

# ROMANS 15

## COMMENTARY

**1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2 Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. 3 For even Messiah did not please Himself; but as it is written, “THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME” [Psalm 69:9]. 4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

15:1 Having just addressed issues that had arisen among the Roman Believers in ch. 14, regarding opinions of eating and sacred days (which this commentary has proposed took place mainly in the venue of fellowship meal times), the Apostle Paul prepares to conclude his long letter to them, with some critical admonitions. He directs his audience, “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the powerless and not just please ourselves” (TLV). To what extent is the terminology “strong” to be viewed in association with the “weak” who would only eat vegetarian in the preceding discussion of ch. 14? Many examiners feel that there is an exact correlation, while others would think that there is some shift between a specific group of “weak” Believers in ch. 14, to a more broad group in vs. 1-7. In 1 Corinthians 8:11,<sup>1</sup> for example, the weak who are targeted are those whose faith would be ruined if a presumed Believer were to eat meat sacrificed to idols in a local temple or shrine. In contrast, though, when Paul later says, “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some,” this should be taken as the weak more generally being the down and out in society. Paul is perfectly capable of varying his usages of “weak” and “strong” in his writings.

The REB renders v. 1 with a noticeable value judgment, “Those of us who are strong must accept as our burden the tender scruples of the weak, and not just please ourselves.” Surely it has to be kept in mind that whoever a reader considers *tōn adunatōn* (τῶν ἀδυνατῶν), “the weak” or “the powerless” (TLV) or “those without strength” (HCSB) to be, that such people will probably have some underdeveloped areas of their spirituality (the Goodspeed New Testament actually does have “those who are immature”). The causes of a man or woman in the Body of Messiah being weak, should not at all be classified along the exclusive lines of being Jewish or of the nations, eating kosher or not eating kosher, observing the Sabbath or appointed times or not observing them—as frequently takes place among examiners. The causes of a man or woman in the Body of Messiah being weak should more be considered by their station in life, their process of being welcomed and integrated into the faith community, and their level of love and understanding for fellow brothers and sisters.

Being a strong community of Believers, means that the shortcomings of those who are to be regarded as “weak”—for whatever reason—have to be borne by others who are not weak. The verb *bastazō* (βαστάζω) can generally concern, “**to sustain a burden, carry, bear,**” but in v. 1 surrounds

<sup>1</sup> “For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Messiah died” (1 Corinthians 8:11).

“bear patiently, put up with: weaknesses of the weak” (BDAG).<sup>2</sup> In the work of the Kingdom that needs to be performed, those who are “strong” in the Lord, frequently have to go *above and beyond the call of duty*, in contrast to those who might have a more minimalistic faith.

What Paul has stated in v. 1 is fully consistent with his previous word, “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you fulfill the *Torah* of Messiah” (Galatians 6:2, TLV). And as he will later assert in Philippians 2:5, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Messiah Yeshua...” The credo of those who are strong and affirmed in the Lord, taking on a greater load than others—in emulation of the Lord no less—is a definite thrust of Paul’s own worldview and ministry service. C.E.B. Cranfield appropriately observes, “Under the gospel the strong, those who, because of the inner freedom which has been given to them, have plenty of room in which to manoeuvre, have an inescapable obligation...to help carry the infirmities, disabilities, embarrassments and encumbrances of their brothers who are having to live without that inner freedom which they themselves enjoy.”<sup>3</sup> While the subject matter of eating and sacred days has just been addressed by Paul in ch. 14—which we have concluded surrounds the status of clean fare (v. 20) served at fellowship meals and optional days of fasting (vs. 5-6)—the weaknesses of others are not at all limited to these categories. Far too frequently, various persons in the Body of Messiah get tripped up on issues of Scriptural minutiae, in strict adherence to their interpretations of opinion or detail, and others have to be more flexible and conscious of the larger, more pressing issues facing the faith community. Although he takes a customary view that the “weak” here are those who observed the kosher dietary laws and Sabbath, Douglas J. Moo is still widely correct in recognizing,

“This does not necessarily mean that the ‘strong’ are to adopt the scruples of the ‘weak.’ But what it does mean is that they are sympathetically to ‘enter into’ their attitudes, refrain from criticizing and judging them, and do what love would require from them.”<sup>4</sup>

*Putting oneself into the position of another, understanding their position and perspectives, is absolutely vital for Messiah followers.* The Apostle Paul himself did this in his word of 1 Corinthians 9:20-22.<sup>5</sup> Certainly to also be recognized is the service of Yeshua the Messiah Himself, in the strong bearing with the weak: “When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ‘HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES’ [Isaiah 53:4]” (Matthew 8:16-17).

