant did not have to be carried out under conditions of exile and mortality because the death penalty itself was simply an acceleration of, and analogy for, the original exile from the garden and God's imposition of mortality. Israel's sins were not 'piling up' in exile, as it were. We cannot receive Hebrews 2:2 in such a way so as to go the other way and include the overly brutal and violent actions of Babylon and other Gentile powers as part of the "just penalty" from God -- not when Isaiah and Zechariah specifically protest those experiences, even voicing divine sorrow that the suffering Israel endured had been far too much for God's purposes. 'Exile' as Israel's categorical, communal, and narrative experience could only be remedied by 'the purification of sins' from human nature (Heb.1:3) and God restoring humanity to the garden land and original creation order (Ps.8 quoted by Heb.2:6 - 8). Hebrews could therefore say Israel *already* received from God what was just and appropriate, prior to Jesus.

So Israel's experience of exile and death was a particular experience of the Adamic categories of exile and death, generally, but they were not different in substance. They were different in speed but not in kind. And the point about God, I would be quick to add, is not that God was storing up punitive, retributive wrath against Israel which He discharged against Jesus as a penal substitute. That does not appear to be Paul's understanding of the Sinai covenant in Romans. Paul in Romans 3:25 should be interpreted this way: 'This [i.e. Jesus' own faithfulness, 'pistis christou' in Rom.3:22] was to demonstrate His righteousness [i.e. God's faithfulness to the covenant with Israel], because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.' Paul is not appealing to some long-delayed divine retributive justice which was 'propitiated/satisfied' by being poured upon Jesus. Instead, Paul is explaining why Jesus was the ideal patient of God's surgical power and the ideal scribe of the heart, and why God's long-awaited covenant promise to Israel and the world is fulfilled in Jesus and by Jesus. I think that is the only way to coordinate Isaiah 40:1 – 2, Zechariah 1:15, Psalm 103:10, Hebrews 2:2, and Romans 3:25 and honor all of them

together.

Since Paul spoke of the Sinai covenant as ‘weakened’ by ‘the flesh’ of Israel, we must conclude that the commandments and the covenant frame itself were aiming at something besides simply seeing Israel punished. After all, in what sense can the Sinai covenant be considered ‘weak’ when Israel suffered the exile and death menaced in Deuteronomy 27 – 29? If the purpose of the Sinai covenant was simply to drag Israel into exile and death, then Paul should have said, once again, that the law was ‘strong.’ That Paul did not say that is vitally important. In fact, the ‘I myself’ of Romans 7:14 – 25 is aligned *against* the flesh and *with* the Sinai covenant as well. That means the Sinai covenant and its commandments were meant to *assist* the Israelites as they battled against the flesh. It also means that ‘the sending of the Son’ and the giving of the Sinai covenant and the willing of the ‘I myself’ are aligned in the same purpose. It is ‘the flesh’ of Romans 7:14 – 25 – the ‘alter ego,’ as it were – which weakened both the ‘I myself’ and the law such that it could not achieve its purpose, and Mosaic Israel could not achieve its purpose.

As Proverbs and the Jewish wisdom literature show, God gave us commands to help us grow in the way He designed His creation to grow. God’s commandments were for our good and our partnership with God in our growth. In the context of fallen humanity and the tendency for humans to sin, this did not fundamentally change. But personal growth for Israel under the Sinai covenant did take on an additional dimension: God called the Israelites to condemn sin within themselves, by not sinning. In essence, they were supposed to ‘circumcise their hearts’ through their obedience and faithfulness and partnership with God. ‘Circumcision of the heart’ is a surgical, symbolically cleansing, act. Despite the use of the English word ‘law’ and the Western adversarial legal system that it conjures up in Western contexts, God’s commandments to Israel are to be understood more like the commandments of a doctor to a patient. They are part of a very serious, demanding health regimen meant for our good and our healing. Contrary to much of Protestant conservative evangelical thinking on atonement and God’s character, the fact that God gave commandments to us does not make Him our opponent, adversary, or accuser. It makes Him wise, good, and loving towards us. Hence, Paul can say, ‘the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good’ (Rom.7:12). Only Jesus, though, ‘persevered in doing good’ (Rom.2:7 – 10), and fulfilled what the Sinai covenant required: ‘circumcision of the heart’ (Rom.2:28 – 29).

Correspondingly, what should be apparent is that the Sinai covenant served Israel as a tool for diagnosing their own human nature in the context of biblical theodicy and the moral discernment of good and evil. No other people group had the capacity to do this with accuracy. People had various other logical options. Adam, notably, shifted blame over to Eve (‘this woman’) and God (‘You gave me’) (Gen.3:12) and we clearly inherit that tendency to blame God and others, as well. Perhaps people would make good and evil meaningless categories because they projected both onto a deity/reality who was both and therefore neither (Hinduism, atheism). Or, people would make good and evil into two eternal and opposite gods (Zoroastrianism) or multiple gods (paganism), thereby sacrificing impossible an eschatological victory of good over evil, and the beauty of personal hope which would bloom in such soil. Or, people would blame other people for evil, and regard themselves as good, as Adam did after he fell into sin, or as Western Enlightenment advocates did (and do) in colonialism and imperialism. Or, people would simply blame circumstances, like secular liberals tend to do, making human beings the mere products of their environment. The Sinai covenant prevented Israel from pursuing those options. The true struggle between good and evil is within every single person. The tenth commandment against covetousness, lusting, and jealousy reflected the primal sin in the garden, and reminded Israel of it. Arguably, covetousness of some sort underlies every other sinful motive and act. Therefore, the tenth commandment in particular exposed Israel’s internal life, even before it became evident via another sinful action. That is what Paul learned from the Sinai covenant.

