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Paul and the Vocation of Israel

How Paul's Jewish Identity Informs his Apostolic Ministry, with Special Reference to Romans

DE GRUYTER
1 Introduction

There are as many ways of being Jewish as there are Jews—probably more.

Howard Jacobson.\(^1\)

They’re Hebrews? So am I!
They’re Israelites? So am I!
They’re Abraham’s seed? So am I!
They’re ministers of Christ? I’m a better one ...

The Apostle Paul.\(^2\)

Paul’s apostolic mission was his way of being Jewish. Paul was convinced that Israel had received a special divine revelation which conferred on Jews a distinct divine vocation. Paul, in other words, was committed to the view that God’s global purposes in Christ included a special place—and correspondingly a special role—for the Jewish people. Paul, through preaching Christ to the Gentiles, was in fact fulfilling Israel’s distinct divine vocation. This will be our contention in this book.

In making this claim, we are not seeking simply to contend for a particular position within the history of interpretation of the nature of Paul’s “religion.” We are not, for example, simply claiming that Paul’s religious background in “Judaism” provided him with a set of convictions or a general pattern of life which, when subjected to a few more or less drastic “Christian” modifications, subsequently shaped elements of his preaching and missionary activities. Rather, our contention is that Paul’s own Jewishness—not just his “Judaism,” but his personal, distinct, ongoing Jewish identity—found its primary expression in his apostolic mission.

This understanding of Jewishness is, of course, deeply controversial. Indeed, this understanding of Jewishness was born in the midst of controversy. According to his own letters, Paul was a Jew who argued with Jews. On the one hand, Paul emphatically asserts his Jewish identity at key points.\(^3\) He describes Jews as his brothers,\(^4\) his family,\(^5\) his race,\(^6\) and his flesh.\(^7\) He grieves for Jews,\(^8\) prays for

\(^1\) Man Booker Prizes 2011.
\(^2\) 2 Cor 11:22–23a.
\(^3\) Most notably Rom 11:1, 2 Cor 11:22.
\(^4\) Rom 9:3.
\(^5\) Rom 9:3; 16:7, 11, 21.
\(^6\) 2 Cor 11:26, Gal 1:14.
\(^7\) Rom 9:3, 11:4.
\(^8\) Rom 9:1–3.
Jews, seeks to win Jews, works alongside Jews, and shapes his ministry in service of Jews. On the other hand, Paul also engages in strong disputes against various Jews. He abandons certain Jewish commitments, trivializes certain Jewish lifestyles, curses preachers of Jewish circumcision, “dies” to the Jewish Law, and at one point seemingly renounces his Jewish identity altogether. At first glance, Paul’s varied statements about Jewishness seem mutually incompatible. They certainly constitute a broad spectrum, from heartfelt identification through to bitter denunciation. We will argue that this broad spectrum of statements can be comprehended under a single, albeit multi-faceted, rubric: Paul is convinced that his own apostolic ministry fulfills Israel’s divine vocation. For Paul, preaching the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles is the true way to be Jewish.

1.1 Paul’s Jewish identity

The spectrum of Paul’s statements about Jewishness has been analysed using various lenses of scholarly concern. Some scholars concentrate on Paul’s personal convictions and overall worldview. Jörg Frey, for example, in his article “Paul’s Jewish Identity” seeks to demonstrate that various elements in Paul’s conception of himself, his piety, his missionary strategy, his preaching style, his geographical framework, his exegetical methods and his eschatology are similar to those which can be found among other first-century Jewish groups. For Frey, it is Paul’s Jewish convictions that mark him out as Jewish. Love Sechrest, on the other hand, is concerned with Paul’s personal group affiliation: in which group did Paul feel he “belonged”? Sechrest concludes that Paul significantly weakened his kinship ties with the mainstream Jewish community and established new, strong, non-biological kinship ties with the Christian community. For Sechrest, then, Paul has become a member of a third “race” and can be regarded as a “former Jew.” Other scholars seek to understand Paul’s Jewishness by examining his concrete relationships with his Jewish contemporaries. Mark Nanos, for example, finds that Paul is a “good Jew” because he upheld the distinctiveness of Jews in Rome. According to Nanos, although Paul insisted that Gentiles did not have to become Jews, he never challenged the need for Jews to observe the Torah. John Barclay, however, asks the converse question: would Paul’s fellow Jews themselves have recognized and accepted him as a Jew? Barclay finds that although Paul believed himself to be Jewish and desired to redefine Judaism from within, his program ultimately failed. Paul would have continued to be regarded as an apostate by the Jewish community and was consistently opposed by other Jews. Thus, by the generally accepted standards of his fellow Jews, Paul is a renegade, apostate Jew.
Paul's Jewish context is itself a complex phenomenon. Indeed, there are a number of competing scholarly options for comprehending the breadth of first-century Jewish life and thought. Some emphasize the existence of different “Judaisms,” each with its distinctive worldview and way of life. Others perceive a “common Judaism,” a shared first-century conception of what it meant to be Jewish, centred on the priesthood and temple cult. Still others argue that Jewishness was defined in large part by the Pharisees; thus Pharisaism was “normative for Judaism to the extent that the Jewish majority recognized in the Pharisaic ideals the authentic expression of Jewishness.” Since, however, we are seeking to study Paul’s view of Jewish identity in light of his own perception of his Jewish context, we are not bound to choose any one of these conceptions of “Judaism” as an absolute starting point for our investigation. Rather, we will find that each of the conceptions furnishes valuable insights into aspects of Paul’s Jewish context. For example, observations about the existence of differing “Judaisms” provide a historical context for understanding how Paul can assert his own particular version of Jewish identity and Jewish vocation in the face of rival views. On the other hand, the concept of a “common Judaism” helps us to understand Paul’s awareness of a generally accepted “mainstream” Jewish identity to which his own conception of Jewishness was a radical alternative. Nevertheless, since Paul himself had a Pharisaic past and would almost certainly have viewed such “mainstream” Jewish identity in the terms of “Pharisaic normativity,” sources with a Pharisaic background (for example Josephus) will be especially significant for our study.


