

If Sons, Then Heirs

*A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity
in the Letters of Paul*

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2007

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Introduction

As it says in Hosea: “I will call those who are not my people ‘my people’ (οὐ λαὸν μου λαὸν μου) and the one not loved, ‘loved.’ And it will be in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people.’ There the sons of the living God will be called.”

—Rom 9:25–26; LXX Hosea 1:10

Paul writes to the gentiles in Rome to tell them that this prophesy has been fulfilled. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, the God of Israel has called the gentiles to be his people; he has made them his sons. As in Hosea, also in Paul this new relationship is understood in terms of ethnicity and kinship. Paul follows biblical models to announce his gospel: gentiles have been adopted as sons and made into a *laos* of the God of Israel, a position previously occupied by the Israelites alone.

In spite of passages such as this, Christianity is widely understood, both by scholars and laypeople, to be separate from and immune to differences related to kinship and ethnicity. Christianity is perceived as a “universal” religion, one that transcends ethnic and familial particularities.¹ Denise Kimber Buell calls attention to such scholarly portrayals of early Christianity: “Most historical reconstructions published in the last twenty years depict earliest Christianity as an inclusive movement that rejected ethnic or racial specificity as a condition of religious identity.”² Buell quotes Frank Snowden, who claims, “Christianity swept racial distinctions aside,” and Rosemary Radford Ruether, who remarks, “class, ethnicity,

and gender are . . . specifically singled out as the divisions overcome by redemption in Christ.”³

These comments perpetuate the notion that “the essence” of Christianity is beyond culture. Those who claim such a de-ethnicized Christianity fail to recognize that certain aspects of Jewish culture are normative for Christians and that Christians rank Jewish culture over pagan or polytheistic culture (even as they define themselves over and against Judaism). That is, historically Christians have accepted the master narrative of ancient Israelites and not, for example, of ancient Greeks. They have accepted the story of this particular ethnic people, the God of their homeland, their myths about creation and the ordering of the cosmos, and the morals inscribed in their sacred scripture. Yet Christians tend to view their religion as one that transcends ethnicity; they have translated these particular markers of identity into an ethnically neutral, all-inclusive tradition which is somehow beyond the normal human characteristics of culture, its discourses and practices.

As Buell demonstrates, the effort to turn this particular story into a universal one was already happening in the second and third centuries, when Christians such as Clement of Alexandria crafted their own versions of Christian identity as inclusive and transcendent.⁴ These characterizations endured, and they continue to shape modern perceptions of Christianity, as the comments of Snowden and Ruether illustrate.

In this study, I argue for a new way to read kinship and ethnic language in Paul that dismantles the contrast between a universal, “non-ethnic” Christianity and an ethnic, particular Judaism. Through a critical analysis of kinship and ethnic discourses in Paul, I will illuminate how the categories of kinship and ethnicity shape the relationships between Jews and their God, between Paul and his gentile audience, between Paul and his fellow *Ioudaioi*. For Paul, kinship and ethnicity cannot be merely metaphorical, for lineage, paternity, and peoplehood are the salient categories for describing one’s status before the God of Israel. It is in these terms that Paul articulates the central theological problem of his writings: gentiles are alienated from the God of Israel. And it is in these terms that Paul presents the solution: baptism into Christ makes gentiles descendants of Abraham. Paul’s universalizing—by which I mean his invitation to gentiles to be made right with the God of Israel—is expressed through notions of peoplehood, lineages, and familial relatedness.

Thus the notion of an ethnically neutral “Christianity” in Paul makes no sense. The term “Christian” is itself an anachronistic designation for a Christ-follower in Paul’s letters.⁵ Paul is a *Ioudaios* (the Greek term for “Jew” or “Judean”) who has come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is a messianic agent of God and Paul claims to have been called to bring his gospel to non-Jews, to gentiles. The Romans passage cited above describes this good news: the God of Israel has proclaimed through the prophet Hosea: “I will call those who are

not my people ‘my people.’” The gentiles will be called “sons” and will be fashioned into a people of the God of Israel. The gendered nature of Paul’s language is important to his argument, which relies on the patrilineal ideal of sons as heirs (as opposed to daughters).⁶ Thus notions of peoplehood and paternity are by no means rejected, downplayed, or even metaphorized by Paul; instead they are central to his gospel and crucial to his arguments, especially in Romans and Galatians.

In the following chapters, I make the case that Paul uses the discourses of kinship and ethnicity to construct a myth of origins for gentile followers of Christ. Paul relies on the logic of patrilineal descent to create a new lineage for the gentiles, a lineage that links gentiles through Christ to the founding ancestor, Abraham. By means of this kinship-creation, gentiles are made descendants of Abraham, adopted sons of God and coheirs with Christ. Paul makes a place for the gentiles—the ethnic and religious “other” for the *Ioudaioi*—in the story of Israel, so that they may be made righteous before the God of Israel. Although *Ioudaioi* and gentiles now share a common ancestor, Paul does not collapse them into one group (of “Christians,” for example). Gentiles-in-Christ and Jews are separate but related lineages of Abraham.