The Narrative of Jesus and Israel in Paul’s Writings, and Romans 8:3

To further understand what else Paul might mean when he speaks of the sending of the Son ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh,’ we can examine Paul’s ministry and thought for any other clues to how he aligned the life of Israel within the Sinai covenant and the life of Jesus.

Paul is accused of reducing Jesus’ life to certain key events, such as his incarnation and death. For instance, to the Galatians, he says that he portrayed Jesus Christ as crucified (Gal.3:1), and to the Corinthians, he says that he was ‘determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor.2:2). Taken in isolation, these Pauline statements support the notion that one can begin a proclamation with Jesus’ death on the cross, and its supposedly penal substitutionary meaning. Is Paul not guilty as charged?

Yet the apostle also gives evidence in his letters of rather expansive narration about Jesus. We should, moreover, coordinate Paul with Luke in particular, because Paul's preaching likely included what we now know as Luke's Gospel, or at least certain portions of it. Luke was Paul's apostolic associate from Philippi, since Acts 16 marks the point when Luke uses 'we' to denote himself as with Paul and Silas. Luke records a number of sample speeches by Paul, including one in a Jewish synagogue where Paul says that through Jesus, 'everyone who believes is freed from all things [probably meaning sin, death, and the demonic], from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses' (Acts 13:39).

Paul says to the Corinthians that he passed on what he received from Jesus and other Christians (1 Cor.2:1 – 2), including what Jesus said about marriage (1 Cor.7:10; used as an example briefly in Lk.16:18), about apostolic workers earning a living from proclaiming the gospel (1 Cor.9:14; mentioned in Luke 10:7), about Jesus having a 'law' or ethical teaching distinct from the law of Moses (1 Cor.9:21; evidenced throughout Luke), about Jesus' establishment of worship norms for men and women (1 Cor.11:2; suggested by Lk.10:38 – 42, etc.) and the eucharist (1 Cor.11:23 – 25; cf. Lk.22:14 – 23), about Jesus giving some norms for speaking in service (1 Cor.14:37), and an apostolic creedal recollection of Jesus' resurrection appearances (1 Cor.15:1 – 4). Again to the Corinthians, he says that his apostolic suffering is a reminder and manifestation of 'the life of Jesus' as complementary with but in contradistinction to 'the death of Jesus' or 'the dying of Jesus' (2 Cor.4:7 – 12), which means that Paul and the Corinthians shared an awareness of the suffering and persecution that Jesus endured in his earthly lifetime. To the Philippians, Paul attributes his affection for them to 'the affections of Christ Jesus' (Phil.1:8), which assumes that they can all recall that Jesus demonstrated human, earthly affection, which is illustrated by Jesus' joy in the Spirit (Lk.10:21) and hospitality praxis (Lk.5:27 – 32; 7:36 – 50; 14:1 – 24; 15:1 – 16:31; 19:5). To the Jewish synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, Paul (surely in abbreviated form as portrayed by Luke) recounts the history of Israel from the Exodus, including King David and Jesus as the 'new and greater David' being examined and tried by the Jerusalem leadership (Acts 13). And to the Ephesians, in Acts, Paul says that he has told them 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27), which probably included substantial material about the life and teachings of Jesus. Therefore, Luke's Gospel is a good primary candidate for understanding how Paul preached.

If Luke was writing in part to substantiate Paul's ministry, more themes about Jesus' connection to Davidic kingship stand out because Paul himself stressed that connection (Rom.1:2 – 4; 2 Tim.2:8; Acts 13:32 – 39; cf. Acts 15:15 – 18 quoting Amos 9:11 – 12 about the house of David; 1 Cor.15:20 – 28; etc.). Luke portrayed Jesus as a 'new Israel' and a 'new David' who retold – or recapitulated – the stories of Israel and David, but by succeeding where they failed. The Israel imagery overlapped with the David imagery. On the one hand, the sequence of Jesus' baptism and wilderness temptation (Lk.3:21 – 4:13) retell the story of Israel's passage through the water of the Red Sea and the wilderness. In that regard, Jesus succeeds where Israel failed, and Jesus' deeply symbolic actions become the special concern of Matthew (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), who then narrates Jesus' ascent up a mountain, and giving of a new law (Mt.5 – 7), retelling Sinai, and so on. Jesus' baptism, particularly, should be recognized as Jesus' participation in a confession that his human nature needed to be cleansed, because he was participating in our fallen human nature. But Jesus succeeded where Israel failed.

Luke, more so than Matthew, makes stronger connections to David's story from the beginning of his narrative, so emphasize Jesus' undoing the failures of David and his house. Luke includes the stories of Elizabeth and Zacharias (Lk.1), who are like the barren Hannah and her husband Elkanah (1 Sam.1 – 2). As Samuel anointed David for kingship (1 Sam.16), so also John the Baptist anointed Jesus for kingship, at his baptism in the Jordan River (Lk.3:21 – 22). God's quotation of the coronation psalm of the kings of Judah, 'You are My beloved Son' from Psalm 2:7, signals Jesus' Davidic kingship. Moreover, Luke then reminds us of Jesus' Adamic heritage (Lk.3:23 – 38) because the Davidic, kingly role was already an Adamic motif,³⁸ to reclaim the truest human meaning of 'son of God' and a proper reign over all creation. Just as David then fought a Goliath in the wilderness (1 Sam.17), Jesus went to battle a greater Goliath, Satan (Lk.4:1 – 13). More evidence can be provided, but the narration that goes by Luke's name accords with Paul's abbreviated summary of his preaching: 'Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel' (2 Tim.2:8; cf. Rom.1:2 – 4).

³⁸ Even in the Book of Samuel, David was introduced with Adamic imagery, but transposed into a wild key: David defended his flock against the lion and the bear (1 Sam.17:34 – 37). Daniel later portrayed the 'Son of David' as 'Son of Man' and surrounded by empires represented by the same wild beasts: lion, bear, leopard, but with strange body parts representing a creation gone mad.

