

From Small Words: Reading Deixis and Scope in Romans

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Introduction

In his letter “to all those dwelling in Rome, beloved of God and called holy,”¹ for whom, and about whom, did Paul write and to what end?² Even narrowed to the first phrase of Rom 11:26, “And thus all Israel will be saved,” the questions remain too broad, and the ways of approaching them too manifold for the compass of an article.³ The present work proceeds from small words and phrases

¹ Rom 1.7. (Author). Translations are RSV unless otherwise noted.

² Questions of the intended audience of Romans are crucial to, though distinct from, the equally important question of about whom Paul is writing at any given point in his text. On the question of intended audience, I am convinced that Paul is writing with a Gentile audience in mind. Here I rely on Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography*, (Coniectanea Biblica, NT 40; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003); Rafael Rodríguez, *If You Call Yourself a Jew: Reappraising Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015). The question of who Paul is writing about varies from the clarity of “you Gentiles” in Rom 11.13 and “... my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites” in Rom 11.3-4 through the vagaries of pronouns with unclear references and deictic terms of unclear scope such as a “to each” in Rom 2.6.

³ This article is a development of a paper presented at a session at SBL 2015 on whether Paul thought Jews had to become Christians to be saved. Larry Hurtado offered a response both trenchant and humane that has had a significant effect on the form of this article, though this constitutes no claim that he would endorse much, if any, of what follows. Papers in that session by Mark Nanos and Jason Staples as well as their contributions to discussion on that occasion made for a very fruitful session.

that are not the canonical *topoi* of Christian theology or of Paul's thought. Rather than initially teasing out heavyweights like faith, works, law, gospel, salvation, etc.,⁴ the point of entry here lies in several deictic terms: "all," "we," "thus," "you,"⁵ as well as Paul's characteristic negation *μη γένοιτο*. Such small acts of language-making are the stones that determine the course of Paul's eschatological, mystical flow of big concepts. So when Paul writes in Rom 11:26 *καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται*, the interpretive challenge lies not in Israel or in salvation, but in the means and mode—*οὕτως*—and the scope—*πᾶς*. Both are terms of deictic reference. Starting "from small words," this paper moves through a larger structure of interpretation, namely plot, and a larger concept in Pauline thought, namely "salvation." The path of reading these larger structures is determined by the possibilities highlighted in the examination of "small words."

Returning to the realm of small words, the function of deixis and deictic in this argument deserve clarification. Both narratology and linguistics use deixis to describe terms that refer beyond the self-contained control of a text: I, you, we, he, she, this, that, all, none, etc. Mieke Bal's work on narratology has provided an introduction to deixis. In the second edition of her *Narratology*, she explains deixis as "words that only have meaning in the context in which they are uttered, such as 'I' and 'you,' 'yesterday,' 'here' or 'there.'"⁶ It bears note that formal linguistics specifies deixis further by emphasizing that the object of contextual reference has not been previously indicated in a given discourse and, in some cases, uses the term *anaphora* to discuss contextually dependent reference within discourse.⁷ For two reasons, this distinction will not operate here: first, "anaphora" has a completely different and potentially distracting reference within classical rhetoric which may prove deceiving in the disciplinary

⁴ Even more importantly there will be an active, programmatic avoidance of the anachronistic reification of "Christian" and "Christianity;" these terms/concepts are usually brought to bear on readings of Paul. See Gager, *Reinventing Paul*; Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Real Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

⁵ Gaston notes that "the key word for understanding Romans is *pas*, "all," or "every," *Paul and the Torah*, 116.

⁶ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 30.

⁷ Other linguists see *anaphora* as a subset of the more general phenomenon of deixis, e.g. Horst Ruthrof, "Implicit Deixis," *Language Sciences* 47 (2015): 109.

context of the study of ancient Judaism and the prehistory of Christianity;⁸ and second, there is value in remaining open about what exactly Paul has prefigured in his discourse in Romans.

This paper starts from small words and their deictic reference and attempts to understand Paul's difficult dialogue of justification and salvation in the epistle to the Romans. Perhaps smaller even than deictic terms are the nuances of tone that pervade human speech and which we strive to inject into writing. With a fuller set of data than is available for the study of Romans, one might inquire into the influence of a rhetorically trained lector in the delivery of Romans to the saints dwelling in Rome. The second part of this paper explores Paul's use of the phrase *μὴ γένοιτο* as his most prominent written act that approximates prosodic voicing in order to subtly steer the course of his argument and the understanding of his listeners. The paper ends with a reflection on the "plot" (narratively speaking) of salvation within which Paul's deictic reference and prosodic voicing gain their legibility and coherence. The prize in mind is an interpretation of Rom 11:26, though the territory ranged across is inevitably larger.

Deixis: Who, What, When

Over a hundred years ago—long before the New Perspective, long before Krister Stendahl, or the radical, or *Sonderzeit*, reading of Paul—James Moulton wrote of Paul's works in his *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, saying "I and we chase each other throughout these documents without rhyme or reason," and that "every theory for regularizing Paul's use of these pronouns breaks down entirely."⁹ Questions of reference cannot and will not be solved simply by appeals to linguistic system. Even "context" is too weak a tool. Deixis needs to be resolved on the basis of a discourse context¹⁰ and on the basis of the prosodic "voice" that modifies "aboutness."¹¹ The entire enterprise is an exercise

⁸ See Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 446, 473, 562.