Paul is not alone in his creative reworking of identities. Many of his contemporaries—*Ioudaioi*, Greeks, Romans and others—also reconstructed histories, lineages, and the collective myths of whole peoples.⁷ Unlike Virgil or Dionysius of Halicarnassus, however, Paul has not produced a finished, polished version of his scheme. Instead, we have his letters, particular responses to particular questions and situations. His advice and explanations are ad hoc, not systematic. Thus Paul’s myth of gentile origins in a Jewish lineage is not a thoroughly worked-out epic story with all the details in place. Rather, it is as though we are catching him in the act of mythmaking. The result is somewhat patchwork; we find different versions of the argument, seen from various angles, throughout his correspondence.

In his recent work on myth, Bruce Lincoln calls for a theory of myth which “recognizes the capacity of narrators to modify details of the stories that pass through them, introducing changes in the classificatory order as they do so, most often in ways that reflect their subject position.”⁸ Lincoln argues that myths are not containers of information (about the divine-human relationship, about the origins of a people or place, for example), but tools used to persuade: “Myth is ideology in narrative form.”⁹ Paul illustrates Lincoln’s point: he engages in mythmaking to remake and reorder the story of Israel to make a place for the gentiles.

Myths are particularly effective as purveyors of ideology because they call upon authoritative past events or relationships which authorize present-day arrangements (or changes in those arrangements). Burton Mack comments that with myth, “the alreadiness of social arrangements is accounted for in terms of origin stories in which precedence is established by patriarchs,

powers and authorities not accessible for questioning.”¹⁰ Paul constructs exactly this sort of scenario: the rationalization for an Abrahamic ancestry for gentiles lies in the origin stories of Israel, the moments when the God of Israel called Abraham, found him faithful, and promised him many descendants. Among these descendants, Paul argues, were the gentiles-in-Christ. In Paul’s myth, the “authorities not accessible for questioning” reside in the kinships described in these stories, because they are considered both divinely ordained and “natural.”

Interpretations of Paul

In traditional Pauline scholarship, the portrait of Christianity as a universal, transcendent religion that escapes the particularities of history and culture has been located in and justified by the letters of Paul. At least since Augustine, Paul has been read as addressing a universal audience on the topic of human sinfulness, which was often cast in terms of characteristics associated with Jews.¹¹ Reformation thinkers inherited this interpretation of Paul.¹² In what is often referred to as the “Lutheran” reading, the central theme of Romans is faith versus works, the personal faith of the Christian against the merit-based legalism of Judaism.¹³ According to this view, which has been carried on by scholars well into the first half of the twentieth century, Paul argues that the Law is insufficient for salvation not only because it is impossible to keep but also because it cannot offer the necessary spiritual sustenance. One cannot be saved through “works righteousness,” but through faith in Christ. Judaism serves as a foil for Christianity, and is constructed as everything Christianity is not: an exclusive, legalistic, and ritualistic religion devoid of any vitality (echoes of Reformation critiques of the church are audible here).

In the nineteenth century, Pauline scholars begin to articulate this juxtaposition of Judaism and Christianity in terms of race and ethnicity. This move is made possible by a perceived contrast between Judaism and Hellenism in antiquity, a perception which is only now being challenged.¹⁴ Interpreters such as F. C. Baur anchor definitions of the *Ioudaios* and Judaism as a whole in particularity: Judaism represents an ethnic, specific religion tied only to one people. Baur then seeks to answer the question of how Christianity, a universal religion, could emerge from Judaism, a particularistic, ethnic religion.¹⁵ His answer is Paul. Paul shaped Christianity under the influence of Hellenism, resulting in tensions between the “Jewish Christians” and the “gentile Christians” in Paul’s letters. Baur writes that Paul “broke through the barriers of Judaism and rose out of the particularism of Judaism into the universal idea of Christianity.”¹⁶

Though Baur looks to Hellenism for a universalizing precedent for Paul, other nineteenth-century scholars look to earlier Jewish traditions. Robert Henry

Charles locates this universalism in Jewish apocalypticism; Gerhard Kittel finds it in the “pure message” of the prophets.¹⁷ By contrast, other types of Judaism (Rabbinic Judaism, for example) represent the dried-up legalism that Paul argues against. These scholars cast Christianity as embodying and improving a lost, universalizing Jewish ideal. All of these scholars have in common a search for a universal prototype for Paul’s Christianity, one that juxtaposed the ethnic particularity of *Ioudaioi* and Judaism.¹⁸ And each of these scholars understands Paul as the one who preached this universal ideal as Christian gospel. Adolph Harnack, writing at the turn of the century, epitomizes these viewpoints when he writes, “It was Paul who delivered the Christian religion from Judaism.”¹⁹ Thus Paul is understood as the transition point between an old, exclusive, ethnic Judaism and a new, inclusive, universal Christianity.²⁰

Although the anachronisms and anti-Jewish implications of such interpretations are now widely recognized and rejected, their legacy remains.²¹ For example, Paul’s gospel is still described with oppositional pairs such as faith versus works, ethical versus legal, or spiritual versus material. These oppositions recall—and are based on—the nineteenth-century juxtaposition of ethnic Judaism and universal Christianity. At the same time that they construct Paul’s message as one of faith, ethics, and spirit, transcending bodily particularities and historical circumstances, they also construct a foil of Judaism as works-oriented, legalistic, and materialistic.

