

ISRAEL IN THE OUTLINE OF ROMANS 9–11¹

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Paul's thought in these chapters is exceedingly complex and has given rise to a variety of interpretations. Perhaps Paul himself intended to leave some questions open. He ends the section with an exclamation of awe-filled humility before the incomprehensible ways of God: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways!"—Avery Cardinal Dulles²

When students of Scripture read commentaries or other genres of exegesis, they typically pay more attention to what they might call the "actual exegesis"—explanations of words and phrases in relation to the context, other texts of Scripture, and the world in front of the text—than they do to how the exegete outlines the text. In this essay, I argue that in regard to Romans 9–11, how the exegete outlines the chapters is directly connected to how the exegete will explain the phrase "all Israel will be saved" in Romans 11:26, and thus worthy of readers' careful attention. The two significant indicators for how exegetes explain "all Israel" here are, first, whether the exegete outlines the chapters as a unified, single argument or as a series of varied arguments, and second—and the more determinative of the two—how the exegete connects "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" in 9:6b with "and so all Israel will be saved" in 11:26.³ In view of the ways that Paul uses Scripture in these chapters, it is best to read them as a series of varied arguments, from

1 This paper is a revision of a paper presented at the Catholic Biblical Association Annual Meeting at Xavier University of Louisiana on August 3, 2015. I wish to thank all those who heard and/or commented on this earlier version of the paper on that day. Special thanks are due to Alain Gignac, Joel Kaminsky and N. T. Wright, who responded by email to that paper. All weaknesses and mistakes remain entirely my own responsibility.

2 "The Covenant with Israel," *First Things* 157 (2005):16–21 accessed at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2005/11/the-covenant-with-israel>.

3 These and all Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSVCE). At Rom. 9:6b, the RSVCE translation has taken some interpretive license with Paul's more cryptic *ou gar pantes hoi ex Israēl houtoi Israēl*, literally "for not all from Israel, these (are) Israel."

which Paul will draw his concluding vision of salvation for Israel in Romans 11:11–32.

Outlines of Romans 9–11

A taxonomy of Romans 9–11 outlines must first account for what presuppositions are animating the exegete. As in every other area of human discourse, so in the exegesis of Scripture: an exegete's unstated assumptions or presuppositions are decisive and must be carefully detected and uncovered by readers. A basic assumption that is directly linked to one's outline and exegesis of Romans 9–11 concerns its compositional structure. By this I mean whether the exegete assumes the discourse here represents a single, linearly focused argument or a series of arguments that brings the reader circuitously to Paul's conclusion. Exegetes' presuppositions regarding the compositional structure of Romans 9–11 may be positioned on a continuum between the pole of a single, unified and interlocking argument that moves toward a conclusion that repeats what has already been asserted in the argument and the pole of a series of arguments moving circuitously toward a conclusion that is a more definitive statement on Israel than anything earlier in the chapters.

At the pole of the continuum mentioned first—the interlocking, single argument—all parts of Paul's three-chapter essay are weighted relatively equally. In this construct, earlier parts of Romans 9–11 integrally contribute to the conclusion in 11:11–32. At the other pole of the continuum, an exegete will commonly regard some of the earlier arguments in the chapters as less integral to Paul's position as represented by the conclusion in 11:11–32. All students of Roman 9–11 need to be aware of how their exegetical guides regard the argumentative structure of these chapters, for the argumentative structure one sees in these chapters shapes one's understanding of the identity of the Israel whom Paul predicts will be entirely saved.

Outlines Viewing Romans 9–11 As an Interlocking, Unified Whole

N. T. Wright argues that Paul has carefully planned the argument so that Romans 9–11 represents a balanced, focused, and linear argument moving toward its end.⁴ He, like other exegetes who find Romans 9–11 to be a single, unified argument, tends to view all sections of the chapters as contributing equally to Paul's theology of Israel. If one takes the chapters as carefully planned out and structured, then one might be more likely to read “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” in 9:6b and “it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants” in 9:8 as just as decisive for Paul's bottom line as his

4 N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, bk. II, parts III–IV (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1162.

conclusion in 11:25–27. Those who are more open to seeing Paul as moving more circuitously, trying different approaches throughout these chapters, are more open to prioritizing the ending in chapter 11 and less compelled to read this ending in light of 9:6–8. Specifically, this means that those advocating a carefully planned, knows the end from the beginning way of arguing will be more likely to read the “all Israel will be saved” in 11:26 as specifying Gentile Christians and they will pay less attention to the ethnic connotations of “Israel” from 9:27 through the end of chapter 11. This is because they read the statements in 9:6 and 8, quoted above, to be thesis-like statements for a single, unified argument that follows. Since this is so, they will then be more apt to read the “Israel” of 11:26 as equivalent to the “Israel” of 9:6–26. The Israel of Romans 9:6–26 is more conducive to a picture of an “Israel” that includes Gentile Christians, a picture that has a secure place in the exegetical thesaurus of Christian readers at least since the first commentary on Romans, the letter of 1 Peter.⁵

So we Romans students do well to notice what sort of unity our exegetical guides see in chapters 9–11. I suggest that we situate each exegete’s view of these chapters’ compositional structure on the continuum described in the second and third paragraphs above. Beginning with what we have seen in Wright, we can call one pole of the continuum “fully unified and deliberately linear.” At the other end of the continuum, where I will locate the Finnish scholar Kari Kuula, we might use the description, “a series of arguments moving circuitously toward a conclusion.”

To move on to the second and more determinative indicator for the meaning of “all Israel” in Romans 11:26, Wright sees the full valence of “not all Israel are Israel” in 9:6 to be operative in 11:26:

Paul, as we have seen, has very carefully structured the entire three-chapter sequence. And he opens the account, the great historical narrative in which his theological point is displayed, with a clear distinction: not all those who are ‘of Israel’ are in fact ‘Israel’ (*ou gar pantes hoi ex Israēl houtoi Israēl*) (9.6b). That distinction hangs over the rest of the discussion like a puzzling question mark: who then are ‘Israel’, if not all Abraham’s physical children are to qualify? Already this ought to alert us to the fact that *pas Israēl* in 11.26, close to the balancing point with 9.6 in the rhetorical architecture of the whole section, is not likely to mean ‘all Abraham’s physical children.’⁶

5 See 1 Pet. 2:1–10 (assuming the *diaspora* addressed at 1 Pet. 1:1 includes Gentiles).

6 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1241.