⁹ James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. 1, Prolegomenon*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 86.

¹⁰ A discourse context is semantically wider than an utterance context. Deixis resolution then depends on a reconstruction of a wider Pauline discourse rather than just a search for nearby simple or proper nouns to which a deictic term is understood to point.

¹¹ The concepts of "voice" and "aboutness" are articulated by Ruthrof, "Implicit Deixis," 111.

undertaken in hope of an “intersubjective mentalism”¹² wherein an author attempts to generate an utterance that is aligned with cultural rules in such a manner that effective reference conforms to intention.¹³

We

9:24: “us whom he has called”

According to Rom 9:24, God has called people from Jews and Gentiles. About whom is Paul talking? How does he relate to this “us”? What is it to be called? Paul is, in Steve Mason’s well-known formulation, a chameleon. Here Paul identifies himself with his audience in the manner of a confident rhetorician establishing ethos.¹⁴ There is no justification for understanding Paul’s “us” to have a wider scope than the union of audience (and audience type, Gentile) and speaker. Ideas that Paul is speaking generally about Jews and Gentiles forming a new “we/us” are without direct foundation. Simultaneously enacting and rejecting the teleology of orthodox commentary, James Dunn notes that “the sense of the ‘us’ as a new and distinct body (cf. Eph 2:15), let alone a ‘third race,’ is still over the horizon.”¹⁵ And “called?” The question is serious. Robert Jewett sees Rom 9:23 as moving from overreaching pottery analogy into “the straightforward arena of divine calling.” Calling (καλέω) is not simple. Paul understood himself to be called to preach the good news of Christ to the Gentiles, namely the possibility that loyalty to Christ — which minimally entailed refraining from the worship of other Gods than Christ and the God of Israel — brought Gentiles into the position of being inheritors of Yahweh’s promises to Abraham. He understood Gentiles to be called to enact this, giving worship only to Yahweh and his Christ,¹⁶ and living in a practice of anticipating their imminent heavenly state. The vagueness of this latter formulation accomodates many of the difficulties Paul faced in practical terms as time

¹² Ibid., 115.

¹³ Una Stojnic, Matthew Stone, and Ernie Lepore, “Deixis (Even Without Pointing),” *Philosophical Perspectives* 27, no. 1 (2013): 507–9.

¹⁴ John W. Marshall, “Paul’s Ethical Appeal in Philippians,” in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Stanley E. Porter, JSNTSup 90, 1993, 357–374.

¹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans. 9-16*, (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 571. Sanders is much more optimistic about Paul creating a third entity or even a “third race,” *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 172–99.

¹⁶ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003)

marched on and Christ did not return. The “us” here is not a universal humanity, but a manner of cultivating identification of Paul’s audience with the author figure addressing them. The calling is specific to their location as Gentiles and his location as apostle to them.¹⁷

You and They

*10:9-10 you who confess, the one whose heart is loyal*¹⁸

In Rom 10:9-10, Paul articulates something that looks like the future “Christianity,” using a second person singular. This indefinite pronoun can, in theory, be as general as “if you play with fire you’ll get burned” or as specific to a group as “if you eat healthily you may reduce your risk of prostate cancer, but it’s hard to be sure.” The second “you” is grammatically indefinite, but is semantically specific to men. As I’ve noted, the pronouns of Romans are a minefield, but this second person singular and the third person singulars around it, should, I would argue, be closely connected to the specificity of Paul’s Gentile audience:

1. Chapter 10 begins with a third person plural discussion reiteration of Paul’s own individual desire, expressed in 9:1, for the blessing of his “kinsmen by race” [τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα].

¹⁷ For an important exploration of Paul’s active constitution of “Gentile” as a category to be applied by Jews to non-Jews, see Ishay Rosen-Zvi and Adi Ophir, “Paul and the Invention of the Gentiles,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105 (2015): 1-41.

¹⁸ ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν, καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ· καρδίᾳ γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην, στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν· Rom 10:9-10

RSV: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.”

JWM: “for if you confess Lord Jesus with your mouth, and offer loyalty with your heart, because God raised him from the dead, you will be saved; for one who is loyal in heart is towards rightness, but the one who is confessing by mouth is towards salvation.” [if ὅτι is taken as a causal particle] or, “for if you confess with Lord Jesus with your mouth, and believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved; for one who is loyal in heart is towards rightness, but the one who is confessing by mouth is towards salvation. [if ὅτι is taken introducing the content of a verb of knowledge or articulation, in this case πιστεύσῃς]. Note Jewett’s translation of 10:10: “by heart faith is evoked towards righteousness, but by mouth confession is evoked towards salvation”.

2. The vague second person singulars of 10:8-10 stand in contrast to the ignorance ascribed to “them.”
3. The continuation of a hypothetical third person singular in 10:11-13 is talking specifically about a Gentile case even as it denies a distinction between Jew and Greek. This is clear in 10:14 which faces the case of the impossibility of being loyal to a Lord of whom one has never even heard; that is to say, 10:14 shows that the allusion to Joel 2:32 in 10:13 is being explicated with regard to Gentiles, such that the problem it entails is solved by the activity of Paul’s enterprise.

While Paul is no doubt angry about the disrespect of other Jews towards his enterprise, he does not assert that they have never heard of their God. The you/they distinction is clarified especially in Rom 11:28, and 11:30-31.