One of the most damaging effects of this scholarship has been a radical misrepresentation of Judaism in the first century. Because it was consistently constructed as a foil for an ideal Christianity, and not within the context of ancient Jewish sources, the picture of first-century Jewish practices and theologies was grossly distorted. Though in the first half of the twentieth century several scholars objected to this portrait of Judaism, it was not until the second half of the century, after the Holocaust, that these objections began to take hold.²² In an important 1963 article, Krister Stendahl argues that scholars have imposed an anachronistic “introspective conscience” on Paul. Instead, Stendahl maintains, Paul should be understood as a *Ioudaios* himself, not a Christian, and his letters should be interpreted in terms of other Jewish literature. Paul’s central concern is not “justification by faith” but the relative standing of *Ioudaioi* and *ethnē* (gentiles) before God.²³ Stendahl’s call for a more historically accurate understanding of Paul disrupts the dichotomies that undergird traditional readings such as Jewish/Christian and ethnic/universal.

Stendahl’s arguments anticipated what many now refer to as the “new perspective” in Pauline studies.²⁴ E. P. Sanders, whose work in the 1970s is often identified as the trigger for a wave of new perspective scholarship, objects to the misrepresentation of Judaism perpetuated by the Lutheran reading and presents a detailed counterportrait of first-century Judaism as a religion based on “covenantal nomism.”²⁵ Sanders writes, “The supposed objection to Jewish self-righteousness is as absent from Paul’s letters as self-righteousness itself is from

Jewish literature.”²⁶ This refutation of the earlier portrait of Judaism launched a series of reinterpretations that attempt to understand first-century Judaism based on the texts it produced and not as a foil for later Christianity, and to locate Paul in this context.

James D. G. Dunn, who first used the phrase “new perspective” to describe this developing school of interpretation, has been a major figure in this movement.²⁷ Dunn builds upon Sanders’s important work, yet he also notes that Sanders fails to recognize the implications of his own insights. Having documented a more accurate portrait of first-century Judaism, Sanders then argues that Paul, after his “conversion” at Damascus, rejects this Judaism in favor of something new and altogether different: Christianity.²⁸ Whereas Sanders might have traced continuities and developments between Paul’s gospel and various other articulations of Judaism, he instead sees an unbridgeable gap. As Dunn comments, this is not much different from the “Lutheran Paul.”²⁹

Yet other new perspective scholars who build on the insights of Stendahl and Sanders fall into the same trap, including Dunn himself.³⁰ Indeed, even as he insists that Paul does not criticize Judaism or the Law as a whole, Dunn nevertheless argues that Paul does object to a certain aspect of Judaism, an ethnocentric attitude that presumes God’s favor based on possession of the Law.³¹ Dunn’s Paul opposes the notion that Jews understood their election to imply the exclusion of others; thus the aim of Paul’s gospel was to break through the barriers that Israel erected around itself.³² The “Christianity” that emerged from Paul was “against any and every attempt to mark off some of God’s people as more holy than others, as exclusive channels of divine grace over and against others.”³³ The familiar portrait of *Ioudaioi* as arrogant, exclusive, and limited by their ethnic identities surfaces here in contrast to universalizing Christianity which insists that God’s grace cannot be limited. Dunn’s careful historical work has been invaluable to the field of Pauline studies, yet it preserves anachronistic categories that serve as pillars of the traditional view.

Similarly, N. T. Wright, another prolific contributor to post-Sanders Pauline scholarship, identifies Israel’s deluded attachment to a “national, ethnic and territorial identity” as the key to its failure to understand Paul’s gospel: that God has fulfilled Israel in Christ and replaced ethnic Israel with those loyal to the messiah.³⁴ In Wright’s formulation of Paul’s reasoning, this replacement is not anti-Jewish because God planned it from the beginning: to save not a special people but the whole world.³⁵ For Wright, then, God’s plan for universal salvation cannot happen through historic, ethnic Israel, but through its non-ethnic counterpart, the “true Israel,” Christianity.

Despite the enormous contributions of both of these new perspective scholars, they each replicate the universal/ethnic dichotomy of their nineteenth-century predecessors. Thus while we are making good strides toward a better interpretation of Paul, it is clear that traditional models and assumptions are difficult to shed, especially with respect to ethnicity.