Wright also provides a diagram in which the “all Israel” whose salvation Paul predicts in Romans 11:26 is defined as a “hugely increased ‘remnant,’ through jealousy/faith” and the “fullness of Gentiles.”⁷

Arland Hultgren and Alain Gignac also see these chapters as chiastically arranged, but since Wright, Hultgren, and Gignac offer different chiasms for the same three chapters of Romans, we may conclude that there are not enough clear signals in the text for these chapters to be persuasively exegeted as a chiasm.⁸ After suggesting his chiasm, Hultgren wisely concedes, “Yet chiasmic structures are often more in the eye of the beholder than in the text.”⁹

A second example of an exegete who views the compositional structure as a unified, single argument is Florian Wilk. He considers Romans 9:6–10:21 to be the main argumentative section. Then he views 11:1–24 as the “Main Parenetic Section.”

Wilk divides his “main argumentative section,” 9:6–10:21, into two subparts. He characterizes 9:6–29 under the heading “The Jewish Christians as Pledge of God’s Faithfulness to Israel.” Then he characterizes Romans 10:1–21 with the heading “The ‘Gentile’ Christians as Means of God’s Care for the Israel Who Does Not Believe in Christ.” In between these two sections, he characterizes 9:30–33 as a new framing of the problem in terms of how the Gentile Christians receive the righteousness of faith while Israel, who does not believe in Christ, falls short of the Law and stumbles over Christ.

In his “Main Parenetic Section” of 11:1–24, Wilk notes how “Paul the Israelite instructs Jewish Christians” in 11:1–6 and how “Paul the apostle to the nations instructs the ‘Gentile’ Christians” in 11:13–21. After this parenetic section, Wilk describes Romans 11:25–36 simply as “Solution of the Problems Posed and Conclusion.”¹⁰ Wilk is a good example for showing how a unified outline does not necessarily mean that one will define “all Israel”

7 Ibid., 1244.

8 Wright’s chiasm is: (A 9:1–5) matches (A’ 11:33–36); (B 9:6–29) matches (B’ 11:1–32); (C 9:30–33) matches (C’ 10:18–21); (D 10:1–4) matches (D’ 10:14–17); and the middle member is 10:5–13 (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1163). Hultgren’s chiasm is: (A 9:1–5) matches (A’ 11:33–36); (B 9:6–29) matches (B’ 11:25–32); (C 9:30–10:21) matches (C’ 11:13–24); and the middle member is 11:1–12 (Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 349). Gignac’s chiasm is: (A 9:6–29) matches (A’ 10:18–11:15); and the middle member is 10:1–13. For him, Rom. 11:16–32 is parenesis, outside the chiasm (Alain Gignac, *L’épître aux Romains*, CBNT 6 [Paris: Cerf, 2014], 338–339).

9 Hultgren, *Romans*, 349.

10 Florian Wilk, “Rahmen und Aufbau von Römer 9–11,” in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11*, eds. Florian Wilk, J. Ross Wagner, and Frank Schleritt, WUNT 257 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 253.

in 11:26 as including Gentile Christians, as Wright has done, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly.¹¹ The difference is how they find unity between the beginning and ending of Romans 9–11. Wilk notes real parallels between 9:1–5 and 11:25–26 that assume the “Israel” is ethnic Israel.¹² But since he does not directly link the “not all Israel are Israel” in 9:6b to the “all Israel will be saved” of 11:26, he does not seek for a redefinition of the latter “all Israel,” as Wright does.

Other exegetes who outline Romans 9–11 more as a unified, single argument include James Dunn, J. Ross Wagner, and Robert Jewett.¹³ C. E. B. Cranfield is difficult to pin down, but because of his reliance on Karl Barth’s reading of election, it is best to place him toward the unified side of the continuum.¹⁴ Let us turn now to exegetes who view Romans 9–11 as a series of arguments or models for what God is doing with Israel.

Outlines Viewing Romans 9–11 as a Series of Arguments

Though N. T. Wright’s outline for chapters 9–11 prompts him to regard them as a unity, Gignac’s outline, also chiastic in structure, prompts him to find contrast. Gignac sees a three-part chiasm as follows: 9:6–29 pictures God’s word of descendants for Israel, providing a traditional view of election; 10:1–13 describes how God justifies and saves all of humanity by faith; 10:18–11:15 describes the jealousy at the heart of the triangular relationship between Israel, the nations, and God. The chiasm ends there, and then a parenetic section, 11:16–32, communicates that Gentile readers should take no pride in their election. Gignac thinks that the chiastic structure evident in 9:6–11:15 prompts the reader to ask oneself which theology of election one will accept, a question that drives one to focus on the ethical injunctions Paul gives in the parenesis 11:16–32.¹⁵ Gignac, like Wright, thinks that the passage is very carefully planned out, but that there are tensions and even

11 For an explicit example, see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 250 (but note also the qualifications against supersessionism on 253). For an implicit example, see Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1239–1244.

12 Wilk, “Ramen und Aufbau,” 239.

13 James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 517–704; J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “in Concert” in the Letter to the Romans*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 43–305; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 555–723.

14 C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume II, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 445–594. He notes that “chapter 9 will certainly be understood in an altogether un-Pauline sense, if it is understood in isolation from its sequel in chapters 10 and 11” (448) but still considers Barth’s two-fold sense of election as the Pauline glue that holds the chapters together (450).

15 Gignac, *Romains*, 338–340. Gignac sees 9:30–33 and 10:14–17 as diatribal transitions (369–373; 390–395).

contradictory models offered, since Paul is taking his readers on a tour of the complex issues involved in the election of Israel.¹⁶

Still, Gignac does not portray Paul as incoherent or as freely improvising. He notes that earlier material in Romans has prepared the reader for the significance of faith as opposed to works of the law, predisposing a reader to opt for the model of 10:1–13 or 10:18–11:15.¹⁷ Gignac is like Wilk in that he uses multiple criteria to outline the text. He cites the sense of the text, as well as the diatribal elements and the Scripture quotations, as influential factors in discerning divisions in the text. I think this is a fuller and more persuasive set of criteria that more exegetes who seek to outline Romans 9–11 should employ.¹⁸

Gignac thinks that the ethnic, corporeal aspect of “all Israel” is in view at 11:26, but he readily describes the indeterminacy of the term even here. He notes how the same indeterminacy of “Israel” that we saw in 9:6b resurfaces in 11:26, and he is comfortable leaving the reader somewhat uncertain whether Paul is saying that all of ethnic, corporeal Israel will be saved or only those within this group that God has elected.¹⁹ Gignac thus complicates my thesis regarding structural indicators that determine how an exegete reads “all Israel” in Romans 11:26. Because he sees tensions in Paul’s argumentation and variety in Paul’s lines of argument, my thesis leads me to predict that he will not read “all Israel” in these chapters’ conclusion as directly defined by 9:6, but will instead readily find ethnic, corporeal Israel in the “all Israel” of 11:26. But his sighting of the indeterminacy in the “Israel” of 9:6b here in the conclusion at 11:26 keeps him from making a clear decision that this concluding “all Israel” refers to all of ethnic Israel. Gignac’s exegesis therefore illustrates the significant qualifier in my thesis, which is that the most determinative factor in how someone interprets “all Israel” in 11:26 is the manner in which the exegete links this term back to 9:6–8. We turn now to an exegete who is more extreme in seeing discontinuity among the arguments or models that Paul offers in Romans 9–11.