**15:2** Mature Believers are to be concerned with the condition of others, as Paul says, “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (ESV). V. 2 is paraphrased by The Message as, “Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, ‘How can I help?’” Paul has just said in 14:19, “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another,” and as he will say later in Philippians 2:3-4, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

A concern for others, not just inside but outside of the faith community, and their position or station in life, was Paul’s deep conviction: “I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved” (NRSV). This most especially concerns the required love for neighbor that God’s people are to fulfill (Leviticus 19:18; Galatians 5:14), something

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<sup>2</sup> BDAG, 171.

<sup>3</sup> Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 730.

<sup>4</sup> Moo, 866.

<sup>5</sup> The various translation and perspective issues surrounding 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 are addressed in the author’s article “What Does ‘Under the Law’ Really Mean?—A Further Study,” appearing in *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

which in Paul's estimation, "does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*" (1 Corinthians 13:5). Everett F. Harrison is right to state,

"Indeed, the refusal to live a life of self-pleasing should characterize every believer, whether strong or weak, and should extend beyond the narrow circle of like-minded people to all whom we come in contact—in short, to our neighbor, whoever he is."<sup>6</sup>

N.T. Wright also draws our attention to how, "the strong must help those who, through their own current powerlessness, have these 'weaknesses.' They must support and encourage them, not browbeat them with demands for more 'strength' than they can presently muster."<sup>7</sup> As Paul would direct in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "try to imitate me, even as I myself try to imitate the Messiah" (CJB), which extends to many facets of how both Yeshua and Paul ministered and served others, as well as endured others' shortcomings.

**15:3** The need for strong Believers to bear up with the weaknesses of others, is detailed by Paul with an appeal to Tanach Scripture. He states, "For even Messiah did not please Himself, but as it is written, 'The insults of those who insulted You have fallen on Me'" (TLV). Quoted by Paul is Psalm 69:9, "For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me," something also referenced in John 2:17.

The main point being made by Paul, to the stronger Believers, might be best seen in how, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; cf. Matthew 20:28), and how Messiah followers are to emulate their Lord. Yeshua the Messiah decisively came to accomplish the will of His Father (John 4:34), which is something that involved both suffering and death (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:5-8). As it guided Paul's own service, he would testify, "I have been crucified with Messiah; and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Yeshua the Messiah, the eternal and uncreated Son of God, is One who left His glory in Heaven to serve fallen humanity, endure rejection, and be subjected to a humiliating death. *Surely, Believers in their service to one another, can put up with others' human limitations.* Even when taking a customary view of the sacred days and eating previously discussed in ch. 14 to be the Sabbath, appointed times, and kosher, Moo still properly observes,

"Paul may be trying to get the 'strong' to put their own 'suffering' in perspective: occasionally abstaining from meat or wine or observing a special religious day should not seem like much of a burden in comparison with what Christ had to suffer for the sake of others."<sup>8</sup>

Among fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, people might have to dismiss a personal preference, because of the needs of someone else. Not drinking alcohol in the presence of an alcoholic is a commonly referenced example. Messianic people who are kosher-friendly, but not stringent about their observance, might have to give way at times for others who are stringent, such as not mixing meat and dairy products in the presence of others who are stringent. Usually, unnecessary divisions in the Messianic movement take place over finer issues of opinion, and take place when people do not keep their views to themselves, in circumstances when they do not have to speak.

**15:4** Believers in Israel's Messiah are to take their direction from the Scriptures of Israel: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (RSV). Paul had directed the Corinthians earlier, "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved...Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction,

<sup>6</sup> Harrison, in *EXP*, 10:151.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, in *NIB*, 10:745.