30 Most notably Sanders (1992, 47–303).

31 Deines 2001; Hengel 1991, 44. This is a nuanced version of the consensus that existed prior to the publication of Smith’s article (see n. 29).


33 Here and throughout this book, the term “mainstream” is not intended to indicate an objective judgment about the overall nature of Judaism in Paul’s day, but rather to indicate Paul’s subjective understanding of the Jewish community to which he finds himself opposed.

34 E.g. Paul names his interlocutor as a “publicly recognized” Jew (Rom 2:17) (see section 5.1.2).


28 Hagner (2007) discusses the way in which Paul’s Jewishness is inseparable from other key areas of his personal life, his thought and his influence.
Our exegesis will, in part, be informed by the modern concept of social identity. Henri Tajfel, who along with John Turner was instrumental in formulating the theoretical framework for the notion of social identity, defines it as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." We will, accordingly, be seeking to focus in our exegesis on that part of Paul's self-conception which is influenced by his understanding of what it means to be Jewish, and how that aspect of his self-conception influences his perceptions of and interactions with other Jews and non-Jews. The theory of social identity has been nuanced and developed in various ways since its formulation by Tajfel and Turner. Three such developments are particularly significant for our study.

Firstly, a number of theorists have emphasised the dynamic nature of social identity. Identity is not a static entity, but is continuously formed through ongoing constructive interaction between the individual and the group with whom he or she identifies. Identity formation is thus an evolutionary process, a constant interaction between individuals and their social "world" which inevitably changes both the individuals and the world. Indeed, identity definition often takes place through processes of argumentation, negotiation, and persuasion, which at times can lead to schismatic separation. Furthermore, leaders—of whom Paul is, of course, a clear example—often play particularly significant roles in these identity-forming processes. We can examine Paul in these terms, as an agent of identity, who by his speech-actions is both reproducing older conceptions of Jewish identity and simultaneously creating newer conceptions. Various scholars recognize the value of viewing Paul in this way. Dunn, for example, describes Paul's identity in terms of "transformation," "flux" and "transition." Müller describes Paul as "one voice in the ongoing process of identity formation." Indeed, Paul's status as a "marginal-but-legitimate Jew" resonates with a number of modern Jewish authors who view him as a symbol, an exemplar or a fellow traveller in their own quest to redefine Jewish identity. We will, accordingly, proceed by means of comparison and contrast between Paul's self-witness, available to us in his letters, and his Jewish context, available to us both in his letters and in other sources. In so doing, we will endeavour not only to identify similarities and differences between Paul and his Jewish context, but also to discern how these similarities and differences generate Paul's own Jewish identity.

Secondly, it has been pointed out that an individual will often have multiple and / or "nested" identities which must be understood in interaction with one another rather than in isolation. This observation is particularly significant when it comes to understanding Paul's identity. Paul's Jewish identity-shaping activities are more drastic and disruptive than might be inferred from such terms as "transition" or "evolution." He is convinced that something revolutionary has occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, an event in which he himself is intimately involved as he fulfills his apostolic mission, proclaiming the "gospel" of Christ to the Gentiles. This radical Christ-event pervades Paul's letters, undergirding both his own identity as apostle and also his conception of his readers' identities. It creates new communities with new social realities. It even challenges, at a deep level, Jewish identity itself. Paul's Jewish identity, therefore, cannot be understood without reference to his more fundamental Christ-identity. Indeed, we will see that there is a bifurcation in Paul's discourse concerning Jewish identity. On the one hand, Paul acknowledges the existence of a "mainstream" understanding of Jewish identity: a view which he once held, which he still sees as predominant in the synagogue, and with which he still seeks to engage. On the other hand, Paul seeks to redefine Jewish identity in such a way that it retains a distinct, pre-eminent and theologically significant place outside the synagogue, within his own Christ-believing communities. It is the precise nature of these two understandings of Jewishness, along with