Kari Kuula discerns a Paul who is improvising and not linear in his argument.²⁰ He sees Paul as trying out different approaches to the phenomenon of Israel’s general disinclination to believe the Gospel, and ends by linking his

16 Ibid., 337–340.

17 Ibid., 379, 415.

18 Ibid., 398–399 (on Rom. 10:18–11:15).

19 Ibid., 432.

20 Kari Kuula, *The Law, the Covenant and God’s Plan*, vol. 2, *Paul’s Treatment of the Law and Israel in Romans* (Helsinki/Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 306.

view of Israel's salvation with the parousia.²¹ Kuula divides these chapters into units also based on the sense of the text, doing so with a skeptical predisposition to read these chapters as unique among the letters of Paul. As we might expect, Kuula offers no outline of Romans 9–11, only headings of topics, as he exegetes his way through the chapters. He is similar to Gignac in seeing tension within the chapters. For example: "In Rom 9 and 10 Paul makes two very different attempts to explain that God's word has not failed."²²

In a way that is more settled than Gignac, Kuula views the "all Israel" of Romans 11:26 as referring to ethnic, corporeal Israel. Kuula simply asserts, "There is no reason to take it either in a limited sense as meaning only the elected among Israel or as a metaphor for the church."²³ Though he provides no exegetical demonstration for this assertion, I assume that Kuula is allowing the context surrounding 11:26 to influence this decision, since the uses of "Israel" and synonymous locutions for it from 9:27 through 11:31 demand that it must mean ethnic, corporeal Israel. There is a trade-off in one's exegetical decisions. If one takes 9:6b as the umbrella statement for all of Romans 9–11, then one has to ignore the context of 11:26, where the contrast Paul draws only makes sense of Israel and terms that refer to it to signify ethnic, corporeal Israel. And one has to read Romans 11:32 as a blatant exaggeration. On the other hand, if one sees 9:6b as the topic sentence for Paul's preliminary argument or model that he raises as a potentially relevant response from his Scriptures to his concern regarding Israel, one is freer to take more seriously the immediate context of Israel in 11:26 and its predominant usage throughout the three chapters. Hultgren fits with those exegetes who offer a more circuitous, investigative sort of outline, since his main points seem to fit this model more than the unitary whole model.²⁴

In what remains of this essay, I would like to offer a way forward in exegetes' outlines of Romans 9–11 and connections drawn between Romans 9:6b and 11:26 by calling attention to the chapters' exegetical and structural tensions, and these chapters' structural similarities with other sections of Paul's letters where he is focused for at least a thousand words on a single topic.

21 Ibid., 338.

22 Ibid., 326.

23 Ibid., 337, n. 76.

24 Hultgren's major divisions are: Paul's Sorrow (9:1–5); What Shall We Say about God? (9:6–29); What Shall We Say about Israel? (9:30–10:21); Has God Rejected Israel? (11:1–12); How Should Gentile Christians Think in the Present Situation? (11:13–24); Consider a Mystery (11:25–32); God Is Vindicated (11:33–36).

Tensions in Paul's Exegesis and Argumentation

The alert reader will ask, "How can there be tension in Romans 9–11? All of the argument is grounded in Scripture, so how can some parts be at odds with others?" To this I can only respond that one needs to read Scripture—for, in Scripture itself, there are profound tensions. This is David Starling's point on Romans 9, that the tensions Paul raises are tensions directly coming from his Scriptures: "Scripture itself contains and creates deep antithetical tensions."²⁵ Starling specifically traces the following tensions in Romans: "letter" against "Spirit," "law" against "promise," and "righteousness of the law" against "the word of faith." He supports this approach to reading Paul with Francis Watson's assertion that Paul employs a tension-laden hermeneutic in his exegesis of Scripture.²⁶ For example, Watson notes how, in Romans 3:1–8, Paul uses tension in the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32) to contrast God's faithfulness and Israel's faithlessness.²⁷ These insights on how Paul employs Scripture's tensions need to be considered with James Aageson's contribution that Paul argues primarily by means of Scripture in Romans 9–11. In this regard, Aageson describes "discrete scriptural arguments" as forming the argumentative steps in these chapters.²⁸

Scripture animated tensions definitely are at work in the preceding chapters of Romans. We will not linger here to develop those tensions, two of which are: Israel as especially beloved by God *versus* Jew and Greek who equally exist under God's impartial justice, and Abraham as the father of nations *versus* the father of a group who are especially blessed.²⁹ These, in addition to the ones Starling identified, do drive earlier sections of Romans.

We can thus build on the insights of Watson, Starling, and Aageson to consider the possibility that Paul capitalizes on tensions in Scripture when building arguments. My goal in tracing the Scripture-generated tensions

25 David I. Starling, *Not My People : Gentiles as Exiles in Pauline Hermeneutics*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, Beiheft 184 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 135.

26 Ibid., 135–137. Starling cites Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 23–24, 66.

27 Watson, *Paul*, 443–445.

28 James Aageson, "Scripture and Structure in the Development of the Argument in Romans 9–11," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 267.

29 For the tension between God's faithfulness to Israel and God's impartiality with all people, see E. Elizabeth Johnson, "Romans 9–11: The Faithfulness and Impartiality of God," in *Pauline Theology Volume III: Romans*, eds. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 219–220. It may not be sufficiently understood by New Testament readers that Paul receives this tension from his Scriptures. Compare Sir. 35:12c with Sir. 36:12–17. For the tension related to Abraham, contrast Gen. 12:2 and 15:1–14, along with Rom. 4:1 and 13, against Gen. 17:5–6, 25:1–6, and Rom. 4:11 and 16–17.

that Paul employs in Romans 9–11 is to demonstrate that it is best to employ the model of a series of arguments or an argument that moves from varied directions, and that the immediate context of Romans 11:26 is a better guide to the meaning of “all Israel will be saved” than the opening “all Israel are not Israel” phrase of 9:6.

