JEWISH

APOSTLE PAUL
Romans and Galatians in Context
IN THIS LECTURE:

1. Jews in Post-Claudian Rome
2. Romans in a Nutshell
3. The Context of Galatians
4. Paul’s Gospel and Torah
Jews and Post-Claudian Rome
Each of Apostle Paul’s letters have to be read against the particular contexts in which they were written. The biggest mistake is to read them generically, as if all of Paul’s instructions apply to all situations and all assemblies equally, ignoring the natural context. Though some may feel that Paul’s words are universally applicable, these are Paul’s teachings informed by God’s wisdom.
Paul’s Letters to Romans and Galatians lay at the foundation of Christian theology. Though read separately they must be understood together. Both letters address issues of identity in relation to Israel and to Jesus. Both solve a crisis of identity, but from very different contexts and different points of view.
The Letter to Galatians was addressed to Gentiles, to God-fearers who thought that they must draw closer to Israel and become Jews formally in order to identify with the covenants of Israel and thus benefit from their faith in Jewish Christ.

The Letter to Romans is also addressed to primarily non-Jewish followers of Jesus. Jews in Rome did not see how they could maintain close ties to non-Jews who wished to distance themselves from Israel. Because of Israel’s lack of belief in Jesus as their Messiah and the ongoing political strife with Rome the letter underlines unity with Israel.
The belief in Christ in the city of Rome was first promoted by Jewish followers of Jesus. They established home fellowships using the model of Jewish house synagogues or houses of prayer.

However, sometime during his reign, Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. Only non-Jewish members of these home fellowships remained in Rome.
Prior to Emperor Claudius, there were at least two previous expulsions of Jews from Rome (in 139 BCE and 19 CE). Ancient sources suggest that both times the expulsions occurred because of Jewish success in converting prominent Romans to Judaism.

Conversion was perceived by Romans as a form of cultural betrayal and Claudius opposed this. Some historical sources note that Claudius expelled not only Jews but also the Druids, Astrologers and Eastern Mystics. Any religious groups that proselytized were a problem.
For Romans Jewish Jesus-followers were no different than all other Jews. Some Romans who believed in Jesus would also have been seen as converts to Jewish ways of life. Claudian Rome struggled with its religious and cultural identity and Jews did not help.

"Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestos [misspelling of Christ?], he [Emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome."
(Divius Claudius 25)
“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.” (Acts 18:1-2)

As far as we know, Paul himself did not have a personal part in establishing the community of Christ-followers in Rome. But judging by the list of names he listed in his letter he knew many who were involved.
After 10-15 years, when Jews were allowed to return to Rome, the home groups they left behind were transformed in many ways. Roman attitudes towards Israel have changed.

The understanding of what Jesus did in light of the words of Israel’s Prophets has faded. The future of Israel as a people was in question. Suddenly Jewish followers of Jesus who brought the gospel to Rome were not welcome among Roman believers.
The inhabitants of Rome had many reasons to dislike Jews. Political tensions between Rome and Israel grew in intensity daily and the greatness of Rome had to triumph.
A spiritual connection to Israel's God implied a connection to the people of Israel which was not very patriotic in the context of multiple Jewish uprisings against the Empire.

Romans were in a tough spot. In the end, the desire to distance themselves from Jews was socially expedient for the well-being of Roman Christ-followers.
Paul’s Epistle to Romans is typically read as an early systematic theology of the emerging Christian Church. The book covers such important doctrines as the fall of all humanity, nature of sin, justification, predestination, election, sanctification and etc.

The Epistle is usually read with great appreciation of its theological content. As a work of theology the Letter to Romans expresses concerns about proper beliefs and understanding of Scripture.
In traditional perspective the letter to Romans outlines key doctrines to help the Roman church to grow spiritually, to avoid errors, to stand firm in their faith in Christ.