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37 See e.g. Vito 1.12.
39 See e.g. Esler 2003, 20; Tucker 2010, 41–51.
40 Tajfel 1978, 63, emphasis original.
42 E.g. Giddens 1993, 134.
46 Miller 2011, 50, emphasis original.
49 E.g. Rom 1:1–7; 1 Cor 15:1–11; Gal 1:3–5; 1 Thess 1:1–10; etc.
50 E.g. Rom 1:16–15:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 2:1–11; etc.
52 Here and throughout this book, the term "mainstream" is intended to indicate Paul's subjective understanding of the synagogue-attending Jewish community to which he finds himself opposed (see n. 33).
their implications, which will form a large part of the subject of our investigation in this book.

Thirdly, while Tajfel's work is often associated with negative aspects of intergroup interactions—for example: competition, discrimination and hostility—it has also been recognised that there is great value in describing positive aspects of intergroup relations: valued distinctions which allow for interdependence and complementarity between different groups. This observation is important for our own study, since we shall be focussing on Paul's sense that he, as a Jew, has a positive, vocational role towards non-Jews.

We must recognize from the outset, however, that the extent to which we can use modern theories of social identity as explicit or detailed theoretical frameworks is subject to strict limitations. In the case of Paul, we are dealing with a textually mediated identity. The evidence available to us consists of a small collection of letters written by Paul to fellow Christ-believers as he discharges the duties of his apostolic ministry, some reflective accounts of Paul's interaction with his Jewish contemporaries in the course of his apostolic ministry (in Acts), and a body of Jewish Scriptures and other literature which provide general information about how other Jews in Paul's milieu viewed their own Jewishness. This gives rise to two particularly significant limitations, which will inform the nature and methodology of our investigation in this book.

Firstly, the primary texts themselves are limited in their scope. We have no access to any direct interaction between Paul and his wider Jewish context—for example indisputably first-hand recorded dialogues between Paul and non-Christian Jews. At best, therefore, we can only infer how actual identity-generating dialogues between Paul and his Jewish contemporaries may have proceeded. Since, therefore, we cannot be certain of the intricate details of our object of study itself, we will generally avoid pressing the theory for detailed models or theoretical categories. We will, instead, employ a "pragmatic eclecticism" in our use of social-scientific material, and will restrict our use of technical social-scientific terminology to general concepts such as ethnicity and identity redefinition.

Secondly, the historical value of the various dialogues between Paul and other Jews in Acts has been variously evaluated. Thus, while we hope that this book might help to show that the portrait of Paul in Acts is more consistent with his letters than is often claimed, we cannot use the dialogues in Acts as undisputed evidence for Paul's direct interactions with his Jewish contemporaries.

1.2 The vocational dimension of Jewish identity

Our investigation of Paul's Jewish identity in this book will focus on an important, yet often neglected, perspective on first-century Jewish identity: vocation. In using the term "vocation", we are referring to the notion that the distinct existence and concrete practice of Jewish people stems from a special divine vocation, an intention which can imply a particular divine role for Jews in relation to non-Jews.

A second limitation arises from the fact that the concerns of modern social-scientific researchers do not always map directly onto the issues of identity which were important to authors from a different time and place such as Paul. This phenomenon is, of course, recognized by social-scientific writers themselves. If we allow our approach to be driven too strongly by modern questions, we risk missing or distorting the contours of Paul's own description of his Jewish identity. In particular, as we shall see, Paul's perspective on Jewish identity cannot be separated from the notion of divine vocation. Indeed, Paul's discussion of the relationship between his own apostolic vocation and Israel's vocation is so fundamental, so complex and so multifaceted that it requires us to engage directly, and in depth, with Paul's own theology of divine revelation and divine vocation. In our detailed exegetical investigations, therefore, we will provide a largely "emic" account, favouring those terms and categories which arise from Paul's own self-description.