What matters in relation to Paul's statement in Romans 8:3 is that Luke understood Jesus' temptations in the wilderness (Lk.4:1 – 13) and in the garden of Gethsemane (Lk.22:39 – 46) as going far beyond basic, biological human realities like hunger and thirst, later termed the 'innocent passions.' They were kingly, Davidic temptations ultimately related to 'covetousness,' and idolatry, given the Son's commitment to the Father. Paul would have regarded this as important because Jesus' successful struggle against temptation all the way unto his death on the cross reflected Jesus' successful condemnation of sin while 'in the likeness of sinful flesh.' Literarily, the wilderness and Gethsemane provide 'brackets' which frame the beginning and ending of Jesus' public ministry. This arrangement suggests that these two episodes *characterize* Jesus' public ministry, as opposed to merely being two isolated incidents.

Jesus' resistance to Satan's three-fold temptation in the wilderness involved what might be understood as an amplification of the original temptation that Adam and Eve faced in the garden (bread was 'good for food,' possession of glory was 'a delight to the eyes,' guaranteed spiritual power was a 'secret wisdom'), but they are also precisely kingly temptations. Turning stones to bread was not simply a temptation to meet Jesus' own hunger, but to use his power for himself. Seeing the glory of the world's kingdoms was not simply the desire to possess something glorious or beautiful, but to possess what a *king* ought to possess. Recall: King David *saw* Bathsheba *from his palace*. Commanding angels to protect him was not simply the normal human survival instinct; in principle it involved commanding angels to serve his every whim.

For the wilderness experience and Gethsemane to have been temptations, they must have had some point of contact with 'the likeness of sinful flesh' in the humanity of Jesus. I am tempted by chocolate because this thing that is external to me has some point of contact with something internal to me. If I had no internal desire for chocolate at all, then it would not be a temptation. Chocolate would appear to me on the same level as an inedible or undesirable object. While we must be careful to affirm, with Hebrews, that Jesus never actively sinned ('without sin' in Heb.4:15 refers to the active resistance of temptation yet 'without wrongdoing'), nevertheless if we affirm, also with Hebrews, that Jesus 'sympathizes with our weaknesses' because he 'has been tempted in all things as we are' (Heb.4:15), it is because he shared in our fallen humanity but battled successfully to turn all his thoughts, desires, and actions towards the Father by the power of the Spirit. By the time Jesus shared in our death by dying on the cross, he completed his vocation as the true servant-king, praying to the Father for his executioners, calling for Israel and the Gentiles to worship the one true God of Israel, and climactically condemning sin to death.

Paul insisted on anchoring Jesus' incarnation not simply into Adamic humanity, or the Jewish vocation under the Sinai covenant, although such things were true. Paul insisted on anchoring Jesus' incarnation into the Davidic family and kingship, within the Sinai covenant, which shared in fallen Adamic humanity. For Paul to do so meant that he understood Jesus as filling to the full a pre-existing narrative: a story about how Jesus, like David, was to be the model Israelite under the Sinai covenant; about how Jesus, like David, was anointed to be king, yet endured a season of rejection while he gathered a kingdom community; about how Jesus, as the greater David, ascended to the greater throne. This means that Paul's theology of the atonement necessarily required the full narrative of Jesus, played out against and within the backdrop of the narratives of Israel and David. Namely, God established the Davidic covenant within the Sinai covenant, as His promise of kingship, the extension of worship, and the spread of peace and reconciliation, to challenge and beckon the Gentiles. Jesus rose from the dead to ascend to a throne that is Davidic in scope – that is, global – and Davidic in nature – that is, oriented to worship and faithful obedience. And Jesus had to solve the human nature problem for not only Israel, but also the Gentiles. He had to correct and complete, fix and fulfill, purify and perfect human nature in himself, on behalf of all.

Paul's View of the Messiah's Death: The Sin Offering in the Sinai Covenant

One's view of atonement has direct ramifications for one's view of Mosaic Israel and the Sinai covenant, because it requires an upstream, commensurate view of the Sinai covenant. As I stated above, this is where Romans 8:1 – 4 as a hinge section becomes highly relevant. If Israel's suffering was the result of God's supposed need to demonstrate His retributive justice in principle, against which He could demonstrate 'mercy' through Christ, then what additional information was gained by humanity over and above what we learned via Adamic death generally? Did the Sinai covenant indicate in some way that God's divine retributive justice demanded infinite human suffering and misery for any violation of the commandments? Penal substitution advocates argue that the Jewish sacrificial system provides an early analogy for this theory. In this section, I will show otherwise.

Returning, then, to Paul's understanding of how God condemned sin in Jesus, we must consider how Paul associates

condemnation with Adamic death, *not* with death particularly under the Sinai covenant, although the Sinai covenant interprets the death of Jesus with reference to the sin offering. Paul says:

καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας	κατέκρινεν	τὴν ἁμαρτίαν	ἐν τῇ σαρκί
and for sin,	he condemned	sin	in the flesh

A number of commentators perceive in the phrase καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας the concept of the sin offering.³⁹ The phrase refers to a sin offering in forty-four of its fifty-four occurrences in the LXX. It also refers to a sin offering in Hebrews 10:6 and 8, and 13:11. I accept this interpretation as well.

