

Romans 10 - God's Justice and the *Telos* of Torah

“At this point, he finally makes explicit what was implicit in the previous chapter, bringing the discussion out of the scriptural past to discuss Israel's messiah. Having already established that Israel had pursued but not attained a Torah of justness, he further explains that this resulted in to submitting to the messiah...”
(Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 221).”

3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness (justice) that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to the justness of God - **4** For Messiah is the end (*telos*) of Torah for justness in everyone who is faithful. (Romans 10:3-4)

“Nevertheless, despite the pithy, quotable nature of the individual statements throughout Romans 10, this passage is also one of the most difficult, complex, and controversial in the Pauline corpus, serving as ground zero for significant debates about Paul's view of Torah, his understanding of salvation, and the gospel in general (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 223).”

“Instead, in this section Paul is participating in a long-established debate within early Judaism about the relationship between Israel's repentance/justness and Israel's full restoration, arguing that Jesus is God's solution to Israel's predicament (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 224).”

“The first step to understanding Paul's interpretations is recognizing that although verses six and seven are typically rendered ‘to bring Christ up/down’, the word ‘Christ’ is not used as an alternative proper name for Jesus, who is conspicuously not mentioned between Rom. 9:5 and 10:9, where he is finally explicitly identified and declared to be ‘Lord’ (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 226).”

“Instead, like the reference to ‘the Christ’ being of Israelite descent in Rom. 9:5, these verses use *Christos* as a title referring more generally to the messiah, the one anointed to bring about Israel's redemption (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 227).”

“Instead, when Paul argues that Deut. 30:12-14 warns against efforts to ‘bring messiah,’ he is opposing a common early Jewish idea that the coming of the messiah - and therefore Israel's restoration - is contingent on Israel's repentance and proper Torah observance (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 227).”

The Grand Miracle: Divinely Initiated Justness

Question - Will Israel's repentance precede and initiate the restoration, or will God initiate Israel's repentance as the first step in the process of redemption?

“This, I propose, is precisely the position Paul is opposing in Rom. 10, specifically in 10:3-9, where his pesher-style interpretation of Deut. 30:12-14 rejects any efforts to ‘bring messiah’ (Rom. 10:6-7) through the ‘justness of their own’ pursued in 10:3 (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 236).”

“Put simply, Paul’s argument boils down to this: rather than Israel’s justness bringing the messiah, the messiah already came to make Israel just (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 236).”

“... Paul argues that the new age has already been inaugurated, with Jesus as both ‘teacher of justice’ and messianic deliverer, first from sin through the spirit and then from the consequence of sin at his return. And since the messiah has already come, any effort to usher in Israel’s restoration or the messianic age by repentance, Torah-observance, or zealous political or military campaigns is misguided (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 236).”

“Paul’s position essentially combines all four options: the messiah came at the appointed time (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 5:6) for an apostate and unjust people (Rom. 1-3), and the humble manner of his coming was in accord with Israel’s impiety and injustice. He came the first time to bring justification and repentance through his death and resurrection, and he will return in the clouds (1 Thes. 4:17) when Israel has been fully transformed and justified by the spirit (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 237).”

“The Septuagint also renders Deut. 30:1 as an unconditional promise rather than a conditional statement, therefore establishing that Israel will eventually have no difficulty fulfilling the ‘ifs’ of verse 10 precisely because the word is in their hearts and mouths after the guaranteed transformation of Deut. 30:1-9 (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 240).”

“Throughout the rest of Deuteronomy, Israel’s problem is precisely that they do not have the word in their heart or in their mouth, meaning that the command was too difficult for them. But this is the problem Deut. 30:6 promises to solve through the circumcision of the heart, which will cause the people to fulfill the love command ‘so that you may live’ (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 241).”

“Just as Moses crossed the and ascended to the abyss in death and then ascended to the heavens in exaltation to give the spirit, putting the Torah un the mouths and hearts of the faithful (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 242).”

“Having brought ‘the present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4) to its end, Messiah has inaugurated a new era and domain of covenantal favor and fidelity over which he himself is Lord and into which the person joined to him also can participate with confidence and hope for fullness of life and freedom from sin and death (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 243).”

“Instead, the question all along has been *how Israel will become righteous* in accordance with the promises of the scriptures, and Rom. 10 is opposed not to ‘legalism’ or national righteousness’ but rather to the attempt to initiate Israel’s restoration through ‘justness from Torah’ (10:5) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 240).”

“In this context, 10:5-9 explains what Paul means by ‘*telos* of Torah,’ namely that the Torah itself points to the messiah as the agent of God’s justness, to whom and through whom the life promised in the Torah is granted. Taken together, the basic argument is therefore that Torah is not an end in itself (cf. 9:31; 10:3); instead, the Torah points beyond itself to the redemption and justness wrought by Messiah, through whom the purpose of the Torah are fully realized (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 245-46).”

“The explicit argument of Rom. 3 is that Messiah’s faithful fulfillment of the Torah’s requirements - culminating in the crucifixion - has secured justness for those who share his fidelity... The logic of all three passages is the same: the messiah’s complete justness and obedience to the requirements of Torah has facilitated the justification of those previously under the Torah’s curse (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 247).”