<sup>8</sup> Moo, 869.

upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). The Tanach Scriptures have important messages *and warnings* in them, in terms of not repeating the mistakes of previous generations. Paul’s approach in Romans is more focused on the encouragement and hope noted in the record of the Tanach, in that God’s faithfulness to His people in past generations is to surely be present for those living in the present. One might be reminded of the example of Judas Maccabeus, “Encouraging them from the law and the prophets, and reminding them also of the struggles they had won, he made them the more eager” (2 Maccabees 15:9).

There is little doubting that in v. 4, *tōn graphōn* (τῶν γραφῶν) or “the Scriptures,” are a reference to the Tanach or the Old Testament. The Kingdom New Testament has the notable rendering, “Whatever was written ahead of time, you see, was written for us to learn from, so that through patience, and through the encouragement of the Bible, we might have hope.” The CJB is more forthright, as it has, “For everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that with the encouragement of the *Tanakh* we might patiently hold on to our hope.” How have contemporary examiners of Romans, approached Paul’s word that the people of God are to truly turn to the Tanach or Old Testament to find a high degree of solace and confirmation for their Messiah faith?

F.F. Bruce expresses the proper thought, “The Scriptures (here, of course, the Old Testament Scriptures) provide ample evidence of God’s fidelity, especially when they are read in the light of Christ’s fulfillment of them; therefore their readers are encouraged to place their hope in the Lord and wait patiently for him.”<sup>9</sup> No mature Believer in Yeshua should be found criticizing the Messianic hope witnessed in the Tanach, as they should certainly search the Tanach and Apostolic Writings for validation that Yeshua is the Redeemer. Still, the Tanach contains much more than just prophecies or expectations of the Deliverer to come; the Tanach contains many other important words and instructions for the people of God, independent of Messianic expectation. James R. Edwards is right to state, “The Scriptures were not something [Paul] referred to, but something he lived from, for what **was written in the past was written to teach us**. The Scriptures were, of course, ancient, but not in the sense of being ‘dated.’ In his day, what was oldest was normally thought to be truest because it had survived the most difficult of all tests—time!”<sup>10</sup> The Apostle Paul did not just turn to his knowledge of Tanach Scripture to figure out whether Yeshua really was the Messiah; he turned to Tanach Scripture for its words of “patience and consolation” (Wesley New Testament) as well.

David H. Stern has a few poignant thoughts to make in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* on v. 4:

“Christian seminarians under pressure sometimes make jokes about ‘sermons based on Leviticus,’ implying that they consider much of the *Tanakh* boring, with little to say to Christians...Many Christians go further and simply discard the Old Testament in favor of the New. They are not usually explicit about it. Instead they acknowledge verbally that the Old Testament is inspired by God, but in practice they ignore most of it. No wonder Jews often regard the *Tanakh* as the Jewish Bible and the New Testament as the Christian Bible—Christians have fostered that impression by their own attitudes and behavior!

“But Christians who weight the New Testament above the Old not only disparage Sha’ul’s teaching and ignore the example of himself, the other New Testament authors and Yeshua; but they deprive themselves of the **encouragement**, comfort and good counsel (12:1N) that **the Tanakh** offers in helping believers **patiently hold on to** their **hope** of complete salvation (as spelled out earlier, 8:17-30). Also, they are the ones most likely to fall prey to antisemitism in the

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce, 241.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, 338.

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Church, since they remove themselves from three-quarters of God's inspired Word, which gives the fundamental and unshakable ground their identifying with the Jews as God's people."<sup>11</sup>

My present ministry focus on writing commentaries throughout the 2000s and 2010s, while featured more on the Apostolic Scriptures, is more because of an overwhelming need in our Messianic faith community to have New Testament commentaries, than anything else. Yet, I have already produced survey workbooks of both the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures, and one of my intermediate goals is to actually produce a single volume work with summary articles on each book of the Bible ("Bible messages"). In other projects I have been coordinating (most recently in 2014, the *Messianic Kosher Helper*), one will see that I have certainly written papers and summaries on various passages from the Tanach, and that the Tanach forms a definite foundation for my reading of the Holy Scriptures as a whole, and the trajectory of salvation history. I suspect that most Messianic people would share my orientation.