Out of all the offerings, the sin offering was special because it carried sin from people to priests, and from high priest to God. At a high level, the sin offering appears to be a transfer mechanism as God acted much like a modern dialysis machine. Making this slightly more complex, the sin offering had an ‘ordinary’ function and a ‘special’ function on the Day of Atonement, so we must consider both. Here is the function of sin offerings in the Sinai covenant:

All Year Round: Regular Sin Offering Sacrifices

1. The Israelite brings the animal to the priest at the sanctuary (Lev.4:4a)
2. The Israelite lays his hand on the head of the animal (Lev.4:4b)
3. The Israelite kills the animal (Lev.4:4c)
4. The priest sprinkles the animal’s blood on the sanctuary furnishings (Lev.4:5 – 7), symbolically cleansing the objects and land
5. The priest separates the organs for waste and toxins – intestinal fat, kidneys, liver – and burns them in the altar in fire and smoke (Lev.4:8 – 10), burning away the most unclean parts
6. The priests are to burn the hide, head, legs, entrails, and refuse down to ashes (Lev.4:11 – 12)
7. The priests are to eat the meat of the sin offering ‘to bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord’ (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 20).

The Day of Atonement: Special Sin Offering Sacrifices

1. The high priest goes in once a year on the appointed day (Lev.16:2)
2. The high priest wears clean white linen (Lev.16:4)
3. The high priest sacrifices a bull for himself and his family (Lev.16:6, 11)
4. The high priest sprinkles the bull’s blood on the furnishings of the sanctuary (Lev.16:14 – 20)
5. The high priest sacrifices a goat as a sin offering, sprinkling its blood on the mercy seat in the holy of holies, and then the holy place, cleansing it (Lev.16:9, 15 – 19)
6. The high priest lays his hands on the live goat, the scapegoat, confessing all the sins of Israel onto the head of the scapegoat, and send it away into the wilderness (Lev.16:20 – 22)
7. The priests will *not* eat the flesh of the bull or first goat, which is absolutely unusual and unique, but rather burn it to ashes, so the sin does *not* symbolically cycle back into the priests (Lev.16:26 – 28)

In the sin offering, the Israelites divided the animal into different parts: blood, flesh, skin, fat, kidneys and liver, and sometimes legs.

The Blood

The blood of the animal was the cleansing agent that restores sanctity, life, and health to what it touches. The Israelites were to never eat the blood (Gen.9:4).

³⁹ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), p.220 – 225; also affirmed by Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 403, who in footnote 12 lists in support ‘Calvin 1960: 160; Wilckens 1980: 127; Kasemann 1980: 216; Dunn 1988a; 422; Moo 1991: 512; Schweizer, *TDNT* 8:383 – 84; Rosenfeld, *TNDT* 6:55; Greene 1991; Stuhlmacher 1994: 119 – 20; Byrne 1996: 243.’ Francis Watson, ch.7 does not examine the sin offering reference in Rom.8:3 or the *hilasterion* reference in Rom.3:24. His statement, ‘the legislation of Leviticus acquires an ideal, timeless quality, so that it here seems entirely plausible that the commandments truly represent the divinely ordained way to life’ (p.325) is perplexing. I disagree with his assessment of Romans 5 – 8 that, ‘There are only two explicit citations in the entire section (Rom.7.7, citing Exod.20.17; Rom.8.36, citing Ps.43.23).’

The Organs for Waste and Toxins

Interestingly, the kidneys, liver, and intestinal fat are the parts of the body which process waste or store toxins within the body. Very importantly, the kidneys, liver, and intestinal fat were to never be eaten (Lev.3:17; 7:22 – 25; 8:16, 25; 9:10, 19 – 20, 24; 10:15). They were reserved for God alone. When they were consumed in fire, the Lord smelled the smoke of the fat, kidney, and liver as ‘a soothing aroma’ (Lev.3:3 – 5, 9 – 11, 14 – 16).

Nothing else triggered this response from God, including the death of the animal. This strongly suggests that penal substitution advocates are making unfortunate oversimplifications about the whole process of sacrifice. For sin offerings, in particular, burning the toxin-bearing organs became ‘a soothing aroma’ to God (Lev.4:21). And this step in particular is connected to ‘making atonement.’ For example, in the sin offering,

‘Then he [the priest] shall remove all its fat, just as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offerings, and the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar, on the offerings by fire to the LORD. Thus the priest *shall make atonement for him* in regard to his sin which he has committed, and he will be forgiven.’ (Lev.4:35; emphasis mine)

The partitioning of the animal indicates that God is not ‘soothed’ by simply causing death or otherwise doling out punishments. Rather, death is a means to another end, where God separates waste-related organs from the organism and consumes them. This was surely instructive for the Israelite onlooker. Atonement via the sin offering, therefore, is connected to the act of separating one thing from another.

The Legs, Skin, and Digestive Tract

Perhaps the exterior of the animal and its digestive tract represented the way the animal made contact with the land, which had been cursed because of Adam and Eve’s fall into corruption, and further desecrated by the sins of others. In the burnt offering, the legs and entrails of the animal needed to be washed before being offered to God (e.g. Lev.1:9, 13).

The Flesh

The flesh of the animal, in the peace and sin/guilt offerings of Lev.3 – 7, was consumed by the priests or the common people. This is a non-negotiable part of how the priests ‘made atonement’ for the people (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 20). The priests had to internalize the sin that was symbolically placed by the Israelites onto the animals. They were ‘sin-bearers’ in their role as priests.

One cannot help but be struck by the connections to various motifs of separation that occurred before in Scripture. The fiery sword of Genesis 3:24 represented cutting/burning sinfulness away, separating something from us if ever we were to return to the garden of Eden. Now, we observe the separating of the fat, kidneys, and liver from the rest of the animal. With the sin offering, in particular, the parts of the animal that handles waste and toxins are cut away and burned.

This sheds light retrospectively on why God was pleased with the sacrifice of Abel in Genesis 4:4. Abel separated the ‘fat portions’ from the animals, presumably for God to consume by fire. This made Abel ‘like God.’ God separated good things from good things in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, and even Eve from Adam in Genesis 2:21 – 22. Human beings had to partner with God to continue in this work of separating, but with a new significance. Because of the fall into corruption, human beings had to separate sinfulness from themselves, in partnership with God. Abel was demonstrating this, through his offering, in microcosm.