These brief soundings into the deictic terms of Romans 9 and 10 demonstrate that Paul’s discourse coheres as a “local language game” rather than necessarily implying a fully generalized (one might say scripturalized) discourse of the fate of humanity. His writing is, unsurprisingly, specific to time and place, but this has destabilizing implications for the extent to which the historical Paul maps onto the Paul of Christian self-construction of subsequent centuries. The historical Paul’s deixis functioned in a temporally and locally specific discourse; the discourse of the Christian saint Paul functions with much wider and more generalized pretensions.

Tone

Tone of voice, pacing, and the range of functions that linguists call “prosodic contouring” have massive effects on meaning in natural language contexts. This is what Ruthrof means by the modification of aboutness by voicing. Voicing also seems comparable to deixis in the depth of its contextual dependency. To give modern English examples, the ostensibly nonsensical “yes, no” can be quite legible as the affirmation of an interlocutor’s negation if the context and voicing are appropriate. Conversely “yeah, right” can function without effective ambiguity as an affirmation or as a complete and sarcastic negation, again depending on context and voicing. “Aboutness” is subservient to voicing.¹⁹

In written contexts, it is more difficult for a writer to grasp control of this feature of language. Modern orthography includes punctuation, bolding, italics, etc. for purposes including the substitute functioning of prosodic contouring, and some of these devices are deployed in modern editions of

¹⁹ See again Ruthrof, “Implicit Deixis,” 111.

Romans. Greek includes moods such as the vocative which, though it would be subject to prosodic contouring in spoken language, may serve to contribute to a reconstruction of prosodic contouring in written speech. *μὴ γένοιτο* in the optative is of course the signature line of Romans that functions prosodically. In the line of translations from Geneva 1557, through King James 1611, Revised Version 1900, the Revised Standard Version 1946, and the New Revised Standard Version 1989, it was only with the Revised Standard Version that *μὴ γένοιτο* was translated as “By no means!” with an exclamation mark.²⁰ None of the previous versions in this lineage used an exclamation mark here, though all of this lineage of translations used exclamation marks for Romans 11:33.²¹ *Μὴ γένοιτο*, then, is a clear instance of Paul attempting to inject his letter with a proxy for prosodic contouring or voicing in order to set his text within a larger discourse and disposition. What follows in this section is an examination of those instances in Romans in which Paul avails himself of the optative mood with *μὴ γένοιτο*; it proceeds with the understanding that Paul strove thereby to undertake a written deployment of prosodic contouring in order to underscore a point that was crucial to his rhetorical purpose.

²⁰ Geneva: I demande then, Haue they stombled, that they shulde fall? God forbid: but through their fall, saluation cometh vnto the Gentiles, to prouoke them to follow them.

KJV: I say then, Haue they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall saluation is come vnto the Gentiles, for to prouoke them to ieaousy.

RV: I say then, Did they stumble that they might fall? God forbid: but by their fall saluation is come unto the Gentiles, for to prouoke them to jealousy.

RSV: So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.

NRSV: So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.

²¹ Geneva: O the depnes of the riches, bothe of the wisdom, and knowledge of God! how vnsearcheable are his iudgemets, & his wayes past finding out!

KJV 1611: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

RV 1881: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!

RSV: O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

NRSV: O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

The places where he uses μή γένοιτο are places where Paul anticipates that his audience will unjustifiably accuse him of portraying God as unjust, or Judaism as abandoned by God. As I understand it, his worry is that his Gentile followers conceive their options as either (1) converting to Judaism through the established process of becoming a proselyte (Torah observance including circumcision, dietary observances, sabbath keeping) or (2) considering Judaism to have been superseded and abandoned by God and thus exalting themselves over Judaism. Paul's gospel asks for neither of these, instead urging his followers to undertake loyalty to and worship of Jesus as Christ, to forsake worship of other gods, and to live ethical lives in anticipation of the imminent eschaton. So when does Paul avail himself of the Greek equivalent of "No way!" with an exclamation mark (or maybe more than one)? The following list paraphrases the questions that Paul answers with μή γένοιτο:

- Rom 3:4 Has God rejected his people?
- Rom 3:6 Is God unjust?
- Rom 3:31 Does Paul overthrow the law?
- Rom 6:2 Should one sin to bring grace?
- Rom 6:15 Should one sin because one lives under grace?
- Rom 7:7 Is the law sin?
- Rom 7:13 Does the law, which is good, bring death?
- Rom 9:15 Is God unjust?
- Rom 11:1 Has God rejected his people?
- Rom 11:11 Has Israel fallen?

These ten instances of questions boil down to two or perhaps even one. The one is "Is God unjust?" Paul cannot and will not conceive of his God as unjust. He seeks to demonstrate that no matter by what direction one approaches that question, the answer is an emphatic negative— μή γένοιτο! The second question, the one that for Paul's audience seems likely to raise the first, is whether God has rejected the Jewish people. Paul is emphatic that the people of God have not been rejected, that the mode by which they maintain their covenant with God — namely law, referring to the whole relational complex characterised by E. P. Sanders as "covenantal nomism"²² — is not abrogated for them nor is it sin for them. It remains then to explore exactly when and why Paul exclaims μή γένοιτο. What issues surround this grammatically uncommon

²² E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

intervention into his own discourse, and in what direction does it attempt to steer the understanding of his audience?