Objection against a Tension-Oriented Reading of Romans 9–11

N. T. Wright and others who see a very unified argument are justified in questioning why I seek to highlight tensions in this text. After all, if Paul is practiced in his arguments, we would expect that he goes straight to his goal, with each step of his one argument being fully consistent with what precedes.

But some have seen Paul as inconsistent, even incoherent in these three chapters.³⁰ Others have labored against such readings, emphasizing Paul’s consistency here.³¹ One way forward on the question of how these chapters can be outlined is to follow up on commentators’ identification of a midrashic or otherwise rabbinic approach in parts of these chapters and actually read early Jewish discourse.³²

The *Pesikta de Rab Kahana* preserves sermons from Sabbaths and feast days. Though written in the fifth or sixth century CE, the sermons include rabbinic statements from earlier centuries. The sermons sometimes provide alternative viewpoints, such as a single sermon on Psalm 103:13 that first explains how a rabbi interprets the verse through Genesis 18:25. Then the homilist tracks with another rabbi who instead interprets the verse through Genesis 33:3. The point is found in the contrast, in presenting the tension in ways of interpreting the verse and working through that tension to some resolution.³³

The question of how Israel relates to the nations is brought up in Piska 2, and different rabbis’ interpretations of Proverbs 14:34 are offered when

30 Johnson (“Romans 9–11,” 214, n. 13) identifies the following scholars as holding to the incoherence of these three chapters: W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of Israel,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977–1978): 4–39; E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Heikki Räisänen, “Paul, God, and Israel: Romans 9–11 in Recent Research” in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee*, eds. Jacob Neusner, Peder Borgen, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Richard Horsley (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 178–206; and Terence L. Donaldson, “‘Riches for the Gentiles’ (Rom 11:12): Israel’s Rejection and Paul’s Gentile Mission,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993): 81–98.

31 Johnson, “Romans 9–11,” 214–216, 235–239; Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1156–1264.

32 Commentators who identify midrashic elements in Rom. 9–11 include Dunn (*Romans* 9–16, 603–605), Jewett (*Romans*, 651), and Hultgren (*Romans*, 403).

33 *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*: R. Kahana’s *Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days*, trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2002), 435–436 (Piska 19).

this is examined. The different voices are valued, since part of the exegetical process is going through the possibilities that the Scriptures offer.³⁴ The Mishnah similarly offers varied approaches in its scriptural exegesis. For example, in exegeting Deuteronomy 20:5–8 on exemptions from battle duty, it presents other Scriptures and a variety of interpretations that move more circuitously than linearly.³⁵

I readily admit that the written sources just cited come from centuries after Paul wrote. But both the *Pesikta* collection of homilies and the Mishnah do preserve oral traditions from earlier centuries. Also, even the gospels show Jesus using tensions in scriptural exegesis.³⁶ From the perspective of literary genre, Paul's exegesis in Romans 9–11 shows real similarities to Jewish exegesis preserved from the early centuries CE, and debating Paul's supposed inconsistencies or incoherence is as inappropriate as labeling a given unit of wisdom literature, such as Proverbs chapter 26, inconsistent or incoherent.

N. T. Wright will counter that certain scriptural ideas are in tension within Paul's argument, but perhaps reaffirm that Paul has been over this material countless times and that this must be a carefully integrated, single, linear argument.³⁷ In response, one can also read, in the same book, Wright's descriptions of Paul as covering fresh territory. In his exegetical introduction to Romans 11, we read, "Ahead, the virgin snow: no-one has come this way before. Behind, the only track his stumbling footprints. Questions now are real; his own; not mere rhetorical devices, but driven by the thought, *you can't stay here*."³⁸ Yes, both the tensions I am about to survey and the exploratory nature of Paul's thought, admitted by Wright in this last quotation, mean that the argument cannot be considered as tightly integrated as Wright maintains. We must look for Paul's resolutions to the tensions he raises in his conclusion.

In other places where Paul is pursuing a specific question, such as in the letter of Galatians or in 1 Corinthians 8–10, Paul uses a succession of different arguments or models to approach the question. All agree that, in 1 Corinthians, Paul voices positions other than his own when pursuing a given question.³⁹ All agree that, when in diatribe mode in Romans, Paul voices views other than his own.⁴⁰ Just as Paul finally responds to the monotheistic argument of 1 Corinthians 8:4–5 for eating meat offered to idols with an alternative argument in 1 Corinthians 10:20–22 regarding eating with demons,

34 *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*, 34–39 (Piska 2).

35 Sorah 8:1–7.

36 Matt. 5:21–48; Mark 12:35–37a and parallels (Matt. 22:41–46; Luke 20:41–44).

37 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1162.

38 *Ibid.*, 1195.

39 1 Cor. 6:12–13a; 7:1; 8:1, 4; 10:23a; and surprisingly at 10:29b–30a.

40 Rom. 2:17–20; 6:1; 7:7a–b; 9:14a–b; 11:1a–b, 11–b.

so in Romans 11:11–32 Paul nuances or responds to arguments and models he raised earlier in Romans 9–11. As Paul does at the end of 1 Corinthians 8–10 and in Galatians, he considers a series of relevant arguments and models in Romans 9–11 and then provides a synthesis at the end, responding to or utilizing the arguments he has raised in various ways to form his own response.

Scriptural and Structural Tensions within the Outline of Romans 9–11

The beginning and overarching tension for Paul's inquiry is that Israel seems to be outside of a multi-dimensional inheritance that God positively and uniquely directed toward Israel. The echo of Exodus 32:32 in Romans 9:3 calls to mind a national failure on the part of Israel, while the references to Israel's inheritance in 9:4–5 call to mind such texts as Genesis 12:1–3, Exodus 19:4–6, and Deuteronomy 7:7–9. The tension between these Scriptural ideas of Israel's failure and her inheritance propels us on into the rest of chapters 9–11. These chapters contain three preliminary arguments that seek to explain the overarching tension from the perspectives of an election that excludes some of Abraham's descendants (9:6–29), the righteousness of faith that is superior to the righteousness of the law (9:30–10:21), and a division between a positive remnant and the rest of Israel (11:1–10). Within each of these arguments, Paul frames tensions from his Scriptures as a way of advancing readers' consideration of the relevant factors in Israel's situation. A fourth argument (11:11–32) offers a synthesis of some ideas from the preceding arguments as an introduction to the eschatologically framed mystery Paul introduces in 11:25–32.