The principle of separation continues in what became the dominant symbol for salvation: circumcision. Circumcision in Genesis 17 represented the cutting of sinful attitudes of male privilege away, separating those attitudes from Abraham and Sarah so they could return to the creational ideal of Adam and Eve insofar as childbearing was concerned (as I have explained here). Circumcision was an act of separation from uncleanness for the sake of restoration to God’s original creation ideal. Moses described salvation from sinfulness using the motif of ‘circumcision of the heart’ (Dt.10:16; 30:6). Something has to be cut away from us, from our human nature, in a partnership between each human being and God. Internalizing the commandments was synonymous with acquiring

virtues and cutting sinfulness away (Dt.10:16; Jer.4:4; 9:28 – 29). But only God would be able to fully grant the circumcised heart (Dt.30:16; Rom.2:28 – 29; Col.2:12).

This principle of separation demonstrates agreement with what I have nicknamed ‘medical substitution,’ not penal substitution. When Jesus died, God was not pleased by his death per se. Death was a means to another, deeper, end. Through death, God separated out from Jesus’ humanity the most sinister ‘toxin,’ the corruption which must be ‘circumcised’ from the human heart (Dt.10:16; 30:6), ‘the flesh’ (Jn.1:14; Rom.7:14 – 25), ‘the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom.8:3), ‘the old self’ (Rom.6:6), the ‘venom’ of the serpent (Lk.10:19). Thus in his resurrection, Jesus emerged without it.

The Sin Offering in Context of the Sacrificial System and Calendar

The table comparison below is a summary of the Sinai covenant’s sacrificial system. The role of the sin offering must be contextualized into the entirety of this material in order to understand how the New Testament writers understood Jesus’ death as a sin offering.

Moses Ascends Mount Sinai	The High Priest Enters the Holy of Holies
Purpose: God purifies Moses and establishes the Sinai covenant	Purpose: God purifies Israel through the sacrifices, priests, and high priest, and renews the Sinai covenant
Mount Sinai: Three Vertical Levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Base: People • Mid-Level: 70 Elders, Aaron, Moses, Joshua • Top: Moses (w/ Joshua) 	The Sanctuary: Three Horizontal Levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outer Court: People • Holy Place: Priests • Holy of Holies: High Priest
‘...make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain’ (Ex.25:40; 26:30)	
Divine Fire on the Way Up the Mountain: Purifies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently’ (Ex.19:18). • God gave Moses blood to sprinkle on Israel to give them ‘new life’ (Ex.24:6 – 8) • God cleansed those who ascended; ultimately God made Moses’ face shine (Ex.34:29 – 35) because he alone ascended 	Fire in the Bronze Altar: Purifies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘The altar shall be most holy, and whatever touches the altar shall be holy’ (Ex.29:37) • In the sin offering (Lev.4), Israelites interacted with the fire. They laid hands on the animals, probably transferring their impurities symbolically. They sprinkled blood before the Lord and on various objects, cleansing them. The priests burned the kidney, liver, and intestinal fat (organs of waste and toxicity) in the fire of the altar (Lev.4:8 – 10, 19, 26, 31, 35) – ‘a soothing aroma to the Lord,’ not the death of the animals per se. The priests ate the flesh ‘to make atonement’ (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 20), symbolically taking in impurity into themselves and bearing it. Once a year, the high priest represented all the priests, and all Israel, to bear the sin into God. • The bronze basin is connected to the altar, and is also for washing and cleansing afterwards (Ex.27:3; 38:8; 39:9).
Moses and the Elders Eat Halfway Up the Mountain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel... and they ate and drank.’ (Ex.24:9 – 11) 	The Priests Eat in the Holy Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the holy place: ‘You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.’ (Ex.25:30) ‘It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy...’ (Lev.24:5 – 9)
Moses Guided by a Vision of Fire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Now Moses... led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed’ (Ex.3:1 – 2) • Probably was guided by divine light through the divine darkness in the cloud (?) 	The Priests Guided by Fiery Light <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the holy place: ‘Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold... make its lamps seven in number.’ (Ex.25:31, 37) The golden lampstand was probably meant to symbolize God’s appearance in the burning bush.

<p>Divine Cloud on the Top of the Mountain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.’ (Ex.24:15 – 16) 	<p>Cloud of Incense in the Holy Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘You shall make an altar as a place for burning incense... in front of the veil... in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you... perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.’ (Ex.30:1 – 8)
<p>Moses Goes to the Top of the Mountain Alone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin’ (Ex.32:30). ‘So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights’ (Ex.34:28) 	<p>The High Priest Enters the Holy of Holies Alone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest alone entered behind the veil, to send all the impurities into God, once a year (Lev.16) and renew the covenant. • The curtain blocks everyone else’s sight.
<p>The Sky and Heavens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the mountain top, all is sky (Ex.24:9 – 11; 34:1 – 4) 	<p>The Sky and Heavens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gold-covered walls of the holy of holies (Ex.26:29) create an ‘infinite mirror’ effect, where all is sky
<p>God’s Appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God showed His glory partially to Moses (Ex.33:17 – 34:9). Implied is God as ‘fiery sword’ between two cherubim (Gen.3:24) – behind them stands the tree of life 	<p>God’s Appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the holy of holies stood God’s fiery pillar of light above and between the two cherubim on the lid of the mercy seat (Ex.25:17 – 22)
<p>Moses Mediates the Covenant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses’ mediates for Israel and atones for sin, not by being punished by God, but through his obedience and willingness to be purified: ‘If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people?’ The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.’ Then Moses said, ‘I pray You, show me Your glory!’ (Ex.33:15 – 18) 	<p>The High Priest Mediates the Covenant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high priest mediates for Israel and atones for sin not by being punished by God, but through his obedience and willingness to be purified, expressed by wearing white linen and offering the burnt offering of a bull (Lev.16:4, 6, 11) • God consumed Israel’s impurity through the sin offering (Lev.16:15) and simultaneously sent sin away through the scapegoat (Lev.16:21 – 22) • God gave back blood to cleanse and purify sacred space and objects and land (Lev.16:14 – 20, 32 – 33) to renew His presence.
<p>Jesus became our eternal mediator, because he offered himself as a once-for-all sacrifice. He was priest (Heb.7 – 10) and both goats, taken together: the goat sacrificed (Heb.8 – 9; 13:11 – 12) and the scapegoat (Heb.13:13). He took sin into himself to death, and sent it away from us. He became the source of salvation (Heb.5:7 – 10).</p>	
<p>God Restores the Garden Land to Israel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God leads Israel into the garden land, to be a partial restoration of Adam and Eve 	<p>God Restores the Garden Land to Israel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God renews His presence with Israel in the garden land • God enacts the Jubilee year every fifty years, on the Day of Atonement, to restore the garden land to all His children (Lev.25:8 – 12), and release servants from servitude.

