

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 419

Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series: Romans 1-3

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Episode Summary

To this point in our series on Paul's use of the Old Testament we've focused on Paul's "storied reading" of the Old Testament—specifically, how the Old Testament profile of messiah emerges. In the last episode, we talked about how Malachi sets up Romans in terms of Israel's covenant failure and the expectation of a divine messiah. In this episode, we look at how the theme of Israel's elective vocation is reconfigured by Paul to focus on the work of Christ and the resurrection. In Romans 1-3, this will take the form of how Paul understands faith/faithfulness and Torah keeping.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 419: Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series: Romans 1-3 with Dr. Matt Halsted. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MSH: Well, pretty good. What's new with you?

TS: Hmm, I can't say anything, Mike. Just chipping away here. It's been a long series. We've got a few more to go. We're just now getting to the New Testament, pretty much, with Romans here, so I'm excited to hear what y'all talk about—put it all together.

MSH: Yeah. It'll start to happen. I mean, what we'll do is we'll go through Romans and we'll pick out different passages where Paul will say something and how that something that Paul says was (and needs to be in our heads) reconfigured to understand how Paul was looking at his Old Testament, when he talks about Jesus or he talks about the gospel or when he talks about faith and those sorts of things. Those are all component parts.

MSH: Well, we're glad to have Matt Halsted back with us again. Matt, this is our 9th chat together, and we're finally getting into New Testament. So we've been constructing this messianic profile and talking about how Paul uses the Old Testament and reconfigures some things. And we're really going to sort of drill down into that this time. So why don't you tell us exactly what you have planned?

MLH: Yeah! Thanks for having me back on. So *today*, we're going to get into Romans. We're going to get into the meat of things. And we were really set up well because of last episode when we looked into Malachi. And I think Malachi serves as a great introduction to the material in Romans. So here's how, essentially: In Malachi, we remember that the focus from the get-go (Malachi 1) is how Israel is God's elect, chosen people. And yet as we read on into Malachi, we saw that Israel has failed in her vocation—in her election. And yet Malachi also says that this coming Messenger (who we identified as someone who is Messiah), that Messenger will redeem Israel's identity and vocation and their priestly vocation, specifically. And so what we kind of concluded was that Israel's election—Israel's vocation—is reconfigured around the ministry of the Messenger. Now why that's important for Romans is because the theme of Israel's vocation—Israel's election—is front-and-center in Romans. And I think a good argument can be made that Paul reconfigures Israel's vocation and Israel's election around the Messiah. I think that's all over the place in Romans. And what I specifically think is that Paul is so immersed in the *story* of Israel that we've been talking about (that storied approach)... He's so immersed in the story and he takes up that storied approach himself so much that it impacts the way he interprets the Old Testament. And I think in many cases, he gives the Old Testament some fresh meaning—fresh application. But that fresh meaning/fresh application is still very consistent with the Old Testament's original context.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: And what we'll look at today is a few examples of that, as we dive into Romans.

MSH: As we've chatted about this before, you sort of focus on (and I know you've mentioned it before in the early chapters of Romans) two essential concepts. So what are those?

MLH: Yeah, the two concepts, really, that Paul reconfigures are the concepts of faith (or faith language) and Torah (or Torah-keeping). So faith language in Paul is also really faithfulness language. So the Greek word *pistis* essentially can mean both: faith or faithfulness. So that whole concept is all over the place in Romans. Of course, anybody familiar with Paul knows that faith or faithfulness is a very important theme. And Torah (law)... Keeping the law is very important, as well, all throughout Romans. And I think what we can do is just start with faithfulness language in this episode.

MSH: Sure.

5:00

MLH: And just look at how Paul reconfigures it. So the first place we look is in chapter 1—Romans 1:4-5. That's the text where Paul says... and I'll just read it here. He says that Jesus...

⁴...was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

And it's that phrase, "the obedience of faith," that I think we need to home in on just a little bit here. And there's two things that I think can be said about that phrase, "obedience of faith." The first thing is that it's ambiguous. But I think Paul leaves it ambiguous for a reason. It's deliberately ambiguous. And here's what I mean. That phrase "obedience of faith" could essentially mean two things. The first thing is that it could mean "the obedience that *comes* from faith." So his focus here is on obedience, like active obedience to Jesus, that sort of thing. But it can also mean "the obedience that *is* faith." Okay? So anybody who's studied Greek knows that this genitive construction that we see here, this idea, which is the key word "of," "the obedience *of* faith," or the "word *of* God"... Anything that shows possession is often classified, of course, in Greek as a genitive. And there's lots of ambiguity in how to interpret these things. But here, I think, we see it in all of its beauty. I think Paul means *both*—when he wants to bring about obedience in people all across the world, but he wants to do that by bringing them to faith in Christ.

So another example of this really can be seen in Revelation 1, the very first few words. It starts off by saying, "The revelation of Jesus Christ." And of course, scholars have commented on that a lot. Like, "What does John mean there? Does he mean the revelation that *is* Jesus Christ? Or does he mean the revelation that *is from* Jesus Christ?" And I think the answer, of course, is *both*. He means both. And I think Paul means the same thing here. And this is really important, I think, because oftentimes we read Paul as someone who has a thing against works. [laughs] Right? We think Paul is advocating sort of this idea that faith is a mental assent or just some sort of like easy belief or whatever, and that Paul doesn't have a lot to say about works and obedience to Christ. So we essentially pit faith versus works in Paul. And I think that's a very surface-level reading of Paul. So I think that idea of faith here, being paired with the word "obedience," really brings out that idea that... You know, you use the phrase a lot. What do you say? "Believing loyalty?" That's what you say, right?

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: Yeah, believing loyalty.

MSH: What Paul is opposing is any idea of merit, not obedience.