In his commentary on Romans, John Calvin made a point to uphold the value of the Tanach or Old Testament for the Protestant Christians of his era:

"This notable passage shows us that the oracles of God contain nothing vain or unprofitable. At the same time also it instructs us that it is by the reading of the Scripture that we make progress in godliness and holiness of life. We ought, therefore, to strive to learn all that is delivered to us in Scripture. It would be an insult to the Holy Spirit to imagine that He had taught us anything which it is of no advantage to know. Let us also know that all that we learn from Scripture is conducive to the advancement of godliness. Although Paul is speaking of the Old Testament, we are to hold the same view of the writings of the apostles. If the Spirit of Christ is everywhere the same, it is quite certain that He has accommodated His teaching to the edification of His people at the present time by the apostles, as He formerly did by the prophets. This passage also provides an excellent refutation of the fanatics who maintain that the Old Testament is abolished, and that it has no relevance at all to Christians. Are they to have the impertinence to turn Christians from those books which, as Paul testifies, have been appointed by God for their salvation?"<sup>12</sup>

This is not to say that there have not been less than useful approaches to v. 4, and its word about the Tanach Scriptures. Moo is one who says, "The OT, though no longer a source of direct moral imperative (6:14, 15; 7:4), continues to play a central role in helping Christians understand the climax of salvation history and their responsibilities as the New Covenant people of God."<sup>13</sup> This is basically the view that the Old Testament is background to the New Testament, but nothing that much more. The Old Testament is mainly consulted for the Messianic prophecies of Jesus of Nazareth, but is thought to teach contemporary Believers very little about their current, post-resurrection era relationship with God. Perhaps in response to this sort of reasoning, my Old Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, Brian D. Russell, told our Introduction to Old Testament class that the Tanach should actually be regarded as "the Bible," and the New Testament as the "Appendix."

There is a widescale ignorance of the Tanach or Old Testament among contemporary Christians that is unacceptable, where many fail to understand that it contains messages of hope and encouragement for God's people today. I certainly know of Messianic people who have cut the introductory page labeled "New Testament" out of their Bibles, to stop what can often be an unnecessary division in the minds of many. Yet, there are many Messianic people who demonstrate a widescale avoidance of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, and their understanding of the

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<sup>11</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 436-437.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, pp 304-305.

<sup>13</sup> Moo, 869.

Tanach itself tends to be limited to the Torah or Pentateuch. Indeed, all of us definitely need to have a more wholistic view of the relationship of the Biblical books. Tim Hegg is right to direct,

“Note that it is to the Scriptures that we look as we seek to be encouraged in this walk. Since the Ruach has illumined the sacred text to us, we find it is not something of a condemning word, but one of encouragement—the very source of strength and joy needed to persevere in the ways of God’s grace. How often has it been the story of the righteous that God’s divinely inspired word, contained in what we know as the Scriptures (γραφῆ, *graphe*), have been the solace in which they have found refuge from the storms of life as well as wisdom and instruction for walking in a way that pleases their Master! What a pity that the very Scriptures to which Paul refers in this verse (the Tanach) have often been relegated in our times to mere ‘background’ for the ‘New Testament.’ But in reality, the whole word of God (Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures) remain God’s eternal revelation and thus the hope and stay of the righteous.”<sup>14</sup>

**5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Messiah Yeshua, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah.**

**15:5** Paul states his personal desire for the Roman Believers, “And may God, the source of encouragement and patience, give you the same attitude among yourselves as the Messiah Yeshua had” (CJB), as he wants his audience to be mature emulators of the Messiah, recognizing His ultimate service. He certainly wants the Roman Believers united, and not to be divided over petty issues of opinion. Vs. 5-7 certainly do beg readers questions about the unity that Paul wanted to see manifested, and whether the unity was to emerge into more of a unity of practice, or remain broadly constrained to a unity of purpose for those in the Body of Messiah.