Romans 3

Chapter 2 of Romans ends with Paul subordinating the value of circumcision of the flesh to “circumcision of the heart, in spirit not letter” (Rom 2:29). The danger of the argument — understood, as this reading does, as an attempt to dissuade Gentiles loyal to Christ from undertaking the proselyte duties of circumcision, sabbath, *kashrut*²³ — is that Paul’s effort to argue against the process of becoming a proselyte will be construed as an argument against Judaism, and thus as an argument against the justice of God, claiming that the allegiances of God are fickle and disloyal (ἄπιστος). Paul defends vigorously the benefit of circumcision to Jews and the loyalty of God to his people. Thus the passage is not an outlier or a wild goose chase.²⁴ Thus the suggestion of C. H. Dodd that Paul’s answers should logically be “None whatever!” is misplaced and the exclamation of Paul in Rom 3:2 is an expression of profound conviction rather than a symptom of the uncontrolled intrusion of “nothing but national prejudice” into an otherwise coherent argument.²⁵ But Dodd expresses what other commentators only enact. Dunn claims that the idea of Jewish advantage is the “target” of Romans 2, in spite of the fact that Paul affirms major and manifold advantage in Rom 3:2. For Dunn, Paul’s constant target is “Jewish

²³ I read the interlocutor of Rom 2:17-29 as a Gentile who has become a proselyte to Judaism. Arguments to this effect are made previously by Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Rodríguez, *If You Call Yourself a Jew*; Matthew Thiessen, “Paul’s Argument against Gentile Circumcision in Romans 2:17-29,” *Novum Testamentum* 56, no. 4 (2014): 373–91; Joshua D. Garroay, *Paul’s Gentile-Jews: Neither Jew nor Gentile, But Both* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Thorsteinsson, *Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2*.

²⁴ Contra the critics in Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 240.

²⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 242. Though Dodd’s own words are “His [Paul’s] Pharisaism — or shall we say, his patriotism? — was too deeply engrained for him to put right out of his mind the idea that somehow the divine covenant with mankind had a ‘most favoured nation clause,’” (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932], 43.), both Jewett and Cranfield read the meaning as “prejudice”. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 177.

overconfidence,”²⁶ and the “pride” of “the typical Jew.”²⁷ The problem is that Paul has two concerns that are indivisible and yet in tension: (1) God’s continual faithful relation to his people Israel and (2) God’s unimpeachable justice. It’s clear that commentators have relatively little space for the first concern and place massive emphasis on the second. But the two exclamations of *μή γένοιτο* in Rom 3:4 and 3:6 serve to describe both convictions as non-negotiable no matter how powerful the tension is between them.

The first *μή γένοιτο* in Rom 3:4 follows on the challenging interpretive ground of the letter’s first two chapters.²⁸ That Paul deploys clichés of Gentile moral depravity is widely acknowledged by scholars;²⁹ Paul indicates that current *ἀπιστία* does not undermine the loyalty of God to his people.³⁰ At the end of the chapter, 3:31, discussing the loyalty that positions Gentiles as righteous and the loyalty that positions Jews as righteous, Paul corrects any misunderstanding that loyalty overthrows the law: *μή γένοιτο*. The burden of

²⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans. 1-8*, (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 137.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 131. Dunn’s key move in his New Perspective work is to change the character of the pride that is Paul’s target to “pride in ethnic privilege” rather than “pride in self-achievement” James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 14 cf. 46, 58. See especially *Ibid.*, 95. “the ‘new perspective’ was justified in highlighting the issue of Jewish pride in election and status before God as a fundamental factor explaining Paul’s formulation of his teaching on justification.” Compare also James D. G. Dunn, “What Was the Issue between Paul and ‘Those of the Circumcision?’” in *Paulus Und Das Antike Judentum: Tübingen-Durham-Symposium Im Gedenken an Den 50. Todestag Adolf Schlatters (19. Mai 1938)*, ed. Martin. Hengel and Ulrich. Heckel (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1991), 310. “It is the typical Jewish ‘boasting in the law’ (2:23), the climax of the indictment, which Paul is seeking to undermine — that is, the pride in covenantal nomism.” For Dunn, Paul’s antithesis of “Christ and cross versus circumcision” entails also “new creation versus old creation where pride in ethnic identity cloaked a more fundamental dependence on powers other than God” *The New Perspective on Paul*, 29. This is the claim: that Judaism without Christ was characterized by “pride in ethnic identity cloaked a more fundamental dependence on powers other than God.”

²⁸ On the complex diatribal structure of the early chapters of Romans see Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*; Jewett, *Romans*; Dunn, *Romans. 1-8*. Cf. Note

²⁹ The idolatry of Rom 1:22 is the clearest example of a Gentile “they.”

³⁰ Resolving and justifying the particular resolution of the first person plural and singular pronouns and verbal forms in 3:5 and 3:7 that surround the next *μή γένοιτο* in 3.6 is a complex task that exceeds the scope of the current paper, but I would suggest that the dizzying oscillation of Paul’s self-identification is at the surface of the discourse here.