MLH: Riiiiight. That's such a good distinction. And really the concept of faith doesn't even really need to be paired with obedience. Because I think in the Jewish mind... And this is the second thing I would say about this. But in the Jewish mind, obedience and faith, I think, are closely linked, right? And it's really interesting here specifically because most of the time I would say the idea of obedience for Jews is always associated with hearing, like hearing the word of God means to really obey it. And we see this in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6), a very important prayer for Jews. And people are familiar with it, of course: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Well, that starts off with the word for "hear" in Greek. I'm reading from the Greek Old Testament. It's ἄκουε, Ἰσραηλ. The word ἄκουε [*akoue*] means to hear, you know, listen up. And what's interesting about that is the word that Paul uses for obedience (ὑπακοή—*hypakoe*). So you can immediately hear the similarity just in the sound.

MSH: The similarity, yep.

MLH: Yeah. And so "hearing" means to, you know, *akoue*, and then obedience is *hypakoe* [sounds like "a-KOO-ay" and "hu-PAK-o-ay"]. And in both words in Greek, there's an etymological connection there. Both words share the same root, which is ακουω. We get our word "acoustic" from that (acoustic guitar, for example). So when Paul talks about bringing about the obedience of faith here, I know some scholars who have said (and I'm one who goes with this as well)...
10:00 Some scholars think that Paul is alluding to or echoing back to that Shema idea of believing loyalty. I mean, the Shema was essentially like a creed, like a creed that we commit our lives to.

MSH: You're not going to hear and obey it unless you believe it.

MLH: Right. Yeah, it's part of it for sure. And I think here what Paul's really saying is that he's drawing from Israel's ancient creedal covenant. And he's saying, "This is open to Gentiles." Because he wants to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations. So why am I even bringing this up? Well, here's the thing. This idea (this Jewish idea, "faith-obedience," Shema idea—believing loyalty idea)... That whole idea is being repurposed by Paul as believing loyalty to *Jesus* the Messiah. And what he's really saying is that to be in covenant with Yahweh is to be faithful to Jesus. And again, we can't miss the profound nature of this. He (Paul, that is) is taking the concept of faith, or faithfulness (loyalty, whatever), and he's reconfiguring it around the person of Jesus Christ—Jesus the Messiah. And we might look at this and say, "That's really interesting what Paul's doing. He's doing something novel and something totally unwarranted." And I would say, "No, not at all. Remember Malachi. He's the one who has said that Israel's calling—Israel's vocation and what it even means really to be a faithful Jew—is going to be reconfigured around this coming

Messenger. So really, Paul's not doing anything that Malachi didn't already forecast and promise. True, Paul's interpretation here is new and fresh, but it's nonetheless very consistent with and operates within the parameters of what we've seen in Malachi and, I think, elsewhere in Jewish ideas.

MSH: Yeah, it fits with what Malachi and others were angling for.

MLH: It does.

MSH: You know, the failure of Israel and looking forward to the success of someone to follow, which in Malachi turns out to be the Messenger or the Messiah.

MLH: Mm hmm. Absolutely. And again, we have to keep in mind all that we've said even before we got into Malachi—this whole idea of the messianic profile. So Paul's operating within those parameters, too—not just Malachi's Messenger idea, but all of it. So all of that is something that Paul is immersed in. So it's very important. And this is just one example. So I might even point to another very important example from Romans 1:16-17. And I'll read that here. It comes from the ESV. This is another place where, yet again, Paul is going to reconfigure faith language around Jesus. So in this well-known passage, Paul says:

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Now that phrase there, "the righteous shall live by faith," is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4. And I just want to throw this out here. It's very important for folks to know how important this passage is. There's really not a word in this text that is not disputed or talked about or debated among scholars. It's a very important text that every scholar realizes is foundational for understanding Romans. In fact, many Romans scholars are going to say this is the opening line, the theme as it were, the doorway into Romans itself. So it's a very important text. I think the other thing I need to say here too (and I hinted at it previously), but the word "faith" (πίστις—*pistis*) can mean "faith," but it can also mean "faithfulness." And for me, I have this tendency to just say, "Well, let's translate it as faithfulness." Because I believe very strongly that while we cannot earn salvation by merit (I don't believe that we can bring anything to God to earn salvation), I still think that God calls us to loyalty to him.

MSH: It's discipleship.

MLH: Discipleship. Yeah. And you know, I grew up in a tradition that probably didn't emphasize the loyalty aspect. Right? But when I read Paul, he's operating

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on a different plane. He definitely believes that loyalty to Jesus is absolutely essential. So anyway, that's just something I want to say. But just taking the word itself grammatically (*pistis*), this denotes faithfulness. So I translate this as something like "from faithfulness for faithfulness." So in other words, I would say, "For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faithfulness for faithfulness, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faithfulness.'" Or you can say "faith" as long as you know that it's a very thick word that entails loyalty, too.

MSH: Paul is going to come up on the believing part anyway, you know, a little bit later.

MLH: Right. Absolutely. And part of the reason I translate this as faithfulness instead of just faith... Well, there's two reasons. 1) Just because of the cultural issues going on. "Faith" often means (in our Christian subcultures) something like just mental assent, or just hoping, or believing. And that's so foreign to Paul. He's not going to...

MSH: Praying a prayer like it's an incantation.

MLH: Yeah! Yeah, exactly. And I want to avoid that. But the second reason I translate this as faithfulness is actually because of the text itself. So when you go back and you pay close attention to the Habakkuk 2:4 text that Paul quotes, you find out that in the Greek version of that, faithfulness is probably the better translation. So let me just jump to that real quick. Habakkuk 2:4... In the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament), we read something like this:

But the righteous, by *my* faithfulness, will live.