Tensions within the First Argument (Romans 9:6–29)

The first argument is found in 9:6–29. This argument approaches the lamented but unspecified problem with Israel that Paul raised in 9:1–5 by declaring that since God's election has previously narrowed down the elect, with the result that all of ethnic Israel does not in fact receive what God has promised them, God's word has not failed at the time Paul is writing.

"For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" in 9:6b, actually more cryptic in the Greek than this RSV translation suggests, is the topic sentence for the first argument. Paul's words here are literally "For not all who are from Israel these are Israel."⁴¹ Most exegetes understand this verse along the lines of the RSV translation and would say that, either in this argument of 9:6–29 or else in all three chapters, Paul is presenting this ethnological

41 The Greek text of Romans 9:6b is *ou gar pantes hoi ex Israēl houtoi Israēl*. The only textual variant listed in the Nestle-Aland New Testament apparatus for this part of the verse is that some manuscripts have *Israēlitai* (Israelites) in place of the second "Israel."

tension as a way of solving the soteriological tension he has framed in 9:1–5. In the first paragraph of this first argument, God’s word is only guaranteed for Isaac, the promised seed of Abraham. This point is made by the quotations from Genesis that are found in Romans 9:7 and 9.⁴² The “promise” to Isaac emphasized here is then juxtaposed with the “election” that excluded some of Isaac’s offspring in 9:10–13.⁴³ Paul uses the tension between the promise to Isaac and the heavy-handed election between Isaac’s sons to advance the radical idea that God chooses those whom he will favor in a completely unilateral way. Quotations are offered that illustrate God’s mercy on Israel after Israel sinned and God’s decision to use Pharaoh as a means to display God’s own glory.⁴⁴ These quotations in Romans 9:15 and 17 are not in tension with each other; Paul gives them in succession here to set up one side of the next tension he will introduce: the tension between God’s discourse of freely choosing and the standard understanding of God’s judgment, caricatured with the question “Why does he still find fault?” The standard understanding of God’s judgment is not supported here with a Scripture quotation. Paul has already done so in Romans 2:6 and then developed it, connecting it to his own teaching that Jesus will return to judge humanity.⁴⁵ Against what some readers would expect, Paul, so far in this argument, does not back down from the radical model in which God chooses people’s destinies. Here we can see an example of what Joseph Fitzmyer means when he observes that one of the difficulties in understanding these three chapters is “Paul’s habit of isolating and discussing one aspect of a problem without worrying about ramifications that arise in the mind of the reader.”⁴⁶

Paul’s rejoinder to the question about God’s right to judge humanity begins with a quotation of LXX Isaiah 29:16, a prophetic oracle against those in Jerusalem who live as though God does not know their plans and actions. In a continuation of the potter and clay metaphor, Paul then rhetorically asks if the potter has the right to make from one lump of clay vessels for honorable and dishonorable use. This could be an allusion to Jeremiah 18:6, a potter and clay passage that actually shows the potter changing plans in response to the clay, a turn away from the radical determinism of Romans

42 LXX Gen. 21:12 in Rom. 9:7; LXX Gen. 18:10, 14 in Rom. 9:9.

43 LXX Gen. 25:23 in Rom. 9:12; LXX Mal. 1:2–3 in Rom. 9:13.

44 LXX Gen. 33:19 in Rom 9:15; Exod. 9:16 in Rom. 9:17.

45 LXX Prov. 24:12 and Ps. 62:13 are quoted in Rom. 2:6. Paul goes on to develop this standard idea of God’s judgment of morally responsible humans in Rom. 2:7–16. Rom. 2:16 provides clear evidence that Paul has integrated his understanding of Jesus as divine Son of God who will judge humanity according to our behavior into his antecedent, Jewish understanding of the God of Israel as judge of humanity. Paul clearly employs this model also in Rom. 14:10–12; 1 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 1:6, 10; and 2 Thess. 1:6–10.

46 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J., *Romans*, Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 542.

9:14–20. In Romans 9:22–23 Paul goes on to argue that God’s dealings with the non-elect exemplify patience and show how glorious God is being towards the vessels of mercy he has prepared beforehand for glory. This is a specific case within one argument in which an exegete’s readiness to see tensions in Paul affects how deterministic one portrays Paul to be. Wright, who sees Paul as making a unified argument here, is driven by his outline to consider this an integral part of Paul’s single argument that spans chapters 9–11. Wright considers the question Paul asks in 9:22–23 to be Paul’s way of introducing a deterministic idea that is too strong to state in the indicative mood:

Supposing, in other words, that the doctrine of election *always envisaged the elect themselves being the people through whom God would perform the negative task essential to rescuing the world, namely the outpouring of his anger and power?* This is such an enormous thing to suggest that we can easily see why Paul casts it in the mode of a tentative proposal, a ‘What if,’ much as in Philemon he inserts a *tacha*, ‘perhaps,’ into the crucial interpretative sentence.⁴⁷

A “crucial” sentence indeed, for Wright goes on to claim that God planned for Israel to sin, break the covenant and experience God’s wrath. This could find possible support in Acts, but it is not evident that Paul wants to say this about his people in his letters, and it is tragically evident in history where this exegetical judgment can lead.⁴⁸ It is better to follow Fitzmyer’s observation that Paul ruthlessly develops his arguments in this section of Romans and note how these arguments differ from Paul’s conclusion in 11:11–32.

The Hosea quotations in Romans 9:24–25 are making the point that those God has called include Jews and Gentiles. The composite quotation beginning in Romans 9:27 is helping Paul demonstrate that only a remnant—the connotation here seems to be of a limited, small number—of Israel will be saved.⁴⁹ This composite quotation juxtaposes the idea of LXX Hosea 2:1 that Israel cannot be counted with the idea of Isaiah 10:22–23 that a remnant will be saved in order to encapsulate or summarize the tension within this first argument: though God promised that Abraham’s descendants would be numerous beyond counting, the Scriptures also declare that only a remnant

47 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1191.