What Paul wants to see emerge among the Roman Believers is *to auto phronein* (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν), “the same thing to think” (Brown and Comfort),<sup>15</sup> “likeminded” (KJV), “the same attitude” (Common English Bible), or “a mind united” (Phillips New Testament). One might be reminded of what is communicated in 1 Chronicles 12:38, “All these, being men of war who could draw up in battle formation, came to Hebron with a perfect heart to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest also of Israel were of one mind [*lev echad*, לֵב אֶחָד; a united heart, ATS] to make David king.” The unity of “one mind” that Paul desired to see the Romans come to, was one of purpose, where the big issues of the Kingdom of God, redemption, and blessing of one another would come into focus—and the minor issues would not be points of unnecessary contention or division. Grant R. Osborne concurs,

“Paul asks that they learn to ‘think the same thing’ or find a harmony of mental outlook, the very thing he commanded of the Philippians in Philippians 2:2 and 5 and of the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3:11. It is of course certain that he is not asking them to come to agreement on the issues, for that is his whole theme in 14:13-18 and 15:1-2, that they learn to live with their differences. So it must mean that they learn to focus on the major issues of agreement and ‘agree to disagree’ in the areas of conflict.”<sup>16</sup>

With some more contemporary Messianic issues being considered, Hegg’s observations are also most worthwhile:

“Paul has pointed to the inner workings of the Godhead as the model of relationship for the congregation of Messiah. Even as Yeshua submitted to the Father and did His bidding—an obedience

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<sup>14</sup> Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 430.

<sup>15</sup> Brown and Comfort, 571.

<sup>16</sup> Osborne, 378.

that lead [sic] to the lowest of deaths (Philippians 2:5-8), so we are to submit one to the other in order that the oneness portrayed in the Godhead might be realized (though, of course, never in such perfection) in us. Dividing away from the community over matters of personal *halachah* are therefore not allowed. We must strive to find within ourselves the patience and strength to forego our personal *halachah* at whatever point it would create a division within the community.”<sup>17</sup>

15:6 Unity in a Kingdom venue, such as that of worshipping the Lord, is where minor differences of opinion are supposed to go by the wayside. As Paul wants to see of the Romans, “so that together with one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord *Yeshua* the Messiah” (TLV). This should recall previous encounters of the people of God being gathered before Him in unity. In Exodus 24:3 it is witnessed, “Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice [*qol echad*, קוֹל אֶחָד] and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!’” Similarly, when the Ark of the Covenant was brought in to the newly constructed Temple, “in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice [*qol-echad*, קוֹל-אֶחָד] to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD *saying*, ‘He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,’ then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud” (2 Chronicles 5:13). The term Paul employs to describe this action is *homothumadon* (ὁμοθυμαδόν), “with one accord” (LS).<sup>18</sup> TDNT further summarizes,

“The term denotes common interest rather than personal feeling and expresses reaction to some outside event. In the NT it stresses inner unanimity in response to teaching (Acts 8:6) or in prayer (1:14). Tensions exist, but unanimity is achieved in the magnifying of the one Lord (Rom. 15:16). It is a response to God’s action for the community and the world (cf. Acts 1:4; 4:24). It is thus a gift of God to the praise of God.”<sup>19</sup>

Noting the scene of worship as being the place of unity among men and women of God, James D.G. Dunn appropriately explains,

“Once again it is not at all accidental that in this winding-up passage Paul recalls one of the key elements in the indictment of humankind and expresses his vision in terms of its complete reversal: when all, Jew and Gentile, will render God the worship which is his by right of creation, and now also of salvation...Nor is it accidental that Paul expects this unity to come to expression in *worship* rather than in unanimity of *opinion* (14:1-6).”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 431.

<sup>18</sup> LS, 556.

<sup>19</sup> H.W. Heidland, “*homothumadón*,” in TDNT, 684.

<sup>20</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:841.

**7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Messiah also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Messiah has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME” [Psalm 18:49]. 10 Again he says, “REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE” [Deuteronomy 32:43]. 11 And again, “PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM” [Psalm 117:1]. 12 Again Isaiah says, “THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE” [Isaiah 11:10].**

**15:7** There is a noticeable textual variant in v. 7, which in a wider selection of modern versions, reads as “Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (RSV). The main difference is whether *humas* (ὁμᾶς) or “you,” or *hēmas* (ἡμᾶς) or “us,” is the correct reading, with many concurring that the former has much better textual support.<sup>21</sup> The real difference is whether or not Paul is personally including himself among those who the Messiah has received, for his emphasis here. This is likely not the case, as his attention is more on his audience themselves (cf. 14:3).