That's my translation. Well, what's interesting there is that God is the "my." By *my* faithfulness, the righteous will live. And that's really an interesting piece there. When you read the Hebrew Old Testament, though, you don't have *my* faithfulness, you have *his* faithfulness. It reads like this:

But the righteous, by *his* faithfulness, will live.

Or "by his faith, will live." And there in the Hebrew, the emphasis is on the believer, the human. Their loyalty to Yahweh is what counts. But in the Greek, like I read, it's shifted to God. It's God's faithfulness. So if we want to be righteous, then the characteristic of what it means to be righteous is we're going to live by *God's* faithfulness. That's how we live. And so that's a difference between the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek Old Testament. Now Paul doesn't include either one of these things. He just says that the righteous shall live by faith. So he omits any sort of pronoun, whether it...

MSH: He disregards the pronoun in either case.

MLH: He does. That's exactly right. So what do we do with this? And this is just one of the reasons I love Paul. Because I think his omission might be deliberate. There's really good reason to think that. Because I think he wants to preserve the ambiguity between both ideas. But before I get to that, let me say something about the original context of Habakkuk. When you go back and read (which it doesn't take long to read the entire book of Habakkuk)... But when you go back and read it, I think we see that it's best not to play these ideas off of each other, like whether God's faithfulness or human faithfulness is in view. I think there's actually room for both, given the context of Habakkuk. Because the point in Habakkuk's story and the book is that God will be faithful to do what he said he would do, namely bring justice and punish the Babylonians for what they're doing. And Habakkuk is just told to wait and have faith in God, or have faith in God's faithfulness. And I think that's the idea—that God is faithful. And because God is faithful, we have good reason to put our trust or our faith in him.

So what we have there, given the context of Habakkuk, is that you can have both the Greek Old Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament kind of complement each other. So the Greek Old Testament says we live by God's faithfulness. The Hebrew says that we live by our faithfulness. And which is it? It's both. You only have faith in something that's trustworthy, right? And because God is trustworthy, we can place our trust in him. So anyway, you can take both of these witnesses in the Greek and the Hebrew. And you can see how...

20:00 **MSH:** Even the Masoretic Text, "the righteous, by his faithfulness, will live," yeah, you can say that that's the faithfulness of the person, but "his" could actually still be a reference to God, which is why the Septuagint translator opted for that. I mean, there's plenty of ambiguity here.

MLH: It's very possible, yeah. It's very possible. And that ambiguity is something that we can just live in and kind of tease it out a little bit more. And Paul's interesting, I think, because...

MSH: You know, it's a message that really doesn't need to be overcomplicated.

MLH: True.

MSH: Because on the one hand it's like the righteous is going to live by God's faithfulness. And if the righteous person believes that God is going to be faithful, he's going to be loyal. So you see how both aspects, like you said, blend it together.

MLH: Exactly. Yeah. And the main point in all of this, though, is how Paul reconfigures the whole thing. I mean, Paul gives it a messianic reconfiguration, really. You have to read all of chapter 1 and really the whole context of Romans to see this. But Paul is going to give a slightly different sense to this text that

what is originally in Habakkuk. But he doesn't contradict the original context of Habakkuk. I think what he's just suggesting is that to have faith in Yahweh's faithfulness... If you want to do that, then you have to have faith in the faithfulness that God has shown us through the manifestation of Jesus.

MSH: Yeah, not... We're seeing God's faithfulness play out here in the messiah.

MLH: That's the context of Paul's quotation. Now Habakkuk's a slightly different... It has more of a political overtone here. Habakkuk is complaining and questioning and really wondering why God's using the Babylonians to punish God's own people. And Habakkuk's like, "I don't know how to make sense of this." And then God says, "Well, look. You have to understand that I'm doing something big here. I'm going to punish the Babylonians later. And your job is essentially to be patient, just trust my faithfulness, and place your faith in me." And Paul, though, has re-situated it to be more about faith in Jesus for salvation. Now at the same time, even though Paul does something slightly new and replaces it in a new context, there's nothing that Paul's doing that's contradicting the Habakkuk context. You know, is he expanding it? Yeah, he is re-situating it within the messianic era. But there's nothing in there that contradicts what Habakkuk is originally trying to say.

The other thing that's interesting here is, I don't think that Habakkuk envisions this whole faithfulness idea originally to be apart from works of the law—performing the works of the law. So when you look at Habakkuk 1:4...

MSH: Yeah, how else would he conceive it?

MLH: Yeah, you know, as a Jew, Torah-keeping was a very important thing, obviously.

MSH: Yeah, it's the way you show your loyalty to the God you believe is faithful.

MLH: That's exactly right. And part of Habakkuk's complaint (and this is in chapter 1 of Habakkuk, verse 4)... One of his complaints is that the Torah, he says, is "paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted." So one of his complaints is that even his own people are not practicing Torah. And in the Hebrew there, when he says "the law is paralyzed," the word "law" there is Torah. And so in the next chapter, when he says that the righteous will live by faith, I don't think he envisions faithfulness to be apart from works of law. Because that's the very thing he was lamenting in the first place. So now for Paul, though, he's going to do something slightly different. Faithfulness is no longer wrapped around Torah-keeping (works of law, circumcision, those sorts of things). But faithfulness is going to be re-wrapped around Jesus Messiah. That's the equivalent of what faithfulness to Yahweh is all about. Now that's interesting. So what have I just said? Well,

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faithfulness for Paul is wrapped around a person—Jesus, who he believes is the messiah. What's interesting about that is when you look at the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Habakkuk commentaries, which are called the Peshirim, the sectarians there (the Dead Sea Scrolls), they commented on this Habakkuk text. And they quote the same Habakkuk 2:4 text that Paul does. And it's interesting when you put them side-by-side. And I'll just read the interpretation that Qumran or the Dead Sea Scrolls people gave to the Habakkuk text. They say:

This refers to all those who obey the Law among the Jews whom God will rescue from among those doomed to judgment, because of their suffering and their loyalty to the Teacher of Righteousness.