Romans chapter 3 is to answer three questions: Rom 3:4 Do Jews lack advantage? No!; Rom 3:6 Is God unjust, No!; Rom 3:31 Does Paul overthrow the law? No! Abraham Malherbe's description of Paul using *μή γένοιτο* to fend off what he considers the mistaken, hostile, or simply stupid inferences that people have drawn from his teaching is apt.³¹

Romans 6

Rom 6:1-2 arises to forestall the logical implication of Rom 5:20. Having said that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more," Paul must dissuade his audience from sin. And so he asks, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" answering, "*μή γένοιτο* — By no means!" This question and answer serves to pull his argument back from the evident (potential) excess of Rom 5:20, but also the numerous instances in chapters 4 and 5 of Romans where a Gentile reader might draw negative conclusions about Judaism. Who is the "we" who were enemies of God until reconciliation was brought by Jesus (Rom 5:10)?³² Such a picture is hard to apply to Jews, given Paul's description of their advantage and of God's constant loyalty to them (Rom 3:1-8). Paul says that "death reigned from Adam to Moses," implying that with Moses came life and reconciliation to those who received God's offering to his people given through Moses, namely Torah. The action of Jesus in Rom 5:15 and Rom 5:18 extends the cessation of the reign of death beyond those for whom Moses effected the end of that reign. Nor does Romans 5 make much sense of the valorization of Abraham in Rom 4:1-23. Who is the first person plural of the enemies (*ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν*) in Rom 5:10? Who is the first person plural slanderously charged (*βλασφημούμεθα*) in Rom 3:8? Who is the "we" who may or may not have benefit (*προεχόμεθα*) one verse later in Rom 3:9? Who is the first person plural of the children (*ἡμῶν*) of Abraham in Rom 4:16? Context supplies more and less certain answers for each of these first person plurals, but no system of interpretation can read them as all the same "we/us." The victim of the slanderous charge in 3:8 is Paul himself, the same first person plural that received a commission (*ἀποστολήν*) in Rom 1:5 and who offers thanks in the first person singular in Rom 1:8. This shifting is well known in Paul's letters. The children of Abraham in 4:16 seem to

³¹ Abraham J. Malherbe, "MH Γ H aham in the Diatribe and Paul." *Harvard Theological Review* 73, no. 1-2 (1980): 231-40.

³²Literally *εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, πολλῶ μᾶλλον καταλαγάντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ*. The first person plural of *κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ* indicates that the "we" of the passage were enemies of God.

be not only the “the adherents of the law but also ... those who share the faith of Abraham.”³³ Dunn and Jewett both squirm around the clear implication that Paul declares Jews who do not share his convictions about Jesus are still children of Abraham, but both affirm that Paul has clearly said so in Rom 4:16.³⁴ This fluidity of reference in Paul’s pronouns forms the condition for the exuberant section that the *μη γένοιτο* of Rom 6:2 reins in.

Romans 5 describes the process by which the death of Christ reconciles God’s enemies to God. The first person plurals in this section combine indexical universality and deictic particularity, and after Paul pulls back from the extremes of his index in Rom 6:2, he emphasizes the ethical life necessary for the audience (second person plural, e.g. *υμεεις*) emphasizing that they are “not under law but under grace.”³⁵ Again Paul pulls back with a similar question and identical answer “Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? *μη γένοιτο*” (Rom 6:15). The description of the former sinful state that follows, “... you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity” (Rom 6:19), gestures to classical Jewish polemics about the moral degeneracy of Gentiles as well as Paul’s own indictment of Gentile depravity in Rom 1:21-32. Thus, the two instances of *μη γένοιτο* in Rom 6:2 and 6:15 both deal with whether the relation of sin, grace, and law should foster sin on the basis of Gentile devotees of Jesus living under grace rather than *υπο νόμον*. Again the pronouns and declined verbs are slippery, but the idea that changing the Gentile path to

³³ οὐ τῶ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον ἀλλ ἂ καὶ τῶ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ.

³⁴ Dunn suggests that “in a more careful statement of his position” Paul might insert “qualifications” to this declaration (1988:216). Dunn’s own suggestion that though Paul can affirm the promise given to the Jewish people, he would have had to deny the promise to “those who sought to lay claim on God by the merit of self-achievement.” This reservation of something for Paul to oppose sits awkwardly with Dunn’s repeated claim that Paul’s target is pride in ethnic privilege than with pride in self-achievement.” (2008:14; cf.2008:58; 2008:117; 2008:129; 2008:132; 2008:203n36; 2008:475-76). Jewett (2007:331) describes the contrast between “the adherents of the law” and “those who share the faith of Abraham” as “somewhat odd”. He recognizes Paul as “not excluding non-believing Jews from Abraham’s inheritance”, though he winces at the inconsistencies such an inclusion introduces into Paul’s argument (or Jewett’s reconstruction of Paul’s argument). Cranfield reads a distinction between Jewish Christian and Gentiles Christians in this passage. Methodologically, this was more plausible in 1975 than it is forty some years later, but the ahistorical contamination of those categories have been increasingly recognized in the last twenty years.

³⁵ οὐ ὑστέστε ὑπο νόμον ἀλλ ἂ ὑπο χάριν. Gaston argues that “under the law” refers specifically to the negative functions of the law for Gentiles, *Paul and the Torah*, 31.

salvation from ὑπὸ νόμον to ὑπὸ χάριν should open the door to the type of sin that many aspects of law function to forestall or manage is one Paul anticipates and forecloses twice with a forceful μὴ γένοιτο.