54 The historical value of the various dialogues between Paul and other Jews in Acts has been variously evaluated. Thus, while we hope that this book might help to show that the portrait of Paul in Acts is more consistent with his letters than is often claimed, we cannot use the dialogues in Acts as undisputed evidence for Paul's direct interactions with his Jewish contemporaries.
The notion of a divine vocation for Israel is undergirded by scriptural passages which claim a divinely ordained role for Israel in relation to the rest of the world. In Genesis, for example, God promises Abraham that his descendants (his "seed") will become a distinct nation with a special role to play in God’s plan to bless all other nations:

... I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and exalt your name, and you will be a blessing, and I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 12:2–3)

... in your seed [πνεῦμα σπέρματος αὐτού] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice. (Gen 22:18)

In Isaiah, this notion of Israel as the "seed" of Abraham is linked with the figure of the "Servant," a figure who both embodies and represents the particular nation of Israel, and also brings God’s salvation to all the other nations:

You, Israel, my Servant [βοιαίος], Jacob, whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham [αβρααμίῳ], whom I have loved, you of whom I have taken hold from the ends of the earth, and called from the peaks, and spoke to you: You are my Servant; I have chosen you and I have not abandoned you. (Isa 41:8–9)

He [the Lord] said to me, “You are my Servant [βοιαίος], Israel, and in you I will be glorified. ... Behold, I have made you a covenant for the people, a light for the nations [θηνη], that my salvation may extend to the end of the earth.” (Isa 49:4, 6b, LXX).

A sense of Jewish vocation also appears at times among Jewish writings roughly contemporaneous with Paul. This sense of vocation is often linked with the conviction that the Law of Moses is a divine gift of revelation to Israel. Since God has uniquely revealed himself to Israel in the Law, Israel has a unique task to perform in response to that Law, which will lead to positive outcomes for the rest of the world (cf. Deut 4:6). For Ben Sira, for example, the existence of the Law in Israel is the primary embodiment of universal wisdom (Sir 24:6, 8, 23): Ben Sira envisages that Israel’s maintenance of the Law will lead to wise teaching shining out to the rest of the world (Sir 24:32–33).60 The international blessing that is to flow through Abraham is linked to Abraham’s Law-keeping (Sir 44:19–21). For Philo, Abraham’s union with Sarah produces "an entire nation—the most God-loving of all nations—and one which appears to me to have received the offices of priesthood and prophecy on behalf of the whole human race" (Abr. 98 [Yonge]; Philo sees Israel’s special role in the world linked directly to the possession and practice of the laws of Moses, which he regards as the embodiment of God’s laws, the purest, most comprehensive and "true divine" laws on the earth (Mos. 2.12), which lead and influence the laws of the other nations (Mos. 2.20ff)). The Letter of Aristeas also expresses a vocational Jewish consciousness through a stylised narrative that depicts Jewish teachers providing extraordinary and detailed wisdom to the Greek king on the basis of the Law of Moses (Ep. Arist. 181–294, 312; cf. Philo, Mos. 2.34). We will examine these and other texts in the course of our investigation. They provide evidence that a number of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries felt that their Jewish identity was caught up with a divine vocation to keep and teach the precepts of the Law of Moses as an exemplary witness to God’s power and wisdom in the world.

Paul, we will argue, affirms that the revelation of the Law to Israel provides Jews with a unique gift and thus a significant divine vocation. Nevertheless, in light of the gospel of Christ, Paul strongly contests and redefines the significance of the Law, and thus also strongly contests and redefines the nature of Israel’s distinct vocation. For Paul, the Law’s primary purpose is to bear witness to the gospel of Christ, which is a message of universal significance. Hence Paul’s primary expression of Jewish identity was to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. The bulk of this book is devoted to demonstrating, through a detailed reading of Paul’s texts in their context, that Paul sees his own gospel-preaching as fulfilling Israel’s vocation—as, for example, “Servant” (e.g. Rom 1:1) and “Seed of Abraham” (e.g. Rom 11:1).

There is, in fact, a significant reason why the vocational dimension of Jewish identity in Paul’s letters merits serious attention: Paul himself frequently discusses Jewish identity in the context of his own apostolic vocation. Of the approximately 28 discrete places (23 in the undisputed letters) where Paul uses terms explicitly related to Jewish identity, at least 13 (11 in the undisputed letters) involve discussions of Paul’s own vocation as apostle to the Gentiles and/or warnings about potential rivals or opponents to his apostolic vocation. It is while contrasting his own cruciform ministry with the ministry of Jewish rivals that he speaks positively of the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:12–16). It is while contrasting Jewish teachers with his own gospel-preaching that Paul speaks of the “true Israel” and the “true seed of Abraham” (Phil 3:2–5; 1 Thess 2:14–16) as distinct from those who have abandoned God. Paul inverts the prophecy of Deuteronomy which promises that in the future the nations (Gentiles) will acknowledge Israel as God’s true seed (Deut 32:20). In Paul’s view, it is those who believe in the gospel of Christ who are God’s true Servant and true Seed of Abraham, just as Abraham himself was promised to be a blessing to all the nations (Gen 12:2–3; 18:18; 22:18).
mending his co-workers and denouncing Jewish opponents that he declares, “we are the circumcision” (Phil 2:19–3:3). It is while defending his own “ministry” (διάκονος) that he employs the figures of “Moses,” the “covenants” and the “Israelites” (2 Cor 3:7–16). It is while denouncing rival “super-apostles” and supporting his claim to be “minister [διάκονος] of Christ” that he declares himself to be a “Hebrew,” “Israelite” and “seed of Abraham” (2 Cor 11:22–23). Not only do these examples (among others) suggest that Paul himself saw a strong connection between Jewish identity and apostolic vocation; they also suggest that other Jewish teachers and the Gentiles they were seeking to influence saw a similar connection between Jewish identity and ministry to Gentiles. In fact, as we shall see, a number of Paul's discussions are generated directly by conflicts over the legitimacy of various conceptions of Jewish vocation and its outworking in ministry among Gentiles.