Interestingly enough, given the motif of “welcome each other, just as the Messiah has welcomed you into God’s glory” (CJB), Ben Witherington III takes this in the direction of the Roman Believers being warned against xenophobia toward outsiders. Certainly within a still-developing and mixed faith community, of largely Jews, Greeks, and Romans, needing to be welcome and accepting of all who were being drawn in, was most imperative. As he states,

“Paul knew that a major portion of what we term ‘sin’ consists of obsession with ‘otherness,’ xenophobia (literally ‘fear of strangers’). With the Fall, the richness of creation’s diversity within a framework of relatedness was deformed into a differences-as-divisions understanding. Relationship gave way to suspicion and its inevitable fruit of alienation—the ultimate refugee experience. Strangers are essentially ‘people without a place’ and thus vulnerable. Yet, within the Christian hospitality tradition, only strangers depending on God are capable of truly welcoming other strangers.”<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, ultimately the redeemed are to be regarded as strangers or aliens in the present world (1 Peter 2:11), on their way to the new world with Messiah Yeshua as King. In his discussion of the Romans needing to be welcoming to one another, Witherington notably goes on to mention the issue of Ancient Israel welcoming the outside sojourner into its midst (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 24:14-22). Such directions are to only be further intensified, given Yeshua’s own teaching on feeding the hungry or visiting those in prison (Matthew 25:36-41).

**15:8** The Apostle Paul makes a very important assertion, in stating, “For I declare that Messiah has become a servant to the circumcised for the sake of God’s truth, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs” (TLV). The origins of the Messianic promise are rooted in the covenants formally given to Ancient Israel, first manifested among the First Century Jewish people. Some interpreters like to bring out the thrust of Yeshua’s own word, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24).<sup>23</sup> While Paul will discuss the welcome inclusion of the nations in God’s plan of redemption (vs. 9-12), it is by no coincidence that he draws the attention to his fellow Jews first (1:16; 2:9-10). As Colin G. Kruse directs,

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 536.

<sup>22</sup> Witherington, pp 346-347.

<sup>23</sup> If at all necessary, consult the sub-section “Yeshua the Messiah and the ‘Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,’” in Chapter 3 of the author’s book *Israel in Future Prophecy*, “Cross-Examining the Two-House Teaching.”

“Paul’s purpose in telling his audience that ‘Christ has become a servant of the Jews’ is probably to emphasize, by the example of Christ, the need for Gentile believers to likewise serve their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters, and also possibly to counteract any anti-Semitic attitudes on their part (cf. 11:17-21).”<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the graceful inclusion of the nations, within the redemption of Israel, is not at all to take place at the expense or the exclusion of Israel proper—as has been made clear by the tenor of chs. 9-11 preceding.

It cannot go unnoticed how some versions have rendered *peritomēs* (περιτομῆς) not literally as “the circumcision” (NASU) or “the circumcised” (RSV/NRSV/ESV), but instead as “the Jews” (NIV) or “the Jewish people” (CJB). Why did Paul make the point to call his fellow Jews “circumcised”? Aside from the widescale Jewish adherence for males to be circumcised on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3), as Paul himself had been (Philippians 3:5), it would have been an important way for him to affirm the ongoing and continuing value of circumcision for Jewish Believers. Simply because non-Jewish Believers were not required to be circumcised as proselytes, in order to be integrated into the people of God, did not mean that Jewish Believers should stop doing it, as he would later be falsely accused of actually promoting (Acts 21:21).