God was acting like what we today understand to be a dialysis machine. The Israelites passed their impurities to God through the mechanism of the animal sacrifices (specifically the sin and guilt offerings) and the priesthood. The priests, when they ate the sacrifices, stored up those impurities in themselves. Simultaneously, the priests shed the blood of the animals offered, since the animals’ blood was not corrupted by sin. The innocent animal blood ‘cleansed’ the uncleanness of the Israelites and the objects they touched.

Meanwhile, every year, the priests stored up the contaminants in themselves until the high priest, representing all the priests, entered into the sanctuary on the annual Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and sent the uncleanness into God. God consumed it. The scapegoat and the sin offerings represented the “used dialysate with waste” which could not circulate back into the system by being eaten. The scapegoat had to carry the sin of the people far away into the wilderness as a representation that God separated sin from the people. And the other goat and the bull

similarly could not be eaten.

This annual ceremonial process represented a spiritual work *within the person of Moses*, which was a partnership between God and Moses. God accepted Moses' mediation not by punishing him, but by purifying him. Moses mediated the Sinai covenant, but Jesus mediated a better covenant (Heb.9:15). God accepted Moses as mediator not by making Moses bear a retributive punishment to satisfy His own retributive anger, but because Moses was faithful, and allowed himself to be purified to some degree.

Likewise, God accepted Jesus as mediator not by making Jesus bear a retributive punishment to satisfy, exhaust, and drain God's retributive anger, but because Jesus was faithful, and purified his own human nature completely. Jesus became our eternal mediator who offered himself as a once-for-all sacrifice. He was priest (Heb.7 – 10) and both goats, taken together: the goat sacrificed (Heb.8 – 9; 13:11 – 12) and the scapegoat (Heb.13:13). Jesus took the corruption of sin within himself to death, and sent it away from us. His death revealed and exemplified the central inner dynamic of his entire life: to resist every temptation and live his life faithfully unto God the Father.

'For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin' (Heb.4:15).

Though his suffering and obedience throughout his life, Jesus became the source of our salvation because he is the source of a cleansed, purified, new humanity:

'In the days of his flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his piety. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered. And having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation.' (Heb.5:7 – 9)

Therefore, Jesus' death on the cross was a capstone and crowning event, but his death cannot be separated from the cross he bore during his life. That is, Jesus lived a life of self-sacrifice unto the Father, by the Spirit. Jesus' death was his final victory over the corruption of sin in his human nature, but his death was a continuation of the victories he won every single moment.

The sacrifices also demonstrated God's interest in purification, by partitioning. In the sin offering, the death of the animal per se did not please God. The death was a means to an end: the destruction of the waste and toxin organs by fire, which alone produced a soothing aroma to the Lord (Lev.4:31). Taken individually, each sin offering represented an *extension* of the worshiper, not a substitute for the worshiper. Taken as a whole system, the sin offerings were the vehicles to transfer human uncleanness and impurity into God and receive back from God the uncorrupted life-blood which cleansed and purified.

Likewise, the death of Jesus per se cannot be said to please God. His death was a means to a deeper end: the separating of the corruption of sin, the inward circumcision of something unclean from the heart (Dt.10:16; 30:6; Jer.4:4; 9:28 – 29; Rom.2:28 – 29; Col.2:12), so God could raise Jesus from the dead with a purified, cleansed, new humanity. This is why Jesus' resurrection is part of the atonement, equally with his death, because we must participate in both, by the Spirit: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins' (1 Cor.15:17). Jesus did not die *instead* of us; he died *ahead* of us.

That Jesus' atonement covers all creation and applies to all creation is also typologically foreshadowed by the sacrificial system. Symbolically (at least), human sin contaminated the physical world. Thus, in the Jewish sacrificial calendar, the cycle of atonement addressed not only human beings, but the physical world. We see this in the many ways blood was sprinkled on objects and land. God would 'atone for His land and His people' (Dt.32:43), not just people. During the duration of the Sinai covenant, creation was serving a double burden for Israel. Not only was creation giving its life to feed Israel in an ordinary sense. Creation was also giving its life to address Israel's sinfulness. This is helpful to remember when reading Hebrews and the Gospel of John, which are sometimes accused of being the most mystical, spiritual, Platonic, and anti-ecological in their orientation. But they are the most anti-temple, that is, against the sacrificial system. They explain Jesus as fulfilling the entirety of the sacrificial system. This means, in addition, that Jesus relieved creation of its double burden with respect to the Sinai covenant. Animals and harvests no longer needed to be sacrificed. Thus, Hebrews and the Gospel of John are not

anti-ecological.