Scriptural References

“In isolation, one might doubt that this citation of Habakkuk should be understood as referring specifically to Jesus and the resurrection, but in addition to the instances later in Romans in which the revelation of the ‘justness of God’ is identified with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, there is strong evidence from other contemporary sources that ‘the just one’ should be understood here as technical terminology designating a messianic figure (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 248).”

Habakkuk 2:4; Acts 3:14-15; Acts 17:31; Philippians 2:8-9

“These elements of obedience/justness and consequent resurrection/exaltation are put together even more plainly in Phil 2:8-9... the very thing Paul expects his audience to confess in Romans 10:9, ‘Jesus is Lord’ (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 251).”

“Once again, Paul’s use of scripture is not haphazard but rather reflects deep engagement with the context of the passage - interpreted through distinctly messianic lenses - while presenting his gospel as the fulfillment of the promises to Israel found in his scriptures (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 251).”

An Excursion to Galatians

“Indeed, although not widely recognized, Gal. 3 is governed by the same logic observed in Rom. 1, 3, 5, and 10, specifically that the messiah’s obedient justness, death, and resurrection have provided justification for those previously under the Torah’s curse (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 252).”

Reference - Galatians 3:10-14

“The logic of this passage is extremely compressed, as Paul assumes his audience is familiar enough with his gospel and his reading of these passages to be able to follow his argument without substantial clarification... This is little help to Paul’s modern interpreters, however, who do not enjoy such familiarity with the apostle’s preaching (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 253).”

Leviticus 18:5 - “You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD.”

“But once it is understood that Paul, working within a framework of new covenant restoration eschatology, reads both Hab. 2:4 and Lev. 18:5b as messianic prophecies to fulfilled by Jesus’ faithful obedience and consequent resurrection, the logic of Gal. 3:10-14 is significantly clarified (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 254).”

“Instead, ‘the scripture has imprisoned everyone under sin so that the promise from the fidelity of Jesus Messiah might be given to the faithful (Gal. 3:22).’ That is all humanity is imprisoned under the sentence of death except for ‘*the just one*,’ the ‘one to whom the promise had been made (3:19).’ That promise is exactly the one specified in both Hab. 2:4 and Lev. 18:5b: ‘He will live.’ The Torah’s promise of life to ‘the one who does these things’ therefore applies specifically to ‘the just one’ who ‘from fidelity’ accomplished ‘these things’ (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 258).”

“The point of verse 12 (Gal. 3:12) is that although the Torah did not arise from fidelity, it yet (alla) promises life to ‘the one who does these things’ - that is, ‘the just one’ already mentioned in the quotation of Hab. 2:4 in the previous verse (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 261).”

“Instead, as is also the case in Rom. 10, the argument is about the *source* of justification and deliverance from the Torah’s curse. Rather than citing Hab. 2:4 and Lev. 18:5 as a scriptural contradiction, Paul cites them as concurring witnesses to the messiah to whom life is promised (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 261).”

“That is, since Israel chose not to do the things that would lead to life, God gave them laws by which they could *not live*; here divine judgement involves handing the people over to their own desires in exactly the fashion outlined in Rom. 1:18-32 (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 262).”

“Romans 10 and Galatians 3 therefore mutually inform one another. Jesus’ redeeming action of submitting to death on a cross and subsequent resurrection is the *telos* of Torah (Deut. 34:10), and Jesus is the ‘prophet like Moses’ anticipated and attested to by the Torah itself. Rather than Israel fulfilling Lev. 18:5b to bring the messiah and redemption, the messiah fulfilled 18:5b and now has the authority to justify Israel and extend the blessings of Abraham to the nations (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 264).”

A Pledge of Fidelity (10:9-21)

“Paul’s initiates, however, do not pledge themselves to ‘return to the Torah of Moses’ in compliance with Zadokite/sectarian interpretation but rather pledge fealty to Jesus as Lord in confidence that Jesus has been raised from the dead (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 266).”

“The confession that ‘Jesus is Lord’ therefore serves as a public embrace of a new identity, an official acknowledgement of Jesus’ authority and a commitment to submit to that authority - that is, to live according to Jesus’ teachings as mediated via the spirit. Now the initiate into the messianic *ekklesia* can be expected to uphold the norms of this group and - as evident in 1 Cor. 5 - may be punished accordingly (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 266).”

“Instead, from the very beginning of Romans, Paul has been arguing that because of Israel’s covenantal disobedience, Jews are under the curse of the Torah and require the same redemption and justification needed by the gentiles - justification and redemption provided to those who submit to Israel’s messiah (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 267).”

“Again it is imperative to remember that Rom. 9-11 as a whole is not about the ‘problem of Jewish unbelief’ or Jews’ commitment to their ‘own collective righteousness, to the exclusion of the Gentiles,’ but rather aims to explain how, despite appearances, God has in fact remained faithful to his promises to Israel (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 268).”

“Paul of course also expects Jesus to return ‘in the clouds’ at a later time (1 Thess. 4:17). Like the Yahah sectarians, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself, Paul therefore argues that God has rejected the authorities in Jerusalem and is restoring Israel without them and those who follow them rather than the messiah God has appointed (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 269).”