The thrust of Paul’s message, especially in terms of the strong bearing the weaknesses of others (v. 1), in emulation of Yeshua’s service (vs. 2-3), is the mutual respect, and indeed emerging dependence, that the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers will have within the Body of Messiah. Edwards fairly describes, “Gentiles, on the one hand, must understand that their salvation comes through the Hebrew patriarchs. Jews, on the other hand, must understand that God’s promise to the patriarchs was from the beginning inclusive of Gentiles (e.g., Gen. 12:3). Christ is the **servant** of both, of Jews by **confirming the promises made to the patriarchs**, of Gentiles by fulfilling the original purpose of the covenant with Israel.”<sup>25</sup> It is, to be sure, in a scene of worship before the Creator God (v. 6), where the common hope and salvation in Messiah Yeshua, is to be primary, to the natural differences and distinctions people possess.

Sadly, Paul’s intention has not been too well heeded over the many centuries since he communicated to the Romans. More blame than not falls at the feet of Believers from the nations, who have not always tried to serve the Jewish people, understand the Jewish struggle throughout history, or stand against anti-Semitism. Instead, rather than mutual honor and interdependence and blessing being the plan of action seen in the Body of Messiah—replacement of the Jewish people and a dismissal of the promises to the patriarchs, has more widely been seen. Hegg makes some observations on Yeshua “becoming a servant to the circumcision” that cannot go unnoticed:

“[T]he word ‘has become’ (γενενησθαί, *gegenesthai*) is a perfect infinitive, giving the sense that not only had Yeshua become a servant of the Jewish people, but that He continues to be such. Here is yet another motivation for the Gentile believers to both receive and encourage the Jewish part of the community, for in doing so they will follow Yeshua Himself Who continues to act as a servant on their behalf. Thus, any rejection of Israel as God’s chosen people is likewise a rejection of Yeshua and His present work on their behalf.”<sup>26</sup>

Of course, certainly from a First Century Jewish standpoint, there would have been various challenges and prejudices to overcome in recognizing that it had been God’s plan all along to include redeemed persons from the nations into His realm. As is seen in vs. 9-13 following, there are quotations issued from David, Moses, and Isaiah, covering a cross-section of the Tanach. It is attested that God has

<sup>24</sup> Kruse, 532.

<sup>25</sup> Edwards, 340.

<sup>26</sup> Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 432.

always had a plan to spread His goodness to the world at large, and see those from the nations be recognized as His own, in addition to Israel proper. In the view of John R.W. Stott, “For, although the Old Testament contains many prophecies on the inclusion of the Gentiles, and indeed the promise to Abraham was that the nations would be blessed through his posterity, yet God had made no covenant with the Gentiles comparable to his covenant with Israel. Consequently, it was in mercy to the Gentiles, as it was in faithfulness to Israel, that Christ became a servant for the benefit of both.”<sup>27</sup> However, even though Paul’s own Jewish people were the formal recipients of the promises, covenants, and blessings—the inclusion of the nations within Israel’s polity, is something certainly seen in the Tanach, and something which reaches its climax for those who have saving faith in Israel’s Messiah. As Wright astutely puts it,

“It is not that God has done one thing for Jews, and another thing for Gentiles; God has designed mercy for all (11:28-32), but as 9-11 made clear, the purpose for Israel always had the Gentiles in mind, and the purpose for the Gentiles was always that they would come in to the fulfilled, returned-from-exile Israel.”<sup>28</sup>

**15:9** As Paul continues, he will substantiate the service that the Messiah has provided for the inclusion of the nations within the Kingdom, with references made from the Tanach or Old Testament. He begins with stating, “and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy. As the Bible says: *That is why I will praise you among the nations, and will sing to your name*” (Kingdom New Testament). V. 9 actually includes a quotation of Psalm 18:49, “Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O LORD, and I will sing praises to Your name.” This is something that also appears in 2 Samuel 22:50, “Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the nations, and I will sing praises to Your name.”

Osborne is keen to direct, “In the psalm, the defeated nations are invited to join in praise of the divine warrior, Yahweh. Here the converted Gentiles join the Jewish Christians in worship.”<sup>29</sup> This is detectable as Psalm 18:47 previously spoke of “The God who executes vengeance for me, and subdues peoples under me.” King David has been successful, because of the power of God, and has integrated non-Israelites into his realm, praising God for it. Bruce properly describes, “David, having incorporated non-Israelite nations in his empire counts them as now belonging to the heritage of Israel. For the Christian application of this idea *cf.* James’s quotation of Amos 9:11-12 (LXX) at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17).”<sup>30</sup> Yeshua, the quintessential Seed of David (1:3), in bringing justice to the Earth by His ministry and sacrifice, sees to it that those from the nations are brought in to His rule.