Now what have I just read? Well, it seems that when they're commenting on the whole "the righteous shall live by faith" part, they're saying that this living, this having faith in God, is tied up in obedience to Torah—obedience to the law. But it's also tied up in the loyalty to the "Teacher of Righteousness." Now who's the Teacher of Righteousness?

MSH: An individual. There's the transition.

MLH: That's right. Yeah, it's an individual. Not 100% sure who they're talking about here, like the precise identity. Scholars talk about the Teacher of Righteousness and who he was and whatever. It doesn't really matter for our purposes.

MSH: It provides Second Temple context for a shift to looking at it as faithfulness to a person.

MLH: Right. That's exactly right. And the important point here is that for Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls), they interpret faith language with respect to Torah-keeping, and loyalty to this person—this sectarian leader that they all revered. And the sectarian leader is like an inspired interpreter. So that's interesting.

Now Paul, on the one hand because he doesn't tie up faith language with Torah-keeping in the way Jews of the time would have been comfortable with... But in the same vein, he's not that far off either. Because Paul, even though he says that we are justified by faith apart from works of law, he still thinks that our faithfulness to Jesus the messiah is actually what fulfills Torah in the first place. So he doesn't want to completely divorce faith language from Torah-keeping. I think what he wants to do is reconfigure Torah-keeping to be consistent with faith in the messiah and loyalty to Jesus, which we'll get into that a little bit more. But I just want to kind of situate Paul as an interpreter alongside one of his contemporaries here, and just show that there is difference, but there are some interesting similarities as well.

Now just kind of closing this piece up here, if we let Malachi be our guide... And again, if folks haven't listened to that episode, you really need to listen to that first. But if we let Malachi be our guide, then I think we can better see how Paul does what he does. Israel's calling (her vocation, her election, her obedience, her faithfulness, all of that), is being reconfigured around the messiah. So when Paul reconfigures faithfulness language around Jesus the messiah, we really shouldn't be that surprised because Malachi prophesied that would happen long before Paul actually does it. I think that helps us make sense of some of Paul's interpretive moves. So with all that in mind, there's another piece in Romans 3 where faith language (*pistis*, faithfulness language) is reconfigured around Christ. And it's done very explicitly. So this is in Romans 3:21-22. ESV says this:

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

Okay, the first thing we notice is that Paul admits that there is discontinuity and continuity between Old Testament and New Testament (or old covenant and new covenant stuff). How so? Well he says that the righteousness of God has been shown apart from Torah. But Torah and the Prophets have born witness to that. They prophesied about, that this would happen. So yeah, Paul is saying, "Something new has happened. And yet something is still... The new that has happened is still very consistent with what the Torah has always promised." So that's a very important piece. We can't miss that. Paul is not creating a new religion or anything like that. That would be just nonsense. Paul is operating within the same vein of the Judaism that he really grew up in. And so that's important to keep in mind.

30:00 Because of all that, Paul can go beyond... Just as an example here, Paul can go beyond, say, the original meaning of prophets like Habakkuk, when he interprets Habakkuk 2:4 in light of the messiah. But the prophets such as Malachi predicted that such messianic reconfiguration would happen anyway. So this really captures what Paul's saying in Romans 3 here, that his gospel (the gospel of Jesus) is new from what we've seen in the Old Testament, but the Old Testament has prophesied that something new like this would happen anyway. So he's still operating within that same vein. So that's important.

The other thing I want to say about this verse, when it says "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe," I think the ESV gets it wrong here. I don't translate it like that. I don't say "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ." I say "the righteousness of God was manifested through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." How can I do that? Well, it's pretty easy to do grammatically. It makes sense grammatically, I think. Because in the text here you have faith language, which of course like I said earlier can be interpreted as faithfulness. So I'm going to go with that. But the main thing here is

that in the text in the original Greek here, it reads more naturally like this. So for those who've studied it, you have a genitive here essentially, where faith, it's "of the faith in Jesus Christ." That's how you could translate it. So "the righteousness of God has been manifested through the faith of Jesus Christ." That's how it would literally read. But I would make a little adjustment there when we say "through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." That makes better sense. And plus, the ESV sounds redundant at this point. So listen to it again. It says:

22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Well, why repeat that? Why say "faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe"? That's too redundant. So I don't think that's what Paul meant. I think he says... He's got both of those things in mind—the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and our faith in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. So that's important to say. And I think the reason is because it's consistent with what we've seen in the Habakkuk citation in Romans 1 that we looked at earlier, that God's faithfulness is in view, too—not just human faith, but God's faithfulness. Here he's doing the same thing.

MSH: When you combine both the elements, and Paul is going to do it later in Romans 2 as well... Or I'm not sure exactly what passage you'll be picking up on. But "to all who believe" or "for all who believe" here in Romans 3 is a good illustration. It doesn't make much sense to quibble about, "Well, am I saved because of my faith in Christ or Christ's faithfulness?" Well, yeah. [laughter] You know? You have faith in Christ because he was faithful. I know there's a lot of quibbling about this that goes on. But ultimately, Paul has both sides of the same coin here. We need to just observe that.

MLH: Absolutely. Yeah. And really, the question is about God's faithfulness. I mean, we see this even more so. We won't really get into it today, but in Romans 3:1-5, around that part, what is that question? It is God's faithfulness. So if Israel has been unfaithful to the mission that she was given, then the question is, "Will that unfaithfulness of Israel nullify the faithfulness of God?" If God promised, in other words, to use the family of Abraham to be the rescue plan for the world, and the family of Abraham has chosen to be unfaithful to that vocation, then does that mean that God's not going to fulfill his promise to the family of Abraham? And Paul just thinks that's inconceivable. "By no means," he says. "No, God is always going to be faithful." So the question of God's faithfulness is front-and-center at the beginning of Romans 3. And that's actually part of my motivation, too, to translate Romans 3:21-22 the way I do. Because the question that Paul sets us up to ask is, "Okay. Well, if God's going to be faithful even though Israel's unfaithful, how then is God going to be faithful?"