Another branch of new perspective scholarship pays particular attention to this difficulty and has made a more radical break with the Lutheran reading. This interpretation is often identified with Lloyd Gaston, who, drawing upon Stendahl, Sanders, and Marcus Barth, argues the following: Paul's focus is the justification of gentiles, not the status of humanity, and Christ (according to Paul) is not the messiah for all but God's solution for gentiles.³⁶ Christ is not a fulfillment of the Law, but Christ and the Law are exclusive of each other; Christ is for the gentiles and the Law continues to be relevant for *Ioudaioi*.³⁷ In this view, there is no implicit or explicit critique of Israel (except that many *Ioudaioi* do not realize Christ's role for gentiles) or the Law (except when gentiles try to keep it). John Gager, Stanley Stowers, and others have further developed this general line of thinking with fruitful results.³⁸

The central insight that makes this reading possible is that Paul is speaking to *gentiles* and not to humanity. Thus the question of audience is crucial, as I elaborate below. In my view, this insight requires a rereading of Paul with ethnicity and kinship as a central focus. Even among "radical"³⁹ new perspective scholars, categories such as "Jew" or "gentile" are often left unexamined.⁴⁰ As I argue here, attention to Paul's use of these concepts further undermines traditional readings and bolsters the "radical" position, for it illustrates that Paul does not reject embodied identities, but teaches the gospel using ethnic and kinship language to articulate God's plan for salvation *in terms* of these identities.

Audience

There is perhaps no more pivotal issue for determining one's reading of Paul than audience. Whom did Paul address in his letters? For whom does he construct his arguments? The traditional answer to this question has dominated Pauline scholarship: all people. Those in the "timeless Paul" camp argue that he speaks to all people of all times. Others, more interested in Paul's historical context, argue that he speaks to first-century gentiles and Jews, thus all people at least in his time.

There is ample evidence that Paul writes to gentiles: he sees himself as called to the gentiles (Gal 1:16, 2:7–9; Rom 11:13, 15:1–6) and addresses gentiles directly in his letters (Rom 1:5–6, 13; 11:13; 15:6).⁴¹ Indeed, few dispute that the gentiles were central to Paul's work and were intended as recipients of his letters.⁴² But we do not have the same evidence for a Jewish audience. Indeed, Paul never claims to be speaking to *Ioudaioi* in his letters, nor does he connect his own teaching activity with *Ioudaioi*.⁴³ Yet there is a pervasive and persistent assumption that Paul wrote to gentiles *and* Jews.⁴⁴ Even those who pay close attention to historical context and ethnic language in Paul see *Ioudaioi* in the audience; their presence supports the popular notion that Paul's goal was to solve tensions between gentiles and *Ioudaioi*.⁴⁵

Scholars find *Ioudaioi* in Paul's audience in several ways. Some identify possible references to a Jewish audience in Romans, the text at the center of most discussions of audience. These have been unconvincing.⁴⁶ Others reason that since Paul wrote *about Ioudaioi*, he must have been writing *to* them. Paul discusses the Law, circumcision, being righteous before the God of Israel—all topics that would be of interest to *Ioudaioi*. Furthermore, they ask why Paul would repeatedly cite Jewish scripture if he were not speaking to those who would understand his references?

Indeed, Paul writes about *Ioudaioi*; this does not mean he writes to them. Apply this logic elsewhere—groups mentioned in letters are intended recipients—and it quickly becomes ridiculous.⁴⁷ Yes, Paul writes about things related to Israel and cites Jewish scripture: what else would do? He is a *Ioudaios* writing to those committed to the messiah of Israel about how they fit into God's larger plan. Yes, Paul cites Jewish scripture, for these are authoritative texts both for him and now for his audience.⁴⁸

The most popular strategy is to find *Ioudaioi* in the audience by looking outside the text to reconstructions of the "church" in Rome. Proponents of this view argue that since there were both *Ioudaioi* and gentiles in Rome when Paul wrote, he must have been writing to both groups. This reasoning overlooks a critical distinction between two discrete categories: the encoded reader and the empirical reader.⁴⁹ The encoded reader exists in the text itself: it is the reader the author constructs. For example, when Paul writes, "I am writing to you, gentiles," it is clear that his encoded reader is gentiles. The encoded reader can also be less obvious, however, and can be discerned by examining the assumptions Paul makes about his audience. For example, when he writes about the Law or about eating sacrificed meat, he writes as though his audience is familiar with these practices and cultural codes. The encoded reader is thus a characteristic of the text itself. The empirical reader, on the other hand, is anyone who reads the text, whether in the first century or today. This reader, which could include first-century gentiles, *Ioudaioi*, Romans, Egyptians, and twenty-first-century scholars, does not necessarily inform us about the audience as Paul constructed it in the text. In the case of Paul, we have little or no conclusive information about first-century, empirical readers, whereas we have ample information about encoded readers, which is a strategy within the text.⁵⁰

The historical-reconstruction approach involves two steps. First, it reconstructs a particular empirical audience, the historical community of Christ believers in Rome in the mid-first century, as a mix of *Ioudaioi* and *ethnē* in Christ. This process is necessarily speculative because of the sparseness of the evidence. Second, it treats this reconstructed empirical audience as the audience assumed in the letters, effectively collapsing the empirical and encoded audiences into one.