But there is another, less traditional way to read the Epistle to Romans. The letter can be read as a theological case for proper understanding of the calling and covenantal status of the nation of Israel. This would address the Israel-related identity problem among the Roman believers. The letter is addressed primarily to Romans, but it is largely about Israel.
Paul’s theology is apologetic. It is expressed not for broad and general purposes but for very specific purposes. Romans believers had to see that despite the unbelief of many Jews, Israel as a chosen nation had a bright and glorious future in God. Such was the nature of covenant.

Paul was a Jew who fully embraced apocalyptic ideas of the prophets and preached not a defeat but the restoration of Israel. For Paul the social and religious identity of Romans, who embraced Israel’s God through faith in Jewish Christ, can never be severed from Israel.
Thus the letter to Romans should be viewed not as theoretical, theological and general in its application of spiritual ideas. It is extremely practical, addressing the particular events of those days. After all, it is a real letter written to real people, experiencing real theological tensions and identity struggles. If the letter is read against the mid-first century political and social climate of post-Claudian Rome it is very practical in nature.
JEWISH
APOSTLE PAUL
Romans in a Nutshell

The Bible does not need to be rewritten, but it needs to be reread.
In Romans Paul outlines the historical and theological reasoning for reconciliation in Messiah. He calls both Jews and non-Jews to reconcile and to serve the risen Christ together, in unity, in the city of Rome.

In chapters 1-3 Paul outlines the spiritual needs of Gentiles and later Jews and then shows how they both need salvation. "...Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin" (Rom 3:9)
"... for there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23-24) "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one." (Rom 3:29-30)
Between Chapters 3 and 4 Shaul argues that true righteousness, one that comes from God, comes through faith and reliance on God, not via Torah observance. Torah has a different purpose and it is not antithetical or opposite to faith.

In Chapters 5-8 the Jewish Apostle to Gentiles explains how true experience of salvation brings both Jews and non-Jews freedom from wrath, from sin and death. And Chapters 9-11 are the very core of the letter. This is where Paul makes his main argument.
In Chapter 9 Paul laments Israel's unbelief and explains it as God’s sovereign will. He rejoices in the acceptance of the good news among the nations and connects it to Israel’s unbelief and God’s greater plan.

"What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." (Rom 9:14-16)
Paul cites the prophets of Israel who foresaw non-Jews being called “my people” by God. Only a remnant of Israel will be faithful to the LORD in the end days according to prophecies.

In Chapter 10 Paul continues to explain the righteousness which comes from faith and trust in God. He contrasts it with Israel’s quest of achieving righteousness through disciplined obedience to Torah, which is a self-focused effort rather than faith. Israel has Torah, but salvation is available to all people outside of that.
"For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Rom 10:11-13)

God makes no distinction between Jews and non-Jews when it comes to his salvation, according to the Apostle. And then, in Chapter 11, Paul emphatically states that despite all of this, God did not cast away his people.
"I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! (Rom 11:11-12)

According to Paul, Israel’s misstep does not mean they are finished. God will use the salvation of the nations to move Israel to jealousy and they will come to their fullness, and it will be glorious.
Paul reasons apocalyptically and he quotes the prophets. It is here, in Chapter 11, in the core of his teaching, Paul introduces the image of the olive tree as an illustration of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews.

Paul paints Jews as individual natural branches. Some of them were pruned off the tree because of their unfruitfulness and unbelief. And non-Jews are wild, uncultivated branches, who were grafted into a mature olive tree among other natural branches.
Paul cautions his Roman audience to carefully consider their relationship and standing before God.

"do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you... Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either."

(Rom 11:18, 20-21)
"For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved..." (Rom 11:24-26)
This is the mystery which Roman believers did not understand. Israel did not fall out of God’s grace.

The fact that God adopted non-Jews into his family does not mean he cast out Israel and replaced them with new people.

For Paul, this situation is temporary, until the fulness of the nations comes. God’s gifts are irrevocable. Israel’s future and fulness is as certain as God’s other promises. And once again, Shaul quotes the prophets to make his case.
Having made his main point, the apostle moves to the application of his teaching in Chapter 12. There is a clear road sign here “therefore”.