Romans 7

The uses of μὴ γένοιτο in Romans 7 operate in another diatribal context, though one somewhat different than the diatribe of Rom 3-4. After Rom 7:1-6 carries to conclusion the meditation on Gentile movement from law to grace, Rom 7:7 resumes the diatribal style. Emma Wasserman has argued strongly that the dialogue of Rom 7:7-25 operates in a platonic mode representing the negotiations of the parts of the soul.³⁶ Wasserman's intervention establishes that the pronouns of Romans 7 are not functioning in reference to Paul as a tormented introspective subject, but naming positions within a diatribal treatment of one of the constituent objects of an ancient anthropology. In Rom 7:7 and 7:13, Paul strives against any conclusion that the law is sin or that it brought death. It is, on the contrary, "holy, just, and good." The now familiar within the letter, but prosodically arresting, μὴ γένοιτο functions to prevent readers from drawing an anti-nomian and potentially anti-Jewish conclusion from his presentation of their relation to law in the context of his narration of the economy of the soul.

Romans 9-11

After the exalted conclusion of Romans 8, Paul changes tone sharply, from triumph over every power in the universe to anguish for his "kinsmen according to the flesh"³⁷ (Rom 8:3), namely Israelites/Jews (Rom 8:4).³⁸ Paul enumerates the advantages that accrue to them: "the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises." These — including the law — are unambiguous positives for Jews. How such a valorization of law can square with the descriptions of its function in Rom 4:15 bringing wrath, in Rom 5:20 increasing trespass, or in Rom 7:5 arousing sinful passions, is a difficult question only when law is supposed in Paul to have the same function for Jews as for Gentiles.³⁹

³⁶ Emma Wasserman, "The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Revisiting Paul's Anthropology in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2007): 793–816.

³⁷ τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα.

³⁸ Ἰσραηλῖται

³⁹ Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 28.

As Romans 9 continues, Paul explores the reference of “Israelite” and of “children of Abraham,” noting that there are contingencies and points of falling away such as Esau’s loss to Jacob of his priority and his birthright (Rom 9:10-13). Knowing the story of Jacob’s deceptions and machinations, Paul presses his interlocutor into service again, asking “Is there injustice on God’s part?” to which Paul answers with characteristic force: *μὴ γένοιτο*. The instance of *μὴ γένοιτο* in Rom 9:14 stands alone to protect the sovereign freedom of God to make and keep commitments to the privilege of one people over another. By its prosodic force, *μὴ γένοιτο* is pressed into service to bind together the tensions that afflict Paul’s argument: one God, two people; impartial justice; and differential advantage and path to salvation.

The two instances in Rom 11:1 and 11:11 are even clearer in their defence of the relation of God and his people: he has in no way rejected them; whatever intransigence they, or some⁴⁰ of them, may currently exhibit does not constitute a fall, or a departure from their relationship to their God. What stands then in Rom 11:26, that “all Israel will be saved,” ties up the commitment Paul has striven to maintain all through his letter, that God is faithful to his people, that God’s promises are kept, that Israel’s path is a path to Israel’s salvation. The how of this is another matter, but the absence of any abrogation of Judaism in favour of a commitment to Jesus that would replace it or describe a conversion from it is striking. E. P. Sanders has, at least partially, recognized Rom 11 as a place where Paul’s commitments are in tension with each other in a way that Paul does not resolve. According to Sanders, the dilemma of Rom 9-11 “arises from Paul’s twin sets of convictions, those native to him and those revealed”⁴¹ Sanders is unwilling or unable to see these two sets of convictions as equal for Paul, and Sanders prioritizes the “revealed” convictions he generally characterizes as Christian over the “native,” i.e. Jewish, convictions that he positions as nearly superseded by revelation. This highly Christian construction of Paul’s pre-Christian conceptual apparatus undermines the historical-critical credibility of Sanders’ otherwise very sensitive and erudite reading of Romans 9-11. While there should not be doubt that “the deliverer” of Rom 11:27 is, in Paul’s understanding, Christ, this does not in any way suggest that Jews have to have the same disposition of worship, conviction, and avoidance of works of the

⁴⁰ Dunn interprets “some” [*τινες* in Rom 3:2] to mean “the bulk” of the Jewish people *Romans. 1-8*, 131.

⁴¹ E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), 197.

law that Paul sees as incumbent on Gentiles responding to Paul's enterprise. Sanders works hard to make prominent traditional *topoi* of Christianity that Paul does not. Subsequently Sanders reasons "just as the salvation of Gentiles depends on faith (11:20), we should conclude that so does that of Israel"⁴². While Rom 11:23 seems to be the only serious contender as a source for Sanders' "should" it is by no means clear precisely what *ἀπιστία* consists of in this context. It surely seems an overreach to imagine something that fully mirrors the response Paul desires from Gentiles to his mission. Sanders ask whether the jealousy that Paul seeks to engender in Rom 11:14 will save some Jews, while the action of the Gentile mission and the deliverer of Rom 11:27 will save "all Israel" at the Parousia⁴³. Sanders' "second question," however, reveals that he is unwilling or unable to balance the twin convictions Paul struggles to keep afloat. Sanders asks "whether or not Paul consistently maintains the equality of Jew and Gentile"⁴⁴. I must answer *μὴ γένοιτο*. Of course Paul does not consistently maintain the equality of Jew and Gentile. He asserts it forcefully and inconsistently and contradicts it repeatedly.⁴⁵ He enumerates great advantage, priority, differential treatment by God, and more.