When we blur these two groups—empirical readers (or speculations about these readers) and the readers indicated in the text—then we lose sight of Paul’s own ethnic constructions and strategies. Therefore, I do not seek for evidence about historical communities, but for the ways Paul portrays his audience, how he creates their identity. Clues from the letter itself allow us to reconstruct these readers. Paul is clear that he is the apostle to the gentiles (Rom 11:13) and that he is writing *to* gentiles, even if he writes *about* Jews at times. Regardless of who might have been in Rome at the time, Paul’s letters are carefully constructed arguments addressed to gentile Christ-followers described as living in Rome. While the historical-reconstruction approach speculatively links ethnic labels to empirical readers, a text-based interpretation identifies the ways that ethnic language is working rhetorically in the text.

My analysis of ethnic language in Paul, because it illuminates Paul’s rhetorical construal of ethnic categories and demonstrates that these do not disappear in the wake of Christ’s first coming, suggests that we should take Paul at his word when he claims to write to the *ethnē* (Rom 1:5–6). How does this change our possible readings? Instead of viewing Paul as a critic of Judaism and the Law, we can see Paul as engaged in working out how *gentiles* can be made right with the God of Israel in the context of the coming end-time. As I mentioned above, Lloyd Gaston calls for this shift in focus: “Paul writes to Gentile Christians, dealing with Gentile Christian problems, foremost among which was the right of Gentiles qua Gentiles, without adopting the Torah of Israel, to full citizenship in the people of God. It is remarkable that in the endless discussion of Paul’s understanding of the Law, few have asked what a first-century Jew would have thought of the Law *as it relates to Gentiles*.”⁵¹ Indeed, Paul addresses issues that other ancient Jews discussed with respect to gentiles affiliated with Israel: to what degree should they follow the Law? Is circumcision necessary for males?⁵² In this context, Paul becomes more recognizable as a first-century Jew. If we understand Paul as writing for gentiles-in-Christ, perhaps gentiles who were interested in Judaism before Paul even arrived on the scene, then many of the seeming contradictions that have plagued scholars for decades fall away.⁵³

Jews, Judeans, *Ioudaioi*

If ever there were a can of worms in New Testament scholarship, the translation of *Ioudaios* is one.⁵⁴ Though the vast majority of scholars translate this Greek term as “Jew,” some, I among them, have argued that “Judean” is a better rendering.⁵⁵ I have come to rethink this position, however, and have realized that although “Judean” appeals in some ways, it may raise more problems than it resolves. While some can-of-worms issues are handily set

aside, acknowledged in a note in order to move on, in a study of ethnic and kinship discourses in Paul, this one demands attention. For the debates about translating *Ioudaios* illustrate just how entrenched the religion/ethnicity dichotomy is in our thinking, just the notion I aim to challenge. So we delve in.

Since the nineteenth century, when “Judean” began to appear in scholarly work, speakers of English have used two words for the Greek term *Ioudaios*: “Jew” and “Judean.”⁵⁶ Though “Jew” typically refers to anyone who claims loyalty to the God of Israel or a connection to Judaism, “Judean” refers to someone from the region of Judea (or as an adjective describing this region, “the Judean desert”). This double nomenclature stands in contrast to English translations for other ethnic terms such as *Hellēn* or *Aigyptos*. For these we use just one word, “Greek” or “Egyptian,” and recognize that they stand for various facets of identity, related variously to geography, ancestry, religious practices, and so on. We look to context to determine which of these characteristics are emphasized or downplayed.

Our two terms for *Ioudaios* both reflect and reinforce the assumption that religious commitments are separate from particularities of identity such as homeland. Many in the modern world—influenced by post-Enlightenment, Christian understandings of religion—conceive of religion as a non-ethnic category, related more to belief and practice than to land or politics.⁵⁷ Graham Harvey addresses this point by comparing modern and ancient Judaism: “Although Judaism now refers to a world-religion partially separable from territory or nationality more ancient usage would not have divorced the religious expression from the ethnic group and territory in which it originated or existed.”⁵⁸ Using two terms for ancient Jews, one that referred to territory and one that referred to religion, maintains this bifurcation.

My initial substitution of “Judean” for “Jew” was intended as a challenge to this distinction. I did not mean to imply that *Ioudaios* always held a regional meaning, but rather that “Judean” should replace “Jew” as the umbrella term for *Ioudaioi*. “Judean,” audibly similar to the Greek *Ioudaioi*, conveys the crucial connection between people and place, *Ioudaioi* and *Ioudaia*. In first-century Judaism, *Ioudaia* or Judea was the location of the temple and accompanying cult practices, a central institution for local and diaspora *Ioudaioi*.⁵⁹ The term “Judean” seemed to better communicate the close relationship between religious observance, place, and peoplehood, even among a diverse collection of first-century Judaisms.