48 Ibid., 1183, 1190, 1192; Acts 2:23; 3:16–18.

49 Wagner argues that on the basis of Rom. 9:24 the remnant language in Paul’s quotation of Isa. 10:22 in Rom. 9:27 should not be interpreted negatively (*Heralds*, 107), but I do not see clear evidence in 9:24 that Paul at this point is using the remnant idea positively. Certainly the context of the quotation from Isa. 10 is emphasizing how few of Israel will return.

will inherit God's promised blessings. God's execution of his word in Romans 9:28 forms an *inclusio* with Romans 9:6a to signal that this argument is about to end. And Paul concludes it with another Isaiah quotation, which with attention-demanding intensity likens Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah. Paul has defined "Israel" in 9:6–29 not as coterminous with all of ethnic Israel and implies that "Israel" is only a small remnant of all of ethnic Israel and some Gentiles whom God has called. For all commentators, a major section of Romans 9–11 ends here at 9:29. All will agree that this is not how chapter 11 ends. Because the remnant idea in 11:2–5 functions differently there, and because chapter 11 ends with a different estimate of the extent of those in Israel who will be saved, it is best to identify Romans 9:29 as the end of the first argument.

Tensions within the Second Argument (Romans 9:30–10:21)

The second argument states that Gentiles who confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead gain a faith-based righteousness that also makes Israel jealous, while those in Israel who sought a works-based righteousness did not gain the righteousness they sought. In Romans 10:5–10, Paul contrasts two types of righteousness that are both in the Torah: the righteousness from works of the law, represented by his quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5, and the righteousness of faith, represented by his glossed quotation of Deuteronomy 30:12–14. Paul uses the verbs "believe" and "call" in the quotations of Isaiah 28:16 and LXX Joel 3:5 to select the righteousness of faith side of the tension, and the adjectival noun "all" that he uses with both quotations supports the inclusion of the Gentiles that this second argument adopts from the preceding argument and radicalizes to complete replacement of Israel.

The quotations of Isaiah 52:7 and LXX Isaiah 53:1 in Romans 10:15–16, along with the quotation of LXX Psalm 18:5 in Romans 10:18, all support Paul's idea that the message of the Gospel has gone out to the Gentiles. This is then juxtaposed with two quotations that Paul uses to support his claim that Israel's failure to respond to the Gospel is a theological idea in its own right in the Scriptures. Israel is either jealous or apathetic, according to the quotations from LXX Deuteronomy 32:21 and LXX Isaiah 65:1–2 that are found in Romans 10:19–21. Watson notes the tension in the chapters as a whole when he describes Paul's quotation from the Song of Moses in Romans 10:19 as the start of a new direction in Paul's argument:

Deuteronomy 32.21 plays a crucial role in the move *beyond* the concept of supersession—the very concept that Paul has taken such pains to elaborate and to defend exegetically in

Romans 9–10. Indeed, its citation in Romans 10.19 marks the beginning of a great turning-point in the argument.⁵⁰

Watson thus would be placed on Kuula's half of the continuum, with those who emphasize variety in the argumentative discourse of Romans 9–11 and a circuitous path in Paul's thought.

Even those exegetes who see only one unified argument in Romans 9–11 must agree that this second section of Paul's argument, Romans 9:30–10:21, is very different from 9:6–29. This is the first time in Romans 9–11 that Paul quotes from the end of Deuteronomy and from the fourth Servant Song and beyond in Isaiah. The opposition of the righteousness of faith and the righteousness based on works of the law also first emerges here. As in the first argument in 9:6–29, Paul is arguing here for how God's word has not failed at the time he is writing. And as in the first argument, this second argument, or second section of the one argument, is encapsulated again by how the section begins: the Gentiles arrived at a righteousness based on faith, while Israel—pursuing a law of righteousness—did not arrive at that righteousness. These ideas are not found in the first argument and recur only with adaptation in the fourth argument of Romans 11:11–32. In Paul's diction within this second argument of 9:30–10:21, "Israel" represents ethnic Jews who seek to keep Torah and miss the righteousness that comes by faith.

Tensions within the Third Argument (Romans 11:1–10)

The third argument opens with a question that reframes the opening tension of 9:1–5 in light of the heavy emphasis on election in the first argument of 9:6–29. The possibility that God has abandoned the people he has foreknown is a possible conclusion that would make sense based on how Paul has argued so far. But Paul emphatically denies this possibility, signaling that he will offer a new argument to eliminate what a reader could conclude after his arguments on election and the righteousness based on faith. The new argument is encapsulated in the phrase that immediately follows Paul's "for," a feature also found in 9:6b, which begins with "for" and encapsulates the argument beginning there. Here in Romans 11:1b, Paul's insistence on his ethnic pedigree signals this argument's positive emphasis on the "remnant" contemporary to Paul. This is supported by the quotations from 1 Kings 19:10, 14 that illustrate how God preserved a remnant even when Elijah perceived he was the only one who remained faithful to the God of Israel. The remnant that is contemporary to Paul, then, is presented here in Romans 11:1–6 as a positive, significant presence, unlike the negative portrait of a handful of survivors in the remnant quotations in Romans 9:27, 29. Here, Paul is saying in 11:5–6

⁵⁰ Watson, *Paul*, 453.

that the remnant in which he is a member disproves an extreme conclusion one could draw from his second argument of 9:30–10:21, that God abandoned Israel because she did not believe and has instead favored Gentiles who believe and call on Jesus.

Paul's "present time" is a key phrase in this third argument.⁵¹ He explicitly uses "at the present time" here because this is the last argument that is focused exclusively on explaining how God's word has not failed in his contemporary situation. Paul goes on to offer a composite Scripture quotation that portrays God as allowing or causing Israelites outside the remnant to be unresponsive and prone to stumbling.⁵² Paul's discourse regarding Israel here is quantitatively better than where he led us before Romans 10:19, for now he has affirmed that Israel is not completely replaced by the Gentiles who have found the righteousness that comes by faith, but it is qualitatively very similar, since he is leaving us here at Romans 11:10 with the picture of "the rest" of Israel beyond the remnant as divinely disabled to respond to God and divinely set on a course of stumbling.

Paul employs Scriptures in this third argument, or third section of his one argument, not previously used. He bases his argument here on the tension between a positive remnant that God has preserved and the rest whom God has made unresponsive. Yes, he has quoted from the end of Deuteronomy in the second argument, and here he quotes from Deuteronomy 29. The remnant idea he offers here is more positively presented than in the first argument. The idea of God hardening someone who is presented explicitly as Pharaoh in the first argument recurs here. But this time those being hardened are Israelites, according to Deuteronomy and a psalm of David. This argument's diction portrays "Israel" as ethnic, corporeal Israel, bifurcated between a significant remnant who are loyal toward God and the rest of Israel, who are unresponsive toward God.