It is important to note that we are not here claiming a simple one-to-one correspondence between the concept of vocation and individual lexemes within Paul’s vocabulary. The concept of Israel’s vocation, rather, is evident when Paul uses expressions which imply a wider divine purpose for Israel and / or Israel’s Scriptures: for example, when he uses terms such as ἰσραήλ (e.g. Rom 3:19, 5:20–21, 9:23, 11:31, 15:4) and ἐκ τοῦ (Rom 9:4–5) to connect Israel or Israel’s Scriptures with God’s wider purposes in Christ. In using the concept of vocation, we are seeking to emphasize this element of a wider divine intention for Israel’s special place and / or role, even in cases where this divine intention is somewhat paradoxical and can only be discerned in light of the gospel of Christ. The concept, therefore, does not map directly onto any particular vocabulary. Nevertheless, it may be discerned in some instances of Paul’s use of certain lexemes.

For example, while the terminology of “calling” (καλέων, κληρίς, κλητός) generally denotes God’s sovereign power to achieve his creative purposes through his word, at certain points, Paul claims that God’s “calling” of one individual or group is intended to achieve a wider effect for another individual or group. A number of times, Paul uses the word κλητός to introduce himself in terms of his apostolic vocation: Paul, the Servant, is “called [to be] apostle” (Rom 1:1, 1 Cor 1:1, also Gal 1:15), which implies a role within God’s wider purposes for the nations (Rom 1:5, 1 Cor 1:6, Gal 1:6). As we shall argue, the description of the representative figure of the “Servant” in Isa 40–55 is an important source for Paul’s understanding of his divine vocation. In Isa 40–55, the “Servant” who is also the “seed of Abraham” is “called” to achieve God’s wider purposes (Isa 41:8–9; also 42:6, 49:4, 49:6). Although it has been claimed that the term by itself only implies that Paul sees himself as a special figure within Israel, we will demonstrate that Paul presents himself more generally as a representative of Israel’s special place in God’s worldwide purposes. This representative role is not, of course, simple and straightforward; in fact, it is so complex and seemingly paradoxical that Paul takes three chapters of his letter to the Romans to deal with it (Rom 9–11).

The terminology of “election” (ἐλέγχονται, ἐκλογή, ἐκλεκτός) may also be used in a vocational sense. It is used by Paul generally to emphasize God’s free choice of people, over against human decision. Exactly what the people in question have been chosen for needs to be determined from the context and relevant sources in each case. Sometimes, Paul uses the term in a vocational sense: God chooses certain people in order to achieve his wider purposes (e.g. Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15; 1 Cor 1:1, 27–28). Furthermore, in the description of the Servant in Isa 40–55, the words ἐλέγχονται and ἐκλεκτός are key terms; and at certain key points (e.g. Isa 42:1, 49:2), these terms indicate that Israel / the Servant is chosen to perform a task in relation to God’s wider purposes.

Thus, although we are not claiming that our concept of “vocation” is derived directly from any particular Pauline lexeme, nevertheless there is at certain points an implicit connection between certain Pauline uses of “calling” and “election” vocabulary and the more general concept of Israel’s divine vocation (see also Rom 11:28–29). Furthermore, the concept of Israel’s vocation is implied by Paul’s frequent discussions of Israel and / or Jews as (perhaps unwitting) instruments in God’s wider plan of salvation for the “Gentiles” (ἐθνῶν) or for “all” (νῦν) people. As we shall see, however, it is most explicit in passages where Paul himself evokes Jewish identity while discussing ministry to Gentiles.