Scholarly attention to this issue initially focused on the Gospel of John, as interpreters attempted to explain the gospel’s polemic use of *Ioudaioi*. In the 1970s, M. Lowe capitalized on the English-language split between “Jew” and “Judean,” arguing that *Ioudaioi* in the Gospel of John should be rendered “Judeans,” and that this term represents not all Jews but a specific group from Judea, distinct from Galileans, who oppose Jesus.⁶⁰ Limiting the sense of *Ioudaioi* to people from a geographical location (“Judean Jews”) establishes a

context of intra-Jewish polemic as opposed to a Christian/Jewish polemic.⁶¹ A related arena for this discussion has been historical Jesus research and the issue of Jesus' identity: if he is a Galilean, is he also a *Ioudaios*?⁶² This question inspired study of the region of Galilee, its degree of Jewishness or gentleness, as a context for interpreting the gospels.⁶³ Scholars investigating this question have called attention to the diversity within Judaism during this period and the possible tensions that could arise among the various groups.⁶⁴

The discussion has broadened to a consideration of whether "Jew" is ever a viable translation of *Ioudaios* and has resulted in fruitful challenges to long-standing categories of analysis, such as the concept of "Judaism" as a monolithic entity and "Christianity" as a relevant category in the first century.⁶⁵ I wholeheartedly agree with the efforts of scholars such as John Elliott and Philip Esler to pay close attention to ancient terminology and conceptions of identity.⁶⁶ I applaud their insistence that we consider the ways ancient authors employed this language and whether *Ioudaios* is used by "insiders" about themselves or by "outsiders" about others.⁶⁷

Some trajectories of the discussion I find problematic, however. For example, one argument from those advocating "Judean" instead of "Jew" is that our modern understanding of a "Jew" would be unrecognizable in the first century. Summarizing this view, John Elliott writes, "The concept 'Jew' as understood today derives not from the first century but from the third and following centuries. It denotes persons shaped by and oriented to not only Torah and Tanak but Mishnah, Midrashim and Talmudim."⁶⁸ The logic seems to be that the tradition changed so drastically that it is better identified by a different name altogether. I appreciate the awareness of how Judaism changed, but I question whether these developments warrant new terminology. If we apply this reasoning more broadly, how many new terms would we need for traditions that have lasted centuries? Could we not accomplish the same thing by demonstrating the similarities and differences in various historical contexts?⁶⁹

Furthermore, and perhaps more important, the continuities between ancient and modern Judaism are significant. Amy-Jill Levine illustrates this point by listing the behavior and characteristics of first-century Jews, all of which are practiced by a well-known first-century Jew, Jesus: "circumcision, wearing *tzitzit*, keeping kosher, calling God 'father,' attending synagogue gatherings, reading Torah and Prophets, knowing that they are neither gentile nor Samaritan, honoring the Sabbath, celebrating the Passover. All of these, and much more, are markers also of traditional Jews today."⁷⁰ It makes little sense to create a terminological divider between current Jews and ancient Jews, despite major changes such as the destruction of the temple and the development of the Mishnah and Talmud traditions. The refusal to use "Jew" (or *Ioudaios*) to talk about the ancient world ignores the broad cohesion shared by different groups of Jews throughout history.

According to the “name change” view, modern Jews have little if any connection to the biblical descendants of the patriarchs. Sometimes this claim is buttressed with the theory that Jews in fact do not descend from Israelites; rather, their forebears are the Khazars, who converted to Judaism in the eighth and ninth centuries.⁷¹ If I follow the argument correctly, the reasoning is that after this time, all previous Jews ceased to exist, and Jewish history started from scratch.⁷² Even if we accept this problematic argument as true,⁷³ it still limits understandings of Jewishness to a single reconstruction of genetic lineages, from the Khazars to the Ashkenazim, as if this were the final word on authentic, modern Jewish identity. This argument assumes that “real” ethnic identities can be traced through genetics (like an essentialist claim to “shared blood”) and ignores the many ways that groups, including Jews past and present, construct their identities and their relatedness to others. As the following chapters will illustrate, these include multiple (and often conflicting) claims of shared ancestry, religious practices and beliefs, stories of origin, and so on.