MSH: Yeah, how does that work?

MLH: Well, it's going to be through the faithfulness of Jesus.

MSH: Right. Paul's answer is Jesus. Yep.

35:00 **MLH:** That's exactly right. So again, the word itself can handle the faithfulness idea. And I think the context can handle the faithfulness idea. I think it begs for it. So that's why I translate this as faithfulness.

But the important point in all of this... We've kind of gotten into the weeds here. But just kind of backing up and looking at the full scope, we can't miss the important element: that what we've seen here is that the faithfulness of God has been reconfigured around the activity and the work and ministry of Jesus the Messiah. Okay? And again, a close reading of Romans 3 shows us that that's the way God will carry on his covenant with Abraham, the story that we've been talking about these past few episodes. And that's just such an important element that I think if we miss it, we totally miss what Paul's doing completely. So the question for our series of episodes is, "Why is that messianic profile so important?" Why did we spend so many episodes just talking about a messianic résumé? Well, because it impacts the way Paul and other New Testament writers read the Old Testament.

MSH: It's going to help you spell out how God's going to be faithful. It's going to be through a particular person that's going to fit this profile.

MLH: Mm hmm. And you need all of those motifs or elements that we've talked about. You need to have the servant motif, because the Messiah is going to be a servant who dies on behalf of people.

MSH: You need the seed and the offspring motif, because of Abraham and David.

MLH: Yep. And you need the son of man motif because Jesus is king. He's going to inherit the nations. You need all of that. And I think there's nothing too controversial about what we're saying here. I think the point that a lot of people miss, though, is that we've not understood carefully how that messianic profile has shaped Paul's and the other New Testament writers' way of reading the Old Testament. It's shaped their hermeneutics. It's shaped their interpretive posture—so much so that they just read the Old Testament through it. And one thing I want to say, Mike (you've been saying this on social media a lot and I just absolutely love what you're saying here)... And I'm going to probably not get it completely right. But you said something recently, how a Christocentric hermeneutic should not cause us not to pay attention to the original context of the Old Testament (or something). How did you put that? It was really good.

MSH: I wish I could remember it now.

MLH: It was so good. Maybe it was a couple of weeks ago when it was posted. But a lot of times people will just say, "Well, because it happened..."

MSH: You know, if it's Christ-centered, they tend to just dispense with the Old Testament then.

MLH: Right. Yeah. "I don't need the Old Testament. I don't need the original context because I'm reading it through the Christ lens," or something. Right? [laughs] Well, that's nonsense. I mean, if you do away with the original context of the Old Testament text, then you have nothing left to read through a Christological lens. There's nothing left. So this is why I love this subject. Especially Paul. Because what we see is he reads the Old Testament dialogically. And what I mean by that is that he engages the Old Testament text through conversations of sorts. Like he thinks the text contributes something to meaning. And he also knows that his messianic assumptions help make sense of the texts that he's reading, too. So it's like this both/and sort of thing. He's not imposing on the original context assumptions that are foreign to the original context or that are violent toward the original context. No, that's not the way it works. But he's also not reading the Old Testament as a blank slate. He literally believes Jesus is the Messiah. He became a Christian after the Christophany, after his supernatural vision. That's what got him to be a Christian. Anyway, there's a lot, lot there on that subject.

So I think what we've seen is that faith language in Romans is reconfigured around Messiah. Pretty consistent with Malachi there, in the sense that the messiah reconfigures the story of Israel.

Okay, so the last thing (and second thing) that Paul reconfigures is Torah and Torah-keeping. I'm going to draw from Romans 2:12-15 here. It says:

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them...

40:00 So I won't get into the weeds here. [laughs] But the ESV kind of gets this wrong here. They misplace a comma that just tears up the entire text. [laughs] But I won't get into that.

MSH: Yeah, punctuation is important.

MLH: [laughs] It really is. So what Paul's saying here is that by nature, given their birth and their ethnicity, Gentiles just didn't grow up hearing Torah. They didn't have the law by nature of their identity as Gentiles. But yet, Paul thinks that there are cases where Gentiles who don't have the law by nature nonetheless do what the law requires—that the law is somehow written on their hearts. Okay, so if we get down to the latter part of Romans 2, starting with verse 25-29, Paul expands on this a little bit further. He says:

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised [MLH: a Gentile] keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

MSH: And it's not like Paul's making that up, because he's going back to the circumcision of the heart.

MLH: That's exactly right. Again, Paul's not reinventing the wheel here. Because he's actually drawing from Deuteronomy and Jeremiah here. I'll get to that in just a moment. But I just want to say that what Paul is doing here is he's saying that a Gentile can keep the commands of the law without keeping one of the law's most important commandments, namely circumcision. This is a point that N.T. Wright has highlighted a lot in his writings. So think about that. How can you keep the law if you don't have to keep one of the law's most basic commands (circumcision)? That's very important. And that's a good question we need to keep in the back of our mind. But in context, what Paul is referring to is Christians—believers in the messiah. They are the ones whose hearts have been circumcised. And if their hearts have been circumcised, then they *have* been circumcised, and they therefore keep the law—they keep Torah. And on the surface, this looks like a pretty radical departure from Old Testament conception of law-keeping. Because the law says, "Be circumcised." So there is some discontinuity there for Paul and the Torah and the new covenant. I admit that. I see that. But the Torah itself actually anticipated this sort of discontinuity. And that's important. We can't fail to see that. So how did it anticipate this sort of thing? Well, when Paul talks about circumcision of the heart, just as you said, Mike, he's not making this stuff up. He's drawing from the Torah and the Prophets. So Deuteronomy 10:16 says"

¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

Deuteronomy 30:6:

⁶ And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

And then we have Jeremiah, a prophet, who says in chapter 4, verse 4:

**⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD;
remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem;
lest my wrath go forth like fire,
and burn with none to quench it,
because of the evil of your deeds."**

So again, Paul is drawing from the deep well of his Judaism. He's not saying anything weird or inconsistent. He is advancing the story of God here, because he doesn't think that you have to be physically circumcised anymore, which the Torah and the Judaism of his time definitely said you had to be. So there is discontinuity between his messianism and the Judaism that he's living in. I admit that. But...