This vocational aspect of Jewish identity cuts across the grain of an assumption that is sometimes made by Pauline scholars—the assumption that Jewish

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62 See also Rom 1:15–16, chs. 9–11, 15:7–33; 1 Cor 9:20–23; Gal 1:13–14, 4:21–31 (cf. vv. 17–19); 1 Thess 2:4–16 and cf. Eph 2:11–3:8; Col 4:11. Tit 1:10–14 also mentions a “Jewish” form of teaching which is opposed to Paul’s preaching vocation (1:3).
63 See esp. Rom 2:17–29 (ch. 5).
64 See sections 6.1.2, 6.2.2.
65 See section 4.1.
66 See esp. ch. 4.
67 See ch. 6.
68 Dunn 1988, 2542–543.
69 Muthunayagom 2000, 2, 28, 31; Vriezen 1953, 64–72.
71 We will examine many of these key passages in the course of this book (e.g. 2 Cor 11:22–23, Rom 2:17–29, Rom 11:1).
identity is simply another way of speaking about the boundaries of salvation. Being Jewish, in this view, is seen as equivalent to being “saved.” However, the value which Paul ascribes to Jewishness is clearly not soteriological in any straightforward sense. Jews, along with Gentiles, belong to the category ἄνθρωπος / πᾶσα σάρξ,73 hence they are equally subject to God’s sovereignty,74 equally morally responsible before God,75 equally subject to sin,76 equally subject to judgment for sin,77 and equally needing the gospel for salvation.78 Paul claims that Christ-believing Jews are equal with Christ-believing Gentiles in respect of being justified by faith in Christ rather than works of Law,79 receiving salvific benefits,80 belonging to the new creation,81 being baptized into Christ,82 belonging to Christ’s body,83 having an exalted status before God,84 possessing the Spirit,85 glorifying God86 and participating in eschatological suffering.87 In addition to these explicit affirmations of Jew-Gentile equality are the many other places where Paul implies the equality of Gentile and Jewish Christ-believers by applying the Jewish Scriptures or traditional Jewish categories to Gentiles.88 We are contending that Paul did not conceive of the distinct value of Jewishness principally in terms of salvation, but rather in terms of a special vocation arising from their possession of a unique divine revelation (the Law, or the Scriptures more generally). For many other Jews in Paul’s context, a careful distinc-

72 See the classic expression of “covenantal nomism” in Sanders 1977 (422–423): “All those who are maintained in the covenant [with Israel . . . ] belong to the group that will be saved.”
74 Rom 3:29. Paul nowhere explicitly identifies God as the God of Israel, Abraham or any other Israelite figure; rather, he speaks of God’s sovereignty in universal terms (Gaventa 2010, 256).
75 Rom 2:10–15.
76 Rom 3:9–18, 23; 11:32; Gal 2:17 (cf. 2:15); 1 Cor 10:1–5.
77 Rom 2:9, 12, 16; 3:9; 5:4.
80 i.e. salvation itself (Rom 116, 1031–13), mercy (Rom 1132), the blood of Christ (Rom 3:25; cf. Eph 2:13), inheritance (Rom 4:3; 6–16; cf. Eph 3:6), power and wisdom (Rom 1:14–16, 1 Cor 1:24); the “promise” (Rom 3:14–16; cf. Eph 3:6); cf. “peace” (Eph 2:14, 15, 17).
84 i.e. called by God (1 Cor 12:4, 38), having Abraham as father (Rom 4:11–18), being sons of God (Gal 3:26); cf. even more exalted language in Eph 2:13–22.
85 1 Cor 12:13; cf. Eph 2:18, 22.
86 Rom 15:10–12.
87 1 Thess 2:4.

1.3 Romans: An exercise in Jewish vocation

We have seen that Paul discusses Jewish identity explicitly in a number of places in his letters, and that he frequently links his discussions of Jewish identity with discussions of his own apostolic vocation.91 Our overall approach in this book must be sufficiently comprehensive of the variety of Paul’s discussions of Jewish identity. Hence, in chapter 3, we will conduct a broad overview of Paul’s understanding of Jewish identity in his letters, especially in relation to the concept of Jewish vocation. However, our approach must also be sufficiently focused on the most significant and sustained discussions. The remainder of our investigation, therefore, will be devoted to the single letter in which these discussions occur—Romans.

Among Paul’s letters, it is Romans which is most explicitly and directly concerned with issues of Jewish identity—even more so than Galatians. It is of course true that both Romans and Galatians contain a high concentration of lexicemes explicitly associated with Jewish identity.92 However, Galatians is not concerned directly with Jewish identity; rather, Galatians is written in response to a situation in which Jewish identity is being imposed illegitimately on non-Jews.93
Romans, on the other hand, discusses directly the significance of Jewish identity itself. Indeed, as we shall now argue, the occasion and purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans is bound up with the relationship between his apostolic ministry and his Jewish identity. Romans, in other words, is an exercise in Jewish vocation.