**15:10-11** Paul makes an appeal to Moses’ Teaching, by quoting from Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX) in v. 10: “Be glad, O nations, with his people” (NETS). As Cranfield notes, “It is an express summons to the Gentiles to rejoice together with God’s own people.”<sup>31</sup> While restitution will be made for the wrongs done to Israel proper, as prophesied by Moses, the nations are by no means excluded or disenfranchised from the process. V. 11 continues with the further inclusive, “Praise the LORD, all nations; laud Him, all peoples! (Psalm 117:1).

**15:12** Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 11:10, a widely recognized Messianic prophecy, is made from the Septuagint: “And there shall be on that day the root of Iessai, even the one who stands up to rule the nations; nations shall hope in him, and his rest shall be honor” (NETS). What is important here, is noting how the Hebrew *asher omed l’nes ammim* (אֲשֶׁר עֹמֵד לְנֶס עַמִּים) was translated in the LXX as *ho anistamenos archein ethnōn* (ὁ ἀνιστάμενος ἀρχεῖν ἔθνω), the verb *anistēmi* (ἀνίστημι) notably being

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<sup>27</sup> Stott, 372.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, in *NIB*, 10:747.

<sup>29</sup> Osborne, 382.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce, 243.

<sup>31</sup> Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 746.

able to involve “**to raise up by bringing back to life, raise, raise up**” (*BDAG*).<sup>32</sup> That Yeshua’s reign is innately connected to His sacrifice and resurrection from the dead, cannot be overlooked. Such a sacrifice endured and resurrection accomplished, should necessarily focus the attention of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers off of their idiosyncratic differences, and onto their common need for salvation and cleansing from sin.

Jesse was the father of David (1 Samuel 16:5-13; Matthew 1:6), and the Messiah is regarded as being the son of David (Matthew 1:1; Isaiah 11:1; Revelation 5:5), as the One who will reign on his throne. Noting the declarations of Isaiah 11:1-12:6, Wright concludes that “the wider context of Paul’s citation fills in the depths of meaning that he has no space to spell out: Isaiah speaks here of God’s purpose to renew the whole created order, and to gather the remnant of Israel, together with the Gentile world, into the one community of salvation (Isa 11:1-12:6).”<sup>33</sup> Yet for Wright, the appeal to the Tanach or Old Testament by Paul does not just have the intention of seeing how broad-sweeping the God of Israel’s plan has always been for the redemption of Israel proper also involving the nations at large; the Messiah’s reign also had something to communicate to the political leaders of the First Century. Wright directs, “The idea of a risen Messiah ‘ruling the nations’ is, further, packed with explosive political implications, especially in a letter to Rome whose own emperor claimed to rule the nations.”<sup>34</sup>

**13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. 14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. 15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, 16 to be a minister of Messiah Yeshua to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

**15:13-14** As he closes his lengthy letter to the Roman Believers, the Apostle Paul genuinely does have a positive disposition toward these people, as he wishes them the best, and desires them to fulfill the work of God’s Kingdom. He expresses it as much in v. 13, “May God, the source of hope, fill you completely with joy and *shalom* as you continue trusting, so that by the power of the *Ruach HaKodesh* you may overflow with hope” (CJB). While it is true that Paul’s letter to these Believers has included various admonitions and corrections, on the whole he expects the better of them to manifest: “I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (v. 14, TNIV). It can be noted how the verb *noutheteō* (νοουθετέω) could involve, “**to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct**” (*BDAG*),<sup>35</sup> but the negative aspects of instruction or admonition *as warning* should probably not be pressed too far. As Moo observes, “there is no reason to think that Paul is insincere in what he says of them here. Through trusted co-workers (e.g. Prisca and Aquila; cf. 16:3), Paul had access to good information about the Roman Christian community—information about both its problems and strengths.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *BDAG*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, in *NIB*, 10:748.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *BDAG*, 679.

<sup>36</sup> Moo, 887.