Additionally, some well-intentioned scholars add the following corollary argument: we should not call first-century Israelites “Jews” because we are morally bound to distinguish between modern Jews and those *Ioudaioi* who are targets of acrimony in the New Testament. This linguistic barrier serves as a protection against anti-Judaism and counteracts the “untenable view that the identity of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Jews is the same as that of first-century Judeans and that the former may therefore be held liable for the alleged sins of the latter.”⁷⁴ Unfortunately, this argument undermines its own good intentions. To try to relieve modern Jews of ancient “Christian” insults and accusations serves as a veiled validation of those insults. In my view, it is more effective to highlight the rhetorical contexts of the texts themselves and the complex interests and claims of various players involved.⁷⁵

Whereas these scholars avoid the term “Jew” for ethical reasons, I find that this avoidance, in addition to being historically problematic, can itself be ethically questionable. I am concerned about allying ourselves with other groups past and present whose explicit goals are to erase Judaism from Christian history.⁷⁶ Though I do not think that extremist positions should dictate our scholarship, we nevertheless should be aware of the ways our work can be heard. Walter Grundmann, a Nazi sympathizer and professor of New Testament at the University of Jena in the 1930s, argued that Jesus was not actually Jewish by documenting the gentile population of Galilee.⁷⁷ The aim was to create a “*judenrein* Christianity for a *judenrein* Germany.”⁷⁸ Similar goals are espoused among current hate groups.⁷⁹ These groups have intentions opposite that of the scholars discussed above, but their arguments overlap with scholarly ones in ways that warrant our attention.⁸⁰ When John Elliott argues that Jesus was not a “Jew,” he is by no means trying to erase Jews from the New Testament; indeed, Jesus’ status as a faithful Israelite is a

given for Elliott.⁸¹ But I think Elliott's position is vulnerable to being misread as an erasure of Judaism, not just by hate groups but also by other readers, our students, parishioners, and others.

Overall, the debate over translating *Ioudaios* has raised some important questions: how did first-century *Ioudaioi* and others understand their own (multiple) identities and relatedness to others? What were some of the different groups within "Judaism"? In what ways are we anachronistic in our conception of ancient *Ioudaioi* and other groups? I am sympathetic to these questions and discuss them in this study. But I am afraid that the solution of not using "Jew" has too many unintended negative consequences.

Now should come the moment where I unveil my neat solution to these problems. Unfortunately, I have none. I have a clear idea of what we need: one term, not two, that operates in English the way *Ioudaios* (and *Hellen* and *Aigyptos*) operate in Greek. It should be multivalent, complex, context-dependent and it should include various facets of self-understanding: religious practices, geographic homeland, shared history, ethical codes, common ancestry, stories of origin, theological positions. We need a term that does not already connote specific, limited meanings (like things religious or things ethnic/geographic) and one that comprises both ancient and modern Jews, in all various manifestations and self-definitions, without falling into an essentialist trap (*Ioudaioi* are always this). Neither "Jew" nor "Judean" does the job without problems.

The closest thing we have to a term that does at least most of these things is a transliteration of the Greek, *Ioudaios*. For this study I have chosen to use *Ioudaios/Ioudaioi* in combination with other ethnic self-descriptors, especially those used by Paul himself ("descendants of Abraham," "Israel").⁸² By leaving the term untranslated, I intend to call attention to the problems laid out above and to remind readers of the multiplicity of connotations this term carried in the ancient world. Yet I also use "Jew" and "Jewish" to signal the continuity between these first-century "descendants of Abraham" and their twenty-first-century heirs. I do not, however, understand Judaism as monolithic or unchanging.⁸³ The complications involved in translating this term serve as a microcosm of the central issues of this larger study of kinship and ethnicity in Paul. The chapters that follow continue the discussion.

Theoretical Position and Approach

It is common for scholars discussing kinship in Paul to describe it as "fictive" kinship.⁸⁴ I hesitate to use the adjective "fictive" because it implies that it is less real, less true, less "natural" than other kinds of kinship. This term is helpful perhaps in that it calls attention to the "made-upness" of kinship constructions, but it also assumes that there is a non-made-up kinship. In my view, there is no such dichotomy between natural, physical relationships and

constructed, made-up relationships. There is no pure, natural kinship that exists outside the realm of human interference. Kinship is always social. Furthermore, the term “fictive” ignores the way people take (more blatantly) constructed kinship seriously.

Anthropologist David Schneider comments on how it is “difficult at times to convince an American that blood as a fluid has nothing in it which causes ties to be deep and strong.”⁸⁵ The myth of shared blood runs deep in our culture, as it did in the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world. Schneider recognizes that kinship is not about biology, but about social relations. In kinship discussions, blood is a “symbol for conceptualizing differences between groups of people.”⁸⁶ As I will demonstrate, it is precisely because it is imbued with such authority that it works well as an organizer of social relationships.

A fundamental assumption of my work is that kinship and ethnicity are social constructions. This is not a new concept in the social sciences,⁸⁷ but it is only in recent decades that the constructionist approach has received serious attention from anthropologists of kinship and ethnicity.⁸⁸ Though both kinship and ethnicity, as categories of identity, claim a primordial or natural base, they are nevertheless human creations. Kinship, for example, may be formulated in terms of biological relationship, but it is often established by other criteria (such as common practices, language, religion, or geographical region). How and whether a relationship is defined as one of kinship is contingent on the specific context and interests involved. Similarly, ethnic identity is often constructed upon a naturalized understanding of kinship (e.g., appeals to common ancestry) but it, too, is a mutable construct that can be shaped by various criteria and contexts.⁸⁹