The endeavour of warning Gentiles not to reframe their opportunity for salvation into an indictment of Israel is the evident purpose of the most prosodically distinctive textual voicing in Paul's letter to Romans. This raises forcefully the question of the larger discourse that frames Romans and within which Paul's letter finds its significance and coherence. Mark Nanos' question is more than "interesting," it lays bare the contradiction of constructions of "all Israel" that see it becoming Christian to be saved: "How could Paul expect 'all Israel' to be saved if he believed that his gospel was the process whereby Jews lost their Jewishness and historical Israel was nullified along with her gift of Torah?"⁴⁶ Of course, Paul's expectations had no such condition.

The Plot of Salvation

The preceding examination of deixis and voicing in Romans demands a return to a discursive context for Paul's writing. By this I mean not only a literary,

⁴² Sanders, *Paul*, 195.

⁴³ Sanders, *Paul*, 195.

⁴⁴ Sanders, *Paul*, 195.

⁴⁵ Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

⁴⁶ Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 183.

linguistic, or utterative context, but a context of reasoning and expectations. I consider specifically the meaning of salvation and the “plot” by which it is situated in Paul’s discourse. This attention to discursive context is a move from small words to big concepts, namely plot and salvation. The point of attending to small words has, unapologetically, been to address big questions.

Salvation

In Rom 1:16-17, Paul asserts that his *εὐαγγέλιον* is the power that brings *σωτηρία* to those who stand loyally [*τῷ πιστεύοντι*]. From a much broader set of his discussions, it is clear the action of “saving” or rescuing is from the judging wrath of God.⁴⁷ The content of Paul’s good news is that those who are loyal to the Christ will be treated as the seed of Abraham in the context of God’s eschatological judgment.

For Paul, and equally for others in Greco-Roman antiquity, “salvation” ran along a continuum from individual to corporate, and the terms *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία* operate in a semantic field of rescue, preservation, maintenance of practices, safety, security, health and well-being [See *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon* *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία*]. Overwhelmingly, these semantic fields are primarily corporate. The specific content *σωτηρία* that Paul offers his audience is participation in the lineage of Abraham, specifically as the seed “σπέρμα” of Abraham.⁴⁸ Again, this is an immensely corporate vision of the benefit Paul has put on offer for Gentiles.

Paul’s use of *σωτηρ*- terms in Romans is distributed throughout the letter, but is not especially illuminating of the character of the concept. His discussion of salvation in 1 Corinthians may serve to provide context for his uses of *σωτηρ*- terms in Romans. Paul’s discussion of saving and salvation in 1 Corinthians should complicate our conception of what Paul understands by these terms. In 1Co 3, Paul describes Jesus Christ as the only possible foundation for the type of structure he is building, namely a means for Gentiles to attain a share in the promises made to Abraham. Paul suggests that people’s building on that foundation may be as strong in relation to the coming judgment as gold, silver, or precious stones, or as weak as straw in the face of flames. Clearly Paul

⁴⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 138 offers as examples Rom 5.9-10, 13.11; 1Co 3.15, 5.5; Php 1.28, 2.12, 1Th 5.8-9. In some cases God’s wrath is less explicit than in others.

⁴⁸ Terence L. Donaldson, “Paul within Judaism: A Critical Evaluation from a ‘New Perspective’ Perspective,” in *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 277–301.

sees the possibility of correct or incorrect, more correct or much less correct, building upon the foundation which is Jesus Christ, but does not associate salvation with correct building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. According to Paul, those whose work of building perishes in the fire of judgment — wood, straw, and hay seem likely candidates — shall still be saved though “as through fire” (ὡς διὰ πυρός). I suggest we take two insights away from this: first, to be rescued/saved/maintained/remembered/preserved may occur despite convictions (and actions) regarding the role of Jesus in a mission to Gentiles that Paul understands as mistaken; second, that reward may be multi-tiered.

Turning to the second instance of the language of *σωτηρία* in 1 Corinthians, the communal problem that Paul addresses in 1Co 5:1-5 further complicates our understanding about whatever economy or systemic understanding of *σωτηρία* might be operating in his works. A man has committed a grievous incestuous sin, has left no evidence of repentance in Paul’s account, and is subject to a communal ritual of cursing, a ritual in which Paul will participate as a sort of spiritually telecommuting member of the Corinthian assembly. The man is to be consigned to the domain of Satan for the destruction of his flesh in order that his soul may be preserved on the day of the Lord.⁴⁹ Something is keeping this man “in” though it is neither corporeal participation in the Corinthian assembly nor evident individual virtue as loyalty to Jesus or any other explicit righteousness. I am at a loss. I offer only hypotheses that I cannot verify: (1) the man offered deep and sincere repentance that Paul does not mention; (2) the man maintained a loyalty to Jesus that Paul did not mention; (3) the man was a son of Abraham by means of Jewish descent and active and faithful participation in the covenantal nomism of the Jewish sons of Abraham (which again Paul does not mention); or (4) Paul was rhetorically exaggerating to emphasize the priority of *πνεῦμα* over *σάρξ* with no sincere hope for the preservation of the man’s soul on the day of the Lord Jesus. Combinations of these factors as well as more I have failed to consider may be relevant. Still, this very specific discussion by Paul of the *σωτηρία* of an individual should caution us in any confidence in our understanding of how *σωτηρία* functions for Paul.