Tensions within the Fourth Argument (Romans 11:11–32)

N. T. Wright considers Romans 11:1–32 to be one main section, which he chiasmatically pairs with 9:6–29 in his outline of a unified argument. While it is true that the ideas of election, remnant, and Gentile inclusion come in both, Romans 11:11 contains the same signals for beginning a new section as appear in 11:1. So it is best to go with Douglas Moo and treat 11:11 as the beginning of a fourth major section in the discourse of these three chapters.⁵³

51 Rom. 11:5. Paul's phrase is *en tō nun kairō*, literally "in the now time."

52 Romans 11:9–10, quoting LXX Ps. 68:23–24.

53 Douglas Moo, "The Theology of Romans 9–11: A Response to E. Elizabeth Johnson," in *Pauline Theology Volume III: Romans*, 242–243. Fitzmyer (*Romans*, 608–618) and Wagner (*Heralds*, 265–276) treat Rom. 11:11–24 as a discrete section within chapter 11.

As we will see below, 11:11–12 also breaks with the preceding discourse by introducing what will happen in the future. This is another reason why the section beginning at Romans 11:1 should end with 11:10. Romans 11:1–10, as a relatively short unit of ten verses, is consistent with Paul's tendency to use shorter units of argument the closer he gets to the conclusion of a given discourse, as we can see in Galatians 4:21–31 or 1 Corinthians 10:14–22.

Paul signals the start of a new argument, or the start of a different argumentative line, by his question that proposes a possible implication of the third argument. As in Romans 11:1, "So I ask . . . ?" is followed with "By no means!"⁵⁴ As we have seen in the preceding three arguments or sections of Paul's argument in Romans 9–11, Paul encapsulates the following argument very early. Here it is with his statement in 11:11b–12. This picks up on the jealousy motif raised near the end of second the argument, and this time Paul uses it in a more hopeful way, implying that God's attention to the nations will make Israel jealous and lead to their salvation. The "Now if . . . how much more . . ." question that ends with the word "fullness" in 11:12 is a definite indicator that Paul is now opening a window onto the future. In this section he is not limiting himself to scriptural arguments that relate only to ethnic Israel's present and past in order to resolve the soteriological tension in 9:1–5. He will in this final section use Scripture to describe Israel's future to resolve this tension. He introduces a present versus future tension that helps to address the soteriological tension of 9:1–5. The question is whether the Israel to whom Paul refers in this fourth argument is ethnic Israel, the "all who are descended from Israel" phrase of 9:6b, or whether this fourth argument refers to the metaphorical "Israel" at the end of 9:6, à la N. T. Wright.

It is commonly remarked that Paul does not quote Scripture in Romans 11:11–25, but this needs to be balanced with the recognition that this section abounds with Scriptural allusions. The "wealth of the world" and of the nations, life from the dead, first fruits, and the wild and cultivated olive trees are all allusions that are firmly grounded in Paul's Scriptures.⁵⁵ These allusions build suspense within this argument and lead up to the grand, composite quotation from Isaiah in Romans 11:26–27 that reminds readers of Jeremiah's new covenant.

The primary tension that Paul frames from his Scriptures in this section is the prophetic tension in which the current judgment (branches are broken off in 11:17, 19–21) is juxtaposed with God's future deliverance and resto-

54 Paul's diction that frames the questions of 11:1 and 11:11 is the same (*legō oun . . . ; mē genoito*), though the RSVCE translates Rom. 11:11 differently than Rom. 11:1.

55 "Wealth of the world" and nations—Exod. 12:35–36 and Isa. 60:11; life from the dead—Ezek. 37:1–14; first fruits—Jer. 2:3; wild and cultivated olive trees—Jer. 2:21 and 11:16.

ration (Romans 11:12, 23–24), which alludes to Deuteronomy 32.⁵⁶ In this major tension, Israel remains the first loved whom God has now spurned by turning to the Gentiles in order to make Israel jealous. In Romans 11:13–14, Paul describes his own missionary strategy in terms of the jealousy theme he has already raised in Romans 10:19 by quoting from the Song of Moses. In Romans 11:17–20a, he describes how branches from the cultivated olive tree were broken off because of unbelief. This image employs Jeremiah’s discourse of the cultivated and wild vine and the beautiful olive tree, from the opening judgment oracles in his book.⁵⁷ Paul is juxtaposing this perspective of Israel under God’s judgment with the prophets’ eschatological vision of an ingathered Israel by using the following terms: “full inclusion”; “their acceptance”; “life from the dead”; and a description of holiness in all of Israel.⁵⁸

The significant uses of the future tense and subjunctive mood signifying future in this argument show that, here, Paul is moving beyond a simple defense of God’s word to Israel in his present to what God’s word will accomplish in the future.⁵⁹ The fourth argument thus introduces the prophets’ eschatological tension in order to bring resolution to the soteriological tension in the opening of Romans 9. With regard to the tension between the election of Abraham’s offspring and the election of a narrower Abrahamic subgroup that we see in the first argument of 9:6–29, the fourth argument decides in favor of the broader group of Abraham’s descendants by mentioning the fathers, gifts, and calling, which are descriptions of ethnic Israel’s inheritance.⁶⁰ If there is any doubt that this is the case, the repeated “all” in Romans 11:32, coming after references to Israel as an enemy in view of the Gospel, should prompt exegetes to envision Israel as a whole, ethnic nation, rather than simply all the elect.

The fourth argument insists that the hardened “rest” of Israel that appears near the end of the third argument in 11:7–10 is not permanently excluded from God’s plan. They have not stumbled so as to fall. In other words, the eschatological tension introduced in the fourth argument confirms the hint that Paul gave in Romans 11:5 that the “remnant” is only a temporary

56 Wagner (*Heralds*, 267) links Rom. 11:12 with Deut. 32:34–42. Earlier in his book, discussing Hosea 1:10–2:1 as in the background of Rom. 9:24–25, Wagner writes of “a tension inherent in the prophet’s message” (87).

57 Jeremiah 2:21; 11:16–17. See Mark Reasoner, “The Redemptive Inversions of Jeremiah in Romans 9–11,” *Biblica* 95 (2014): 388–404.

58 Rom. 11:12, 15–16.

59 The future tense explodes into the fourth argument at 11:21, 23, 24, and 26. The subjunctive mood is used to signify potential future action in 11:14, 22, 23, 31, and 32. English translations offer future tenses in 11:12 and 15, but these are only implied in the Greek text.