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Rom 12:1-2)
In Chapters 12-15 Paul speaks about the spiritual fruit, which is the only true evidence of righteousness which is from God. He instructs about serving God and one another, obeying civil authorities, having proper relationships with one another, loving one’s neighbors, not oppressing the weakest members of the community and etc. Paul calls for unity among all followers of Christ and for a worthy life in expectation of what God will do next.

In latter part of Ch. 15 and in Ch. 16 Paul closes his letter with customary greetings and admonitions.
Hopefully, taking this bird’s eye view of the Letter to Roman the central message of becomes very clear. Though the letter contains a lot of theology, the letter is very practical. The main teachings of the letter are not about salvation in general, or sanctification, or justification, but specifically about the relationship of Roman Christ-followers to Israel.

The letter addresses something unknown, a mystery, a misunderstanding Romans had about their identity in God and their connection to the Jews.
The Bible does not need to be rewritten, but it needs to be reread.
The Context of Galatians
Unlike Romans, Christ-followers in Galatia developed a sense of deep affinity with Israel. They were Paul’s own disciples. They identified with Israel so much, that they wished to become Israelites through circumcision.

Galatians also struggled with understanding their new identity and place in Messiah. And Apostle Paul took a completely different approach with them. This is why the letters to Romans and Galatians have to be studied together. Together they provide a fuller, and more balanced view of Paul’s theology.
Paul passionately dissuaded Galatians from full conversion, emphasizing that their identity is in Messiah not in Israel. The presence of the Holy Spirit connected them to God and to Israel organically, not the formal process of conversion and social acceptance.

The language of the letter is very specific. It is emotional, extremely polemical and full of hyperbole. This leads many interpreters to misread Paul in his passionate arguments.
The Epistle to Galatians is often explained as Paul’s theology of Gospel vs. Law, Freedom vs. Slavery, Christianity vs. Judaism. In reality neither Christianity nor Judaism existed yet, and there could be no conflicts between them. These are medieval theological projections on Paul.

One of the biggest mistakes in understanding Galatians is the idea that Paul’s polemic was against circumcision in general, against Torah and against Jewish way of life in general as a whole.
There is a conflict in this letter but the focus of Paul’s argument can be elusive, especially when the historical background of the problem is unfamiliar to the readers. Paul argues against “another gospel” which is not Torah or Judaism, but a teaching that non-Jews have only one path to Israel’s God – full conversion. Sadly, in years past, the words addressed to Galatians were twisted and became proof texts for theological anti-Judaism and supercessionist ideas. Many read the apostle’s teachings in this light even today.
10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.”

11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.”

12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practices them shall live by them.”

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us...”  

(Gal 3:10-13)
14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Gal 3:14)

In vs. 10 Paul says the “works of the Law are under a curse” and then he explains. Those who disobey the commandments bring a penalty or a curse upon themselves. No, Torah is not a curse, but Torah contains both blessings and curses as conditions of the covenant. And no one keeps the covenant perfectly, so they are under a curse.
In vs. 12 Paul says that “no one is justified (made righteous) by Torah”. Faith brings righteousness and “righteous shall live by faith”. And he adds that “Torah is not of faith”

What Paul means is that Torah does not require faith. That is why Shaul says, “people may live by them” - meaning – by the commandments. Simply obeying the law people benefit and receive fruits of good life, even without faith. Messiah redeemed Israel by taking the curses mandated by Torah upon himself.
According to Paul, Yeshua did this so that the blessing of Abraham could come to the nations (Gen 12). Remember, Paul is addressing non-Jews, so he is primarily focused on benefits relevant to them. Israel is not in focus here.