MSH: Yeah, he's defining what circumcision of the heart means, and that's belief and loyalty to Jesus.

MLH: Right. That's exactly right. And that is very consistent with what he said in Romans 3, where he says that, "but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the Prophets bear witness to it." How so? Well, because the law and the Prophets tell us about heart circumcision. Yeah, righteousness comes apart from the law, but the law anticipated this sort of thing from the very beginning. I think that's a very important piece that we can't miss.

45:00

What is Paul's point here? Well, his point's pretty simple. He says, essentially, because Jesus is the Messiah, and hence therefore he's the one who has reconfigured the entirety of Israel's vocation/Israel's election around himself... Because Paul believes that, he recognizes that faithfulness should no longer be focused on Torah *per se*, but rather on Messiah, who has fulfilled Torah itself. And this is very important because he essentially believes that you fulfill Torah by having believing loyalty in Jesus Messiah, because it was through Jesus that

Torah was fulfilled. Paul says this even later at the very end of Romans 3. He says,

Do we overthrow the law by faith? By no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law.

So Paul actually believes that the law is upheld through his messianic reconfiguration. And how so? Well, again, it's a messianic reconfiguration. Romans 10:4 says,

For the Messiah (or Christ) is the culmination of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

It's in Messiah. Everything is reconfigured around him. So there's a lot there. But this really captures his hermeneutic. But what's really interesting here is in order to get to this point, Paul makes kind of a move that is an important rhetorical move in his letter to the Romans. So one reason he says that you don't have to keep Torah (circumcision, dietary laws, and things like that) is because, "Well, in Christ, those are fulfilled." Okay. Easy peasy. Makes sense. But the other reasons in Romans 2 that Paul gives that you don't have to keep Torah really is because Torah couldn't actually facilitate Israel's calling, anyway. Right? Torah just pointed out how bad there were all the time. [laughter]

MSH: It highlights the failure.

MLH: Yeah. Oh, that's good. Yeah, Torah just highlights the failure. And so if Torah highlights Israel's failure to be God's elect, then how could we rest on Torah to reassure us that we are God's elect? The way we can find that reassurance that we are the elect is if we are in Messiah Jesus. So that's Paul's argument essentially. But Paul says something in the middle of Romans 2 to that end. He basically says, "Look, you Jews, even though you've relied on the law, and even though you think you're a light to those who are in darkness, you've actually misled everybody the whole time." So let me read this text in Romans 2:17-24. Because when he's saying that stuff, he's going to quote a passage from Isaiah. And it's a very interesting quotation that I think we need to deal with. So let's see, Romans 2:17-24. This is from the ESV. He says:

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law [MLH: on the Torah] and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While

you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

That's from Isaiah 52:5. So in other words, what Paul's done here is saying, “You're resting on Torah. You think you are the light to the world and all of that. But actually, what you've done is created a situation where the nations are blaspheming God because of your actions—because of you breaking Torah.” What's interesting here is, when you go back to the original context of Isaiah 52, you find out that the context is slightly different, at least on the surface. It's different than how Paul construes it. So Paul has turned that verse into a word of criticism or a word of judgment. But if you go back to the original context, it's actually a word of comfort to Israel, like God is lamenting their state. He's not judging them for this necessarily. He himself is in kind of disarray. He's really upset that this is the situation that they're in. And I want to pull a quote here from the biblical scholar, Richard Hays. This comes from one of his books. And it really captures what Paul has done here. He says this:

50:00

In Isaiah, the quoted passage is part of Yahweh's *reassurance* of Israel in exile: precisely because Israel's oppressed condition allows the nations to despise the power of Israel's God, the people can trust more surely that God will reveal himself and act to vindicate his own name. Thus, Paul transforms Isaiah's oracle of promise into a word of reproach.

Hays goes on to vindicate Paul. And he says that Paul's kind of reuse here is just provisional in nature. Anyway, I'm not going to get into details and all that. But this is just something that captures what's going on, at least initially. But I want to say here, too, that there is some debate about all this. Some scholars say, “Well, no, Isaiah intended this to be a word of judgment, too, not a word of comfort. You go back and look at the context.” And there are ways to kind of play with it. And if Isaiah originally meant it to be a word of comfort, then presumably that absolves Paul from doing something foreign to the context and doing something novel with that quotation. So be that as it may, I say, let's just... Worst case scenario, let's just say that Isaiah originally intended this to be a word of comfort and Paul has recontextualized it to be a word of judgment. Does that mean that Paul has engaged in faulty exegesis? And I don't think so at all.