60 Rom. 11:28–29. See Rom. 9:4–5.

designation. The remnant is not named or directly described in the fourth argument, so one is led to believe that the remnant will be swallowed up in the “all Israel” who will re-enter on the positive side of the divine economy. But the question remains, is the “all Israel” the ethnic, corporeal people of Israel considered as a whole?

As I have portrayed the arguments here, each of the first three arguments fully pursues one approach to the problem of Israel, with little to no regard for how the argument’s development obscures other scriptural perspectives on the problem. This is what Fitzmyer means by “Paul’s habit of isolating and discussing one aspect of a problem without worrying about ramifications.”⁶¹ Each of the three preliminary arguments offers its own topic sentence: Romans 9:6b; 9:30–31 and 11:1–2a. The final argument in Romans 11:11–32 adapts the election terminology from 9:11 from excluding descendants of Isaac to including “all Israel” (11:28).⁶² It adapts the indictment of Israel’s unbelief in 9:30–10:21 with the eschatological picture of a time when Israel will believe (11:23–24). And it decisively employs the responsive remnant versus hardened rest of Israel tension in 11:1–10 as a temporary stage on the way to the future salvation of all Israel.

In comparison with how Paul applied the Hosea texts in Romans 9:24–27 to the Gentiles, it seems that the mystery here in Romans 11:25–27 goes back to the plain sense of the Hosea texts, that Israel will once again be God’s people. In this regard, Richard Hays writes, “If in Romans 9 and 10 Paul deconstructs Scripture’s witness to Israel’s favored status, Romans 11 dialectically deconstructs the deconstructive reading, subverting any Gentile Christian pretension to a position of hermeneutical privilege.”⁶³

The Connection of 9:6b to 11:26 in Light of the Tensions in Romans 9–11 and the Whole Letter

Aletti and his student Pablo Gadenz have already helpfully offered good arguments from the immediate context for why Israel in Romans 11:26 must refer to ethnic Israel.⁶⁴ Here I will summarize the significance of my survey of the tensions in Romans 9–11 for the relationship of these two key texts and

61 Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 542.

62 Johnson, “Romans 9–11,” 232; Jean-Noël Aletti, S. J., *Israël et la loi dans la lettre aux Romains*, Lectio Divina 173 (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 255.

63 Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 67.

64 Aletti, *Israël*, 260–261; Pablo T. Gadenz, *Called from the Jews and from the Gentiles: Pauline Ecclesiology in Romans 9–11*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.267 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 276–277.

call attention to the wider context of the relationship between these seemingly paradoxical statements.

As we have seen above, those exegetes who still regard “not all Israel are Israel” in 9:6b as determinative for the whole argument tend to read “all Israel” in 11:26 as a metaphor for the Church. The tendency to do this is understandable, since all readers of these chapters understand 9:6a to be a thesis statement for the whole three chapters, with the “for” in 9:6b showing that it supports this thesis statement. But as I have shown above, Paul also uses “for” in 11:1b to introduce a topic sentence for a distinct argument. And since Romans 9:6b encapsulates Romans 9:6–29 more obviously than it encapsulates 9:6–11:32, it is best to read “for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” there as the topic sentence to Paul’s first argument in Romans 9:6–29, not to all four arguments ending at 11:32.

The tensions, including the tensions Paul frames from his Scriptures, mean that not every proposition Paul states in Romans 9–11 can have weight in authority. As I have described above, Paul exhibits a tendency to give air time to a variety of stake-holding voices in the issues he addresses. I have also specified what Fitzmyer has observed, that Paul tends to press each argument to its limit. This also means that not all of the propositions Paul writes carry the same level of authority. They all contribute to the argument, but the conclusion must be valued as most significant.

If we follow Wright and say that Romans 11:26 must mean that “all Israel” means a big remnant of Israel and the Gentiles, we effectively ignore Paul’s categorical denials that God has rejected his people in 11:1 and that Israel has stumbled so as to fall in 11:11. If we assume that the idea of election within Israel, separating descendants of Isaac from one another, is really what he wants to affirm as his bottom line regarding Israel, then we make Paul inconsistent with his concluding declaration in Romans 11:28–29 and his previous affirmation in Romans 4:12a that Abraham is the father of the circumcised. Also, the conclusion of the letter’s argument at Romans 15:8 is seriously compromised if we assume this means that Christ came for a remnant and not completely to fulfill what Christ’s ethnic ancestors had been promised. In the composite Tanak quotation that follows, there is no hint of an eschatologically united single people, as though the “all Israel” includes Gentiles, as in Wright’s model. Rather, it is God’s first love—Israel—alongside the nations, who is praising God. So it is not only the immediate context within Romans chapter 11 that pulls the exegete to view “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 as the entire nation of ethnic Israel, it is also the wider context of Romans as well, in Romans chapters 4 and 15.

Wright is outlining Romans 9–11 as though it is an integrally unified argument. This attracts his attention more closely to the first argument in chapter 9 when he is explaining the mystery of 11:25–27 than my outline of the separate arguments warrants. We can take Aletti's route and call Paul "paradoxical."⁶⁵ Or, as I am advocating here, we can allow Paul, in Jewish fashion, to raise issues and relevant Scriptures and then form a conclusion that adapts and synthesizes the various arguments raised to provide a theological response to his unceasing grief over Israel.

Conclusion

In the first part of this essay, I suggested that students of Romans 9–11 consider a continuum along which exegetes can be identified. At one pole of the continuum would be N. T. Wright's reading of the chapters as a unified and chiastically arranged single argument. At the other pole of the continuum are Kari Kuula and other exegetes who consider Paul to be using more than one argument in these chapters. I have argued here that based on the tensions evoked by Paul's use of Scripture, outlines that highlight the variety or circuitous nature of his argumentative approach more closely reflect what he is doing in these chapters. Assertions that Paul is inconsistent or incoherent can be rejected out of hand as simply a misreading of the genre, for, as a first century Jew knowledgeable in his Scriptures, Paul's exegesis bears remarkable similarity to other midrashic homilies and Scripture-based debates from the early centuries CE. So while the labels of inconsistency or incoherence do not fit Paul, it seems best to outline Paul's Scripture arguments and the mystery to which they lead as following a varied, circuitous route on the way to stating that after a fullness of Gentiles come through Christ to worship the God of Israel, then all of ethnic Israel will be saved.

65 Aletti, *Israël*, 265.