Torah could not bring the blessing of the Spirit to the nations. The promise is a part of the covenant and Torah is the terms of that covenant. Since the nations did not follow Torah, the promise could only come through Abraham-like faith in Christ. And Yeshua’s sacrifice that made it possible.
JEWISH

APOSTLE PAUL
Paul’s Gospel and Torah
Paul’s teaching in Galatians is very dependent on specific terminology. By faith he often means “faith in Messiah”. Righteousness is not sinless life, but “right standing with God”. Promise is the end-time ultimate promise of the covenant, the “promise of God’s presence and his Spirit dwelling with his people”.
Later, Paul relates the “promise” to “blessing” and to “inheritance” connected to the covenant. The “promise” in the context of his next illustration becomes the “inheritance” of the son (child). It has to do with his status as the heir’s, as a free person, as a nobleman.

For Paul this “inheritance” is the promise of end-time salvation, the fullness and maturity of the heir. This is the coming of “faith in Messiah”.

“St. Paul”, El Greco, c. 16th century
Thinking apocalyptically and through the words of the prophets Paul sees “new covenant” and “new heart” (Jer. 31:27-37) brought about by God’s Spirit (Ezek. 36:22-36).

To him that was “the promise” given to Abraham, that in him many families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3).
Apostle finds himself explaining the purposes of Torah... 19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions... 21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (Gal 3:19-22)
According to Paul, one of the reasons Torah was given to Israel is “because of transgressions” - to preserve and protect Israel from the destructive effects of sin and to minimize the damage. Torah is not in opposition to “promises”. On the contrary, is it complimentary. Torah does not “give life” it preserves people from total destruction. Torah has placed everyone “under the guilt of sin” and no one is truly worthy to receive God’s blessings based on obedience. So the “promise” (inheritance/blessing) is received only by faith in God’s goodness and mercy through the work of Messiah.
23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Gal 3:23-25)

Paul uses an illustration of a child and tutor. This may not be the most “Jewish way” of explaining Torah, but it should make sense to the citizens of Roman Galatia.
The “tutor” παιδαγωγός (*paidagogos*) in this text is a guardian, caretaker or a custodian. Not a tutor in a sense of teacher or academic educator, but rather a nanny. In ancient Rome this was typically a job of a household slave, charged with childcare and minors’ instruction in daily behavior, rules of life and proper conduct. Such tutor escorted the child to school and back and provided care until the child matured and could function alone.
In Paul’s illustration the Law (Torah) is like a tutor, who can be very strict and limiting, constantly telling the son he teaches what to do. His job is for the child’s good, though the child may not see it that way. The “faith that came” is not general faith but the “faith in Messiah”. That is moment of maturity when the tutor or custodian is no longer needed. The lessons learned are not disregarded and the rules remain the norm.
Minors need guidance and training because of their inexperience. But this child grew up is no longer held by the hand. He is not “under the law”, not compelled to obey. Like an adult, he knows the rules and he makes choices. He lives with the consequences of his decisions, obeying or disobeying.

Torah’s job was to lead Israel to Messiah to the “end-time promise” and according to Paul now “justification by faith” or attaining “righteousness from God” is possible through trust in Messiah’s sacrifice. Torah and faith work hand in hand.
The prophetic promise of redemption is not for Israel alone. This is where Galatians come in to their blessing. The end-time redemption overflows from Abraham’s seed to the nations of the world. This is Paul’s gospel.

“Another gospel” which Paul rejects teaches that non-Jews can receive the inheritance (promises) of the covenant only if they become Jews. Paul tells Galatians that they already have the salvation and God’s Spirit (inheritance /promise) and that means they are also Abraham’s heirs.
26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.  
28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.  
29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.  

(Gal 3:26-29)
According to Paul’s Gospel, Galatians are sons (and heirs of the inheritance) of God through adoption in Jesus. Their social status (class) does not matter to God. The spiritual gifts they receive have nothing to do with them being Jews or non-Jews, male or female, or even slaves.

As descendants from all families of the earth, promised to Abraham, they receive the promise (inheritance) through Messiah and therefore they are blessed sons.
JEWISH

APOSTLE PAUL