So then, what is it, in the context of Romans, “to be saved?” For modern interpreters, the content of “to be saved” gains its simple and obvious ultimacy

⁴⁹ παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ Σατανᾷ εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός, ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα σωθῆ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου.

most readily from Luther, but Paul's failure to read Luther has been, at least implicitly, noted and lamented by generations of scholars, especially commentators. That "lack" cannot be rectified, but we have a duty as scholars to delutheranize *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία*, to understand its importance without giving it a Lutheran ultimacy that forecloses variety within it, contingency in its attainment, or uncertainty in its distribution.⁵⁰ Did Paul consider in much detail what it took for Jews to be saved or Jews to be sons of Abraham? Our evidence does not indicate such an effort. Were not those questions in a basic sense already solved? The "maintenance" sense of *σῶζω* and *σωτηρία* may help us see their positioning of Jews in relation to their God. *Σῶζω* and *σωτηρία* are in this sense very conservative terms, and it may be beholden upon us to recognize Paul's conservatism in claiming that "all Israel will be saved/rescued/preserved/maintained."⁵¹

Plot

Rapp and Gerrig start their 2002 article on plot-based vs. reality-based interpretation by noting how little ambiguity there is regarding whether James Bond will escape from the situations of extreme and frankly unreasonable peril that characteristically form the opening scene of his movies. No matter how unlikely it is that Bond will successfully fend off myriad attackers while dancing on top of a moving train, or repel a brood of sharks deep underwater without the aid of breathing apparatus, audiences know that a realistic assessment of evidence is no basis for predicting whether Bond will survive and go on to foil his traditional bad guys, drink his favoured martinis, and find his characteristic romantic partners. He will go on. This interpretation of a James Bond initial scene is plot-based rather than reality-based. It is the type of interpretation that proceeds from rich plots that engage readers and thus predispose them to plot-driven interpretation.⁵² Rapp and Gerrig conclude that "readers' preferences can

⁵⁰ Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West." *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215.

⁵¹ Anders Runesson helpfully dismantles the simple binary of "universal" and "particularistic," with its ubiquitous correlations to "good" and "bad" and "Christianity" and "Judaism," noting especially the way in which Paul configures Judaism as a closed ethnicity though the practices of proselytism that Paul opposes treat Judaism as potentially open. Anders Runesson, "Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity? Some Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000): 55–75.

⁵² David N. Rapp and Richard J. Gerrig, "Readers' Reality-Driven and Plot-Driven Analyses in Narrative Comprehension," *Memory & Cognition* 30, no. 5 (July 2002): 780.

affect their mental simulations.”⁵³ Here we come to a crux in the interpretation of Paul by scholars and the interpretation of Christianity itself by early Christians: engagement and preference strongly skew interpretation away from reality and towards plot-based expectations and extrapolations. So we need to destabilize the Christian “plot” (by which I do not mean conspiracy—*μὴ γένοιτο!*—but only the traditional arc of narrative coherence).

Paul does not address Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. He addresses Gentiles who have committed to the worship of Jesus and discusses with them the role of Israel in God’s plan and the meaning of their means of affiliating with the God of Israel as the seed of Abraham. Specifically — and here E. P. Sanders’ characterization of Paul reasoning from solution to plight is insightful and apt — Paul’s commitment to Christ as the means of Gentile affiliation drives his evaluation of traditional means of Gentile affiliation to the God of Israel. Paul, who apparently at one time preached circumcision to Gentiles,⁵⁴ came to the conviction that loyalty to Jesus, including its expression in exclusive worship, was the sufficient condition for Gentiles to become the seed of Abraham, that Jesus was the anointed vice-regal power of the God of Israel to inaugurate the end times and bring rectification to creation: the exaltation of God’s people, the fulfilment of God’s promises, the recognition and worship of myriad Gentiles. This was the solution. For Paul then, this solution generated a plight. The old means of Gentile affiliation to the God of Israel — namely circumcision, food discipline on the model of Jewish dietary discipline, and sabbath observance — now formed a path that constituted a dismissive, disrespectful rejection of the solution that God had provided. To use the previous mode was, for Paul, to scorn, to disdain, to disrespect Jesus, and to treat Jesus, and therefore his God, with contempt. For Paul, it was of crucial importance that the Gentiles he had brought in by the solution of Jesus did not treat his solution as a second-rate or merely preparatory means of affiliation to the God of Israel.

Paul had substantial success in convincing Gentiles or groups of Gentiles that they could become heirs of Abraham by offering exclusive (or primary) worship to the God of Israel and his Christ. He was less successful in persuading them that further activities of affiliation by means of well-known

⁵³ Ibid., 781.

⁵⁴ Gal 5:1

practices were a bad idea. He seems to have had very little success in finding a generous reception among other Jews who didn't share his conviction about loyalty to Jesus, inasmuch as they had heard of Paul's enterprise directly or indirectly. Thus, as many scholars have said — Gaston, Gager, Stowers, Nanos, Eisenbaum, and others, often with meaningful disagreements among them — as Paul spoke to Gentiles about the law, he was speaking about the law as it related to Gentiles under the dispensation inaugurated by the coming of Christ. This is a storyline that we are still in the early stages of exploring as a discipline, early at least in comparison to the Christian narrative of rejection, replacement, and supersession that we have seen since the Acts of the Apostles.

Conclusion

This is one account of the scope of Paul's argument, and the shape of his discourse. The resolution of his deixis is a process of making associations on the basis of such an account of his discourse. I hope that this close consideration of a small portion of Paul's deictic language in Romans, and this more schematic characterization of the shape and scope of his discourse helps us to answer our sessions question in a way that can be generative for further understanding. For Paul, Jews did not have to become Christians to be saved.