Most commentators admit the difficulty of discerning a single purpose for Romans. Many settle for the delineation of several related goals. Three of these goals, in particular, are most significant: Paul wants to present and commend his gospel in detail (e.g. Rom 1:16–17); to unite Jews and Gentiles in Rome around his gospel (e.g. Rom 15:7); and to secure support for a projected Spanish mission in order to further propagate this gospel (e.g. Rom 1:10–13; 15:24, 28). Some scholars lay particular stress on the issue of Jew-Gentile unity amongst the Roman congregations. Other scholars see such Jew-Gentile unity as a means for Paul to achieve his further goal of securing the Spanish mission. According to Jewett, for example, Paul's ultimate goal is to obtain financial, personal, social and linguistic support from the Roman congregations for his future mission. To secure the effectiveness of the Romans' assistance in his mission, Paul must address the disunity between Roman Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles, because such disunity would perpetuate a perverse imperialistic system of honour which was exploiting the barbarians and, if unchecked, would lead to an unwelcome reception of the gospel amongst the Spanish barbarians. The attempt to find a logical connection between Paul's missionary activity and the issue of Jew-Gentile relationships is understandable, given that both of these themes are prominent in the letter. Nevertheless, Jewett's particular proposal for the nature of the connection relies principally on a mirror-reading of Rom 1:13–16 and 15:24, 28. This logic is nowhere spelt out explicitly by Paul and thus is not sufficiently convincing. The connection between Paul's missionary activity and the issue of Jew-Gentile relationships becomes more explicable, however, when we take into account Paul's own self-presentation. It is not only the case that Paul is a preacher of a gospel with implications for Jew-Gentile relationships. Neither is it only the case that harmonious Jew-Gentile relationships have implications for Paul's ability to preach the gospel. Rather, Paul's own gospel ministry is itself an exercise in Jew-Gentile relationships. Paul proclaims a gospel that was promised in the Jewish Scriptures about a Jewish Messiah who has sent him to the Gentiles. Paul is both an Israelite and apostle to the Gentiles. Paul presents himself as an Israelite priest, administering the offering of the Gentiles. Paul's gospel ministry proceeds from the Jewish capital Jerusalem into the rest of the world. Paul's mission itself is thus a Jew-Gentile dynamic. It is not surprising, therefore, in a letter in which Paul calls his addressees to be partners in his gospel-preaching, to find him frequently addressing issues pertaining to Jew-Gentile interaction.

A further link between apostolic ministry and Jew-Gentile relationships is suggested by the significance Paul assigns to Jews in the Roman Christ-believing community itself. Paul's four most prominent addressees are Jews—Prisca and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia. Although they are Jews, they are greeted primarily in terms of their status with respect to the Gentile mission. Prisca and Aquila are well-known Jews whom Paul describes as his "co-workers" (συνεργοί, Rom 16:3), and people to whom "all the assemblies of the Gentiles" owe thanks (Rom 16:4). Andronicus and Junia are both Paul's "kinsfolk"...
That Paul sees the Jew-Gentile dynamic as an important factor in his gospel presentation is clear from his thematic statement in 1:16–17. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation “for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τῷ πρότον καὶ Ελληνι). The verb πιστεύω, along with its cognates, signifies the key defining feature of Christ-believing identity, which Paul describes variously as “faith of Jesus [Christ]” and as faith in God who justifies the ungodly and raises the dead. Yet “believers” consist of two distinct groups, “Jew” and “Greek.” These believing Jews and Greeks are united in salvation through the gospel (τε ... καὶ). Nevertheless, within this fundamental unity, Jews have a certain pre-eminence (πρότον). These two seemingly incongruous aspects of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews together form the subject of a frequent dialectic throughout the rest of the letter. On the one hand, Jews stand in an equal position with non-Jews with respect to sin, judgment and salvation through the gospel. On the other hand, Jews have a certain privilege and pre-eminence with respect to the gospel. Although, in very rough terms, Romans 1–8 tends to emphasize Jewish equality and Romans 9–16 tends to emphasize Jewish pre-eminence, this distinction is not at all absolute. In fact, the two aspects of Jewish identity interact with one another throughout the letter. In the earlier stages of his argument, Paul twice recalls his initial affirmation of Jewish pre-eminence using the key-word ἐνοριον. In particular, he discusses the significance of Jewish identity and the “value” (ωφέλεια) of Jewishness in Rom 2:27–31. Conversely, his argument about Jewish pre-eminence in 9–11 frequently refers back to the fundamental equality he has established in chapters 1–8. Thus there are two topics of discussion in Romans which are particularly worthy of our attention as we seek to discern the relationship between Paul’s apostolic ministry and his Jewish identity. Firstly, there are those passages where Paul presents his own ministry in terms of a Jew-Gentile dynamic (e.g. Rom 1:1–5, chs. 9–11, 15:14–33). Secondly, there are those passages where Jewish distinctiveness is a particularly prominent theme (e.g. Rom 2:27–29, 3:1–2, also chs. 9–11). These passages will form the bulk of our investigation in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