Many advocates of penal substitution believe that the sacrificial system is the Old Testament lynchpin for penal substitution. But the sacrificial system does not actually support penal substitution. It supports what Irenaeus called 'recapitulation' and what I am calling 'medical substitution.' God's holiness doesn't mean He must punish every sin. God's holiness means He has to cleanse every impurity He touches. In the case of human beings, since God has entrusted with a free will to love Him or not, God's holiness means that He always calls us to be purified, with His partnership. God's wrath is not against human persons per se. God's wrath is against the corruption of sin within our human nature. That is shown especially in the partitioning of the sin offering, and the burning of the organs associated with waste and toxins.

Given the overall function of the sin offering in the Sinai covenant, we can affirm the earlier understanding, supported above, that Jesus came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh.' Leander E. Keck's comments on this phrase are succinct, and I quote him in full:

'It is the sin domiciled in the flesh that is condemned. In order to make that possible, the Son was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh" – *en homoiomati sarkos hamartias*, clearly meaning identification with the human condition, not mere similarity. Had the Son been only "like" flesh, he could not have condemned sin "in the flesh," precisely where Paul had located the problem. Had the Son not participated in this kind of flesh, the "condemnation" would not have been liberating; it could only have exposed even more powerfully the human dilemma, so that the net result of knowing about such a Son would, like hearing the law, have only made one conscious of sin (3:20). This formulation of the radical identification of the Son with the full depths of the human condition is similar to that of 2 Cor 5:21 – "him who knew no sin he made sin for our sakes... Christian theology, and especially Christian piety, has found it exceedingly difficult to follow Paul here because of the doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness. Whatever one may think about Jesus' sinlessness, Paul's formulations move on a different plane. They do not have in view the question of whether Jesus committed sins but whether the Son participated in the human condition sufficiently to achieve that which the human dilemma required.'⁴⁰

Keck appreciates Paul's positioning of the Son in relation to the Sinai covenant. That relation can be neither redundant nor oppositional in purpose. Based on Paul's understanding of the Sinai covenant in Romans 7:1 – 8:4, the Sinai covenant must be preliminary to the Son in purpose, and in agreement, fundamentally, towards that purpose. The logic that Paul has built up throughout Romans corresponds with the theological anthropology I described above from the Hebrew Scriptures. That is, the Sinai covenant – even the sacrificial part of the Sinai covenant – was trying to accomplish something in and with Israel. God wanted Israel to absolutely condemn sin in the flesh, which could only be done by a human life lived in utter faithfulness to God, not mere intellectual nodding or verbal repudiation, but a totally integrated, lived human life culminating in a faithful and victorious death. Only such a human life and death would serve to 'condemn sin.'

The Requirement of the Sinai Covenant in Us: Circumcision of the Heart

Paul says the result of the previous action of God sending His Son in 8:3 is 'so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (8:4). This was God's goal and objective – not only of the incarnation of the Son, but also the giving of the Sinai covenant and commandments.

Thomas Schreiner argues that 'the requirement of the law' is simply 'obedience to the law.' I cite him as an example of how a penal substitution advocate must interpret Romans 8:4 in a behaviorist mode. Schreiner runs into two major difficulties. First, he argues that a strictly forensic conception of penal substitution motivates Christians to obey the law:

'They are right in God's sight by virtue of the work of Christ on the cross. The judicial work of God in Christ is the basis by which the law can be fulfilled in their lives. By the work and power of the Holy Spirit

⁴⁰ Leander E. Keck, "The Law and "The Law of Sin and Death"," edited by James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel, *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events Presented to Lou H. Silberman* (Ktav Pub Inc, May 1, 1980), p.49 – 50

they are able to keep the law.’⁴¹

Schreiner must argue that the Christian’s emotional motivation for obedience to the law is gratitude – gratitude that the divine, infinite forensic punishment was absorbed by Jesus, and not meted out upon the Christian. Strikingly, that is not the apostle Paul’s own rationale for obedience to Christ or the law; for Paul in Romans 6 – 8, the new identity of the Christian via union with Christ by the Spirit is the motivation. Whereas Schreiner says, ‘Christ died instead of you,’ the apostle Paul says, ‘Christ died ahead of you, and you with him, so you could rise with him; you are new’ (Rom.6:1 – 11). Of Romans 6, Schreiner says that Paul is speaking ‘not on the penalty of sin but on its power.’⁴² But for Paul, the penalty of sin is the fact that we must bear a fallen humanity; it is an intrinsic reality, not an extrinsic and forensic addition. Correspondingly, our motivation to participate in Jesus’ healed, new humanity is to be free of the fallenness. But Schreiner believes that we have no such intrinsic motivation. Therefore, he has to add an extrinsic and external motivation of punishment, fear, and then relief.

That people would hear those two motivations quite differently can be considered when one imagines, by analogy, a struggling student in school. A teacher who says, ‘Don’t you know how much I’ve suffered more than you, even instead of you,’ leads to a short-term, guilt-based response that eventually results in resentment and poor performance. But a teacher who says, ‘This is not who you are now,’ leads to a long-term, identity-based response that will eventually lead to a healthy sense of self and accomplishment. Schreiner apparently believes that a Christian observing a distant legal and punitive – even carceral and torturous – transaction between the Father and the Son would have a net positive effect. He also believes that when a Christian reflects on God the Father’s supposed demand for moral perfection for His own sake (not ours), and the threat of His infinite retributive justice and wrath looming in the background, that this would inspire genuine affection and love for God, and a desire for intimacy with Him.

Second, Schreiner attempts to address another problem: Christian imperfection.⁴³ Said differently, Jewish non-Christians also obey the law *at times*, just as Christians disobey the law *at times*. Schreiner recognizes that Paul himself would have faced this query with his own contemporaries. In fact, Paul said that Gentiles who do not have the law can live moral lives in some sense congruent with the Sinai moral commandments (Rom.2:12 – 16). To this, Schreiner replies:

‘It is the unbelieving Jews who are unable to keep the law because they lack the Spirit of Christ.’⁴⁴

Schreiner is actually using two different points of reference. He measures Jews against perfect obedience to the Sinai covenant’s moral commandments, disadvantageously for them. But he measures Christians against perfect *disobedience* to those same commandments, advantageously for them, claiming that this constitutes a ‘transformed life’ for Christians. This is a clever sleight of hand. It is not clear why this would have persuaded anyone, including the Saul of Tarsus, the Jew.