So let's talk a little bit more about this. Paul recontextualizes Isaiah's text so that it can mean something slightly different from the original context. Okay. But how can he do that? Well, I think it's pretty simple, actually. Paul can turn Isaiah's word of comfort into a word of judgment because he has recontextualized Israel's exile in light of that Genesis 11-12 narrative—in other words, in light of how they

have failed to be a light to the nations. The exile that Israel is in, it's revealed emphatically that Israel cannot be the rescuer of the nations because she has actually become prisoner of the nations. And since that's Paul's focus, it's really irrelevant that Isaiah's text was originally a word of comfort. It just doesn't matter at this point. What matters is that Israel was leading the nations to blaspheme the name of God because her exile was a result of her own sinfulness. I think that's what Paul's really getting at. And so Paul does interpret this text somewhat creatively because he assumes (like every good Jew did) that Israel is the rescue plan for the world and she has a responsibility to be a minister to the world, to bring the world back to God. And so he's operating within that story. And I think what motivates Paul to re-read Isaiah in light of what he already believes about Jesus is that he sees himself as playing a role as an apostle to bring back the nations through his gospel. But the assumption that Jesus is the messiah, that Jesus is the rescue plan, that Jesus is Israel, the one everything is reconfigured around—that's going to motivate him to read this Isaiah text somewhat creatively, but not in any way inconsistently or in contradiction to the original context, even if it goes beyond the original context.

MSH: Well, there are parts of Isaiah that already know that Israel has become the prisoner. Otherwise, you wouldn't have these visions of reclaiming the nations later on in the book.

MLH: Mm hmm. Right.

MSH: So I mean, that element's still there.

MLH: Absolutely. Yeah, I mean, Isaiah definitely has a role for the nations to play, too, right? [laughs] Paul is not inconsistent with the overall message...

MSH: Paul is looking beyond the one particular verse into the whole scope of the book.

MLH: Mm hmm. Right. Exactly. And again, it just doesn't matter if Isaiah originally meant that as a word of comfort or a word of judgment. It just doesn't matter. I mean, Paul clearly uses it as a word of judgment, but the point for Paul is just that simply Israel was in exile anyway, and Israel needs to know that her exile will continue to last unless she discovers the messiah that has come to rescue not only her, but the world, and therefore fulfill the Israelite mission to rescue the nations. So that's what's going on.

55:00

MSH: Yeah, I mean, the comfort part is that, as much of a mess that Israel's made of things, God's going to turn it around.

MLH: Yeah, absolutely. And Paul is saying, "I've found the one who has turned it around. I found the one who's done it."

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: So what's the point? Paul is reading these Old Testament texts in light of that story. When he accuses the Jews in Romans 2 of hypocritically claiming to be a light to those who are in darkness, etc., he's assuming that that's her mission in the first place. And he's also concluding that she has failed in that mission. And so I think Paul reads the Old Testament along that storied approach that we've talked about several episodes ago. But the broader point, I think, of this episode is just to show very simply that Paul reconfigures faith language, faithfulness language, and Torah-keeping language around the messiah. He approaches those topics, in other words, through a Christocentric lens. But that doesn't mean, as we've said earlier, that he is disregarding the Old Testament text or somehow interpreting it violently or relativistically or something. No, he's interpreting it in light of the story—the story of Israel's election.

MSH: Yeah, because the story arc is going to have all these elements in it. And Paul's privy to the whole story.

MLH: Yeah, absolutely. And I think for us, just listening to this and talking about it, it's pretty clear that in order to understand Paul, you've got to do a lot of work. You've got to do a lot of homework, paying attention to this word and looking up the Hebrew, paying attention to the Septuagint, all of this stuff. And listeners might be thinking, "Man, this is just a lot of work to get to the point of it all. And surely it wasn't that difficult for Paul or whatnot." And in a sense, it probably wasn't because we didn't grow up in that story. We didn't grow up immersed in the stories of Israel and in the worldview of Israel. We're Westerners. I am. And so I didn't grow up with this. But Paul was different. Paul was baptized into these stories from the get-go. And he just oozes with either scriptural quotations or allusions or just the story itself. And so what we're having to do a lot of work to do to make sense of it would've been pretty easy for Paul.

MSH: Even as Christians, we're not immersed in the Old Testament. [crosstalk]

MLH: Right. And that's a travesty.

MSH: We're handicapped from the beginning.

MLH: Right. Absolutely. Yeah. And so we have to remedy that for sure. And really, look what we've done in these episodes. We've spent so much time—painstaking time—looking at this messianic profile, just discovering it. We weren't building it. We were discovering it. And that set us up to understand a text like Romans. But it's not just Romans. This means you can... It'll help you understand Matthew. It'll help you understand all kinds of stuff. Just the other day I was taking my students through 1 Peter, 2 Peter, those texts. And Peter uses the Jewish language all throughout—key language like "elect" and "exiles" and all

these things—priests. And I mean, if you don't know... He just uses these simple little words and assumes you know about them. But oftentimes, as Western readers, we don't know about them. And so I find myself with my students having to constantly go back and say, "Okay, let's read up all on this. Let's pay attention to this bit in the Old Testament before we can even get to a small letter of the New Testament." You know what I mean? And so yeah, it's a travesty that... I mean, I'm speaking for myself here. I didn't grow up knowing the Old Testament as much as I should have.

MSH: It's hard because we're not immersed in the world of the Old Testament.

MLH: Right, right. Absolutely. Yeah, and I think... I'm optimistic, though, because there's a lot of scholars who are (I think at least) bringing our attention back to it. I mean, you, of course. You're doing a great job in that respect. And there are others, too. And I'm hoping that we're seeing a change in that. My hope with my research and my work is to do that in some respects as well. Because by focusing on this topic of intertextuality or the Bible's use of the Bible (New Testament use of the Old Testament), I want people to see not only the beauty of the Old Testament and its riches, but also to see how it interacts and is connected with those texts in the New Testament that are just taken for granted, oftentimes.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: I'd like to see...

MSH: Who reads Malachi? [MLH laughs] You know? Who reads Habakkuk? When was the last time you heard these books preached through in your church?

1:00:00 **MLH:** Oh, I know. Exactly.

MSH: [You don't] get it.