1.4 Preview of the argument

In this book, we are seeking to examine Paul’s Jewish identity using the concept of divine vocation. In particular, we are seeking to demonstrate that Paul viewed his own apostolic vocation as the fulfillment of Israel’s divine vocation. For many of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries, Jewish identity was bound up closely with the Law of Moses, which was seen as a special gift of divine revelation to Israel. The Jews’ distinct divine vocation, in this view, consisted primarily in keeping and teaching the Law of Moses as an exemplary witness to God’s power and wisdom in the world. Paul, as a Jew, agreed with his Jewish contemporaries that the Law of Moses was a special gift of divine revelation and thus a defining feature of Jewish identity. He disagreed, however, about the place of the Law in God’s purposes. Paul read the Jewish Law principally in light of the gospel of Christ. Indeed, for Paul, the Law of Moses was primarily a witness to the gospel. Thus the divine Jewish vocation consisted, not in keeping the Law of Moses per se, but in embodying and communicating a way of life which was focused on the gospel of Christ as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses; a way of life which issued naturally in the preaching of the gospel to non-Jews.

In chapter 2, we will review key scholars who have sought to understand Paul’s apostolic vocation in terms of his Jewish identity. We will find that the work of each of these scholars furnishes valuable insights into our own investi-

113 Cf. the plural in 10:8, 15. Since Paul implies that they had also shared a prison-experience with him, it seems best to assume that they had been prominent members of Paul’s own missionary team.
115 Rom 3:22, 26.
116 E.g. Rom 4:3, 5, 17, 24; 10:9–11; see Jewett 2007, 139.
117 See section 3.1.4 for a discussion of the word “Greek” as a designation for non-Jews in Rome.
121 Rom 2:10, 3:2–2, cf. 1:16.
In chapter 3, we will lay the groundwork for Paul's general understanding of Jewish identity by examining how Paul uses language relating explicitly to Jewish identity in his letters as a whole. We will demonstrate that when Paul speaks about Jewish identity, he is usually assuming or asserting one or more of the following three key elements:

1. **Jewish distinctiveness.** In light of the gospel, Paul sees an ongoing, distinct and positive value for Jewish identity, even within the Christian communities.

2. **Divine revelation.** For Paul, the value of Jewish identity arises primarily from the conviction that the Scriptures in general, and the Law of Moses in particular, are a special gift of divine revelation to Israel.

3. **Divine vocation.** Paul is convinced that God's revelation to Israel provides Israel with a special role or task within God's wider purposes—a divine vocation.

In chapter 4, we will examine the outer frame of Romans (Rom 1:1-15, 15:14-16:24), and show that Paul here deliberately links his own apostolic ministry with his Jewish identity. In particular, Paul presents his apostolic ministry as the fulfillment of positive eschatological expectations concerning Israel's divine vocation with respect to the nations.

In chapter 5, we will examine a key passage in which Paul contests and begins to redefine the nature and significance of Jewish identity (Rom 2:17-29). Contrary to many interpreters, we will argue that Paul is not seeking here to eradicate Jewish distinctiveness or to show that all Christians are in fact "true Jews." Rather, by locating the entire pericope (including vv. 28-29) in the "mainstream" Jewish synagogue, Paul seeks to contest and redefine the significance of Jewish identity and Jewish vocation itself. This contest over Jewish identity and Jewish vocation, of course, inevitably involves disputes about the nature and significance of the Law of Moses.

In chapter 6, we will investigate the complex dialectic in Rom 9-11 between Paul's apostolic vocation and the vocation of Israel as a whole, as represented by the mainstream Jewish community. Paul identifies strongly with Israel because Israel is central to God's worldwide purposes in Christ, as declared in his gospel (Rom 9:1-5). At present, however, Paul's vocation as apostle stands in direct antithesis to Israel's persistent reading of the Law in terms of "works," as well as her failure to keep that Law (Rom 10). Yet Paul ultimately moves his readers beyond this antithesis by demonstrating that Israel's "failure"—especially her failure with respect to the Law—and his own vocation—preaching the gospel as the fulfillment of the Law—respectively achieve complementary aspects of God's purposes in Christ (Rom 11). Indeed, Paul is confident that his own vocation and Israel's vocation will ultimately converge. Paul's identity as "Israelite" (Rom 11:1) and his identity as "apostle to the nations" (Rom 11:13) are thus seen to be two sides of the same coin. Paul thereby demonstrates that his own apostolic mission is, indeed, the true way to be Jewish.

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123 Here and throughout this book, the term "mainstream" is intended to indicate Paul's subjective understanding of the synagogue-attending Jewish community to which he finds himself opposed (see section 11, n. 33).