In contrast to more traditional models in which kinship and ethnicity are fixed, immutable aspects of identity, my view is that these constructs are dynamic discourses which incorporate both fixed and fluid components, even when there is tension among these.⁹⁰ For example, Athenian families would publish their genealogies to bolster or secure their status; the presence of certain ancestors would authorize a family’s position. When the political situation changed, however, these same families could adjust their genealogies to highlight other ancestors who may not have appeared in the first version.⁹¹ The status of the family is guaranteed by the blood relationship, but that relationship was open to change and negotiation. Likewise, Paul understands that being peoples of the God of Israel means being descendants (or literally “seed”) of Abraham and argues that new descendants are created when gentiles are baptized into Christ. Religious ritual authorizes the creation of kinship as Paul draws upon both fixity (“natural,” procreative notions such as “seed of Abraham”) and fluidity (that this identity can be created for gentiles).

The paradoxical nature of these concepts—“natural” yet malleable—makes them particularly efficacious in the discursive practice of mythmaking.⁹²

When identities and social relationships appear to be removed from human agency—as they do with kinship and ethnicity—they seem “natural” and therefore unquestionable. At the same time, the various hierarchies of power embedded within those social relationships are also naturalized and legitimized.⁹³ For example, in a particular cultural setting in which the relationship between a father and a son is considered natural and inevitable, the authority of the father over the son—which is socially constructed and sanctioned—may also be considered natural and inevitable. In turn, when the father-son relationship is used as a metaphor for another relationship, for example that between a teacher and a student, then both the sense of “naturalness” and the structure of authority of the father-son relationship are implicitly projected onto the teacher-student relationship.⁹⁴ Thus the kinship metaphor reinforces the authority of a teacher over his students.⁹⁵

This sort of strategic use of kinship metaphors is ubiquitous in ancient texts. In ancient Mediterranean cultures, in which patrilineal kinship ideologies played such a fundamental role in social organization, the criteria for establishing kin relationships were complex and negotiable. Indeed, constructs of both kinship and ethnicity often support arguments for self-authorization and self-definition. They are well suited to such arguments, for at the same time that they present themselves as natural and fixed, they are also open to negotiation and reworking.⁹⁶ This paradox renders them effective tools in organizing people and power, shaping self-understanding, and defining membership.

Paul’s kinship logic derives primarily from the ideology of patrilineal descent. In this gendered ideology, descent is figured through male lines which transfer attributes and status from fathers to sons. Patrilineality tends to assign all procreative power to the male seed, authorizing fathers as heads of lineages and heads of households. This ideology—an “ideology of the seed”—is constructed by and justifies a patriarchal distribution of power.⁹⁷ Patrilineal descent exemplifies how kinship and gender mutually construct each other: patrilineal ideology naturalizes patriarchal structures.⁹⁸ Paul’s kinship and ethnic constructions—his talk of households, inheritance, procreation, ancestors, status before God—are informed by this ideology.⁹⁹

Organization of the Study

A major goal of this project is to situate Paul in his first-century context, in which his kinship-making schemes are not unique. Thus in chapter 1, I will compare Paul with other ancient authors and ask how each defines kinship and ethnicity and what interests their definitions serve. Further, I will examine how these authors use kinship and ethnicity to erect boundaries, forge alliances, and bolster arguments.

In chapter 2, I shift the focus to ethnic strategies in Paul's letters.¹⁰⁰ I study the ways Paul presents what he perceives as the central problem: gentile alienation from the God of Israel. By juxtaposing terms for Jews and non-Jews (such as "*Ioudaioi* and gentiles," "circumcised and uncircumcised"), Paul articulates the wide gap between these peoples. This oppositional ethnic language defines a religious problem and illustrates the interrelation of religious and ethnic categories. This examination of Paul's ethnic terminology lays the groundwork for later discussions of Paul's ethnic discourses.

Chapters 3 through 6 analyze in detail Paul's kinship-making schemes, treating themes such as adoption (chap 3), descent from faithfulness (chap 4), gentiles "in" Abraham, "in" Isaac and "in" Christ (chap 5), and the procreative activity of the God of Israel (chap 6). This kinship creation is Paul's solution to the problem: gentiles are granted a new heritage and a relationship with the God of Israel. In these chapters, I call attention to the ways patrilineal ideology makes sense of language that has often been interpreted in terms of later Christian theologies.

Chapter 7 proposes a way to read Paul's arguments for gentile inclusion that does not require the melding of all those "in Christ" into one homogeneous group. I apply a model of multiple identities, in which individuals and groups can occupy multiple identities simultaneously, to Paul's own strategic self-presentation and to his reconfiguration of the identities of gentiles-in-Christ.

In chapter 8, I take another look at the juxtapositions of Jews and gentiles and identify the complex ways these pairs work both to place Jews and non-Jews in opposition and to link these two peoples as descendants of the same founding ancestor and as followers of the same God. This simultaneous connection and distance propel Paul's story of the future salvation of both peoples in Romans 9–11.