MLH: Yeah. And hopefully what we're doing here gives preachers, pastors, and Bible teachers just some more tools in their toolbox that they can just pull out and have fun with, and even flesh them out in their own congregations, too. I mean, that's important, obviously. But yes, so Paul reconfigures all this stuff around the messiah. And that's exactly what we should expect after reading Malachi. Right? And the other bits.

So kind of how I divide up Romans (I do this in my book)... But the way I divide it up is essentially in four sections, which is not unusual for scholars of Romans. But essentially, what I do in my book is I take Romans 1-3 and I talk about how Paul reconfigures and recontextualizes key concepts like Torah-keeping, faith language, and I also tackle righteousness language. And that's kind of what we

did here. And then the second part of my book deals with Romans 4-8. And there I talk about how Paul recontextualizes and reconfigures the stories of Israel: the Abraham story in chapter 4, the Adam story in chapter 5, and then in chapters 6, 7, and 8, I think an Exodus story can be detected. And I talk about how Paul recontextualizes those around the messiah. And then when we look at Romans 9, 10, and 11, I talk about how election has been recontextualized, recentered around Jesus as well. And I draw on a number of scholars who said that before I ever thought of it. But it's important because I think we don't realize that a concept like election has itself been reconfigured around Messiah. And then the last bit, Romans 12-16, I talk about how the practice, the ethics, of the early Church has itself been recentered around the messiah as a crucified messiah. Because Christ is crucified and is a servant, we should act similarly to our brothers and our sisters, and how we relate to the State, how we relate within the Church as well. So all of it throughout Romans is recontextualized around Messiah. And so I guess next episode we can get to how Paul retells the stories of Israel.

MSH: Yeah, I think that'll be a good strategy, just to take it in chunks like that. But I think, again, this is... I mean, I'll say it. For my audience, I mean, this is still going to be a challenge because none of us grew up with the Old Testament. We just didn't. So we put a lot of effort into (not just in this series, but just generally) alerting people to the other three-quarters of their Bible that really forms the basis in so many ways for the New Testament—what the New Testament says and who Jesus is and what he does and what he says and where he goes, and all these sorts of things. It's a lot of work. But I agree with you. I think the Malachi episode was really crucial. And this whole notion of how Paul can be a faithful Jew—a faithful interpreter—but yet reconfigure things through the messiah, because the messiah is what all of it was leading to anyway. And Paul can be very overt with that and still be honoring the Old Testament. I think that's really important.

MLH: Yeah, absolutely. And I just want in my research to just get this across, that the hermeneutic element, that the messianic profile impacts and influences Paul's interpretive approach. And I like to say (and I might have already said this in another episode, but I'll say it again nonetheless) that we often talk about how Paul's Christophany (his vision of Christ on the road to Damascus) changed his life. It put him on a new trajectory. And it did. But we also need to see that moment as the moment where his hermeneutical life changed, too.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: You know what I mean?

MSH: He'll never read his Old Testament the same way again.

1:05:00

MLH: You know, that's the point. He had a high view of Scripture. I mean, he had a very high view of Scripture for sure. He was a faithful Jew, after all. And I think he had a high view of Scripture till the day he died. But what's interesting is that he didn't become a Christian just by reading his Bible, but he became a Christian when he had this experience—a supernatural experience—which I find real fascinating on a number of levels. And I'm not suggesting that the Bible didn't contribute to his conversion at all. I'm not suggesting that. Because I think when he had that experience...

MSH: If he's also familiar with Second Temple literature, he's already sniffed out a lot of these trajectories anyway, but just didn't know what to do with them.

MLH: That's the key—didn't know what to do with them until the Christophany. And there's an excellent book. It's published a long time ago, but it was written by Seyoon Kim. It's called *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*. And I cited it in my book because it's such an... You know, I disagree with Kim on a few things, but his overall point is that that Christophany really altered everything. And one thing Seyoon says is that when Paul had that Christophany, he wasn't a blank slate. He had Jewish worldview all in his heart at that moment. And I think that's an important point to make. Because when Paul has the Christophany, he comes to that Christophany with beliefs, assumptions, presumptions about Messiah—messianic profile stuff, of course, but also just the Old Testament story itself. And that Christophany really is the answer to the questions of his Jewish heritage. But it's also the reverse. The Christophany becomes the question to which his Old Testament was the answer. So that's what I meant earlier by saying it's a dialogue for Paul—that the Old Testament made sense of Jesus' Christophany in many ways. And he was able to categorize that supernatural experience within the framework of an Old Testament worldview. And that Old Testament worldview was itself re-situated into everything that that Christophany meant. And so it's a dialogue back-and-forth way of understanding, and it's mutually interpretive. He interpreted the Christophany in light of his Jewish worldview, and his Jewish worldview is interpreted in light of that Christophany. And so I think that's the best way to see it. And I think that actually captures the way he reads the Old Testament up until the day he died for sure.

MSH: Well, we'll look forward to doing some more in Romans next time. I just want to thank you again for being with us and laying all this out.

MLH: Yeah, thanks again, Mike. I enjoy it. I appreciate you. I love your ministry. And I'm so grateful to be on the show.

TS: Alright, Mike. Towards the end there, it's funny, because I was thinking to myself about, "Man, this *is* a lot of work." And Matt said that very exact same thing there towards the end about how much work it is. And it does seem like a lot of work.

MSH: It is. It is. You know, we're just not immersed in these things like Paul was. You know, Paul would've had these things just floating around in his head—just sort of disparate, unconnected points. So it really is hard for us. And it does take a lot of work. So I'm hoping that's one thing that people get out of the episode, that they can string a few more of these things together but realize it takes a lot of study to really understand what Paul's doing. You've got to go back and look at your Old Testament and really think about it.

TS: Yeah, these episodes are really highlighting that. And I think, Mike, we're planning for three more episodes. We're getting into the payoff hopefully happening over here in the next few episodes in Romans. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.