If, however, we perceive the ontological and medical aims – not the supposedly forensic and punitive aims – of the sending of the Son and also the Sinai covenant, we can reach much more satisfying conclusions about Romans 8:4. When Adam and Eve fell, they corrupted human nature in themselves. Rather than give human beings the possibility of eating from the tree of life in a corrupted state, and immortalizing sin and evil within themselves, God exiled them from the Garden of Eden. He closed off access from the tree of life, and apparently withdrew the Garden of Eden from the rest of creation. God stationed a fiery sword between cherubim (Gen.3:24) to guard or signify the way back to the Garden. The twin motifs of fire and sword became motifs of separation and salvation, as God called for human partnership in ‘burning away’ and ‘cutting away’ something from within ourselves, in preparation for God opening the way back to the Garden one day, and restoring us from exile. The Book of Revelation unites those two motifs as it describes Jesus as fiery, with a sword coming out of his mouth, signifying his word (Rev.1:12 – 20). These literary motifs demonstrate God’s interest in *purification*, not punishment.

With Israel, God took the shape of a fiery pillar of light and sat enthroned above the cherubim, above the ark of the

⁴¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, p.408

⁴² Ibid, p.305

⁴³ Ibid, p.406 says, ‘I am not speaking of perfect obedience.’

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.408

covenant in the midst Israel, at the threshold of the Garden and the created world. He wrapped Himself in veils, but still provided for a way for Israel to present Him with their impurities, that He might offer back purity and life, that Israel could live on a garden land which was straining under the fall to uphold them. In the Sinai covenant arrangement, God promised that 'life' could be achieved if Israel – or a faithful Israelite – could faithfully obey the commandments. This would bring the Sinai covenant to a climax⁴⁵ and draw it into full alignment with God's promise to Abraham. Alas, no one among the Israelites was able to do this great task. None but the Son who was sent by the Father 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' in David's line, who put the flesh to death, condemning it through his death, and purifying his human nature in the process of life, death, and resurrection. Jesus resolved the exile of Israel, which itself was a microcosm of the exile of humanity from the original Garden. After 'the Word became flesh and tabernacled among/in us' (Jn.1:14), launching his kingdom movement while faithfully living, dying, and rising to the call of the Father, Jesus left behind a space between two angels, and walked out into a garden (Jn.20:11 – 12). The shining pillar of light now dwelling in a transformed human body left his place to roam among us.

Our participation in Christ by the Spirit means that God has brought about an internal transformation in us, beginning a work of healing. In effect, 'the requirement of the law' (Rom.8:4), I believe, is 'circumcision of the heart.' The requirement of the Sinai covenant was already summed up by Deuteronomy, and directed internally towards the problem in us: 'Circumcise your hearts' (Dt.10:16). By this language of internal transformation and surgical healing fused with the circumcision idiom of outward covenantal membership on the male body, the Sinai covenant summed up what God intended if any Israelite – male or female – had been able to live out the commandments in their totality, in complete faithfulness.

Because 'circumcision of heart' had become the inner meaning behind Israel being restored from exile (Dt.30:6), and all humanity being restored from exile from the Garden of Eden (Gen.3:24), and because Jesus himself was Israel and was restored from exile in his resurrection, then it follows quite logically and of necessity that he is the one who was 'circumcised of heart.' We can look at Jesus from the vantage point of his humanity, specifically his Jewish humanity. If Jesus entered into the place of Israel, then he recapitulated not only Israel's early journey, he completed Israel's appointed task which Israel could not do: he circumcised his heart by fully internalizing the commandments (Dt.10:16). As man, he cut off the unclean aspect of his human nature; he put it to death. He fulfilled Israel's side of the covenant to God.

We can also look at Jesus from the vantage point of *God's* covenant faithfulness to Israel. If Jesus entered into the place of Israel, the divine one who carried Israel's humanity upon his shoulders, then and only then did God actually do what He said He would: circumcise the heart of Israel (Dt.30:6, cf. 29:4). That is, the Word of God inscribed His law on a human heart. That simultaneously means that God was faithful to the covenant to produce a humanity that is restored from exile and resurrected into the intended life of the garden paradise (Dt.30:1 – 6). And if Jesus, in himself, circumcised something away from himself at his death (Rom.6:6), then Jesus must have taken on *fallen* humanity, not an already perfected or pre-fall humanity. The fulfillment of God's long covenant with Israel logically requires Jesus' full identification with Israel's fallen condition.

What other resolution to the Sinai covenant makes sense? Lutheran and Reformed approaches to the Sinai covenant leave us with the unnerving impression that God cares more about His laws than He does about us. 'The requirement of the Law' cannot mean moral perfection on a mental scoresheet God has in His mind, as if He were constantly preoccupied with measuring offenses against His holiness, and as if God only wanted Israel as a case study to demonstrate His eagerness to punish people. Nor does it involve a forensic 'imputation' by which God the Father uses Christ the Son as a 'lens' through which to view us. The Sinai covenant did not require that, or set up the intellectual or social categories by which one could argue that. The Sinai covenant always connected Israel's moral conduct to the impact of that faithfulness upon their own human nature as character-formation and Spirit-saturation. We now progress in this internal transformation by participation in Christ, by the power of the Spirit and 'according to the Spirit.' As our true 'I myself' identity is freed from 'the flesh' and joined by the Spirit to Christ, God heals the original corruption which set in from the fall, so He can bring us home from the original exile.

⁴⁵ For this language, I am indebted to N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), especially ch.13