

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 420

Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series: Romans 4

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Episode Summary

In the preceding episode, we saw how Israel's elective vocation was reconfigured by Paul to focus on the work of Christ and the resurrection. The focus was Romans 1-3 and how Paul understands faith/faithfulness and Torah keeping. In this episode, the template of the faithfulness of Jesus, the faith of the individual believer, and the matter of works (specifically circumcision) are articulated by Paul using the story of Abraham in Romans 4. Again, Paul contextualizes the Old Testament in light of the work of Jesus and his own encounter with the risen Christ.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 420: Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series: Romans 4, 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: Hey, Trey. You know what's going on?

TS: What's going on?

MSH: I think I have the chronology right. I think baseball season has now begun. Did you catch it?

TS: Uh, I think they were on strike. No, I thought they weren't going to play.

MSH: No, no, no, no. The season started April 7th.

TS: Oh. Well... I was really rooting for the lockout, Mike.

MSH: Yeah, I know you were. That's why I wanted to remind you.

TS: Well, how did your draft go? Did you get a good team?

MSH: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I always tend to draft well, but it doesn't really matter because too many things happen during the season. Now I just wait for all my guys to get injured. You know how that goes.

TS: [laughs] Yeah, I hear that. Well, alright, Mike. As much as I'd love to talk about baseball, I like talking about Romans even more. [MSH laughs] So we're still in the thick of Romans here.

MSH: Yeah, that's a good transition, but a low blow, Trey. [laughter]

TS: That's what I do!

MSH: Well, we're thrilled to have Matt Halsted back on the podcast with us, and I think the audience is going to like this. Matt, we're finally breaking into the New Testament. What do you think about that?

MLH: [laughs] It's fun. I enjoy the New Testament quite a bit.

MSH: That's a good thing. [laughs] That's a good thing for a Pauline scholar.

MLH: Right. I like the Old Testament too, obviously, because I'm a Pauline scholar as well. So... I'm just a Bible guy. I like the whole Bible. [laughs]

MSH: Well, we've spent quite a bit of time tracking on a messianic profile—creating that profile. For those of you who are listening and you're sort of jumping into the middle of this, that's a bad idea. You need to go back to the very first in the series with Matt Halsted and listen to what we've been doing this far. I can summarize it by saying we've constructed a messianic profile, something that a Jew of Paul's day would recognize as the messianic expectation. And there's lots of elements to it. There's the seed, there's offspring, there's dynasty, there's kingship, there's family, there's servanthood—all these different motifs. Prophet, even priest, get thrown into the mix to create what would have been in the list of expectations for a messiah, and we were doing this as pushback on scholarship that more or less has Paul inventing things—Paul inventing theology—that would not have been recognizable in mainstream Judaism. And we both object to that idea. So we wanted to have Matt on. And Matt, I'm going to turn it over to you. If you want to recap anything more specific... But now that we've constructed the profile, now we've got to get into, "Okay, how does this help us read Paul?" And why don't you tell us where we're going to start?

MLH: Yeah, we'll start in Romans 4 today. And the last episode, as people will remember, is when we looked at chapters 1-3 and we examined just a few

concepts that Paul had wrestled with and discussed, namely the concept of faith (or faithfulness) language and the concept of Torah (or Torah-keeping) language. And that was real predominant in Romans 1-3. And so we talked about that, but specifically we brought that up to note how Paul will reconfigure those concepts along messianic or Christological lines. That's a very important piece. And why is that an important piece? Well, because just as you said, some scholars will say that Paul is reinventing the wheel when he's writing about certain things, and that he is doing something extremely... I guess you could say "detached" from the Old Testament background. And I don't agree with that. I don't think that Paul is reinventing the wheel. I don't think he's inventing theology, or anything of the sort.

5:00 But at the same time, I will admit that there's some creativity going on for sure in some of Paul's writings, and especially with respect to his quotations from the Old Testament. But even so, what I like to show is that that creativity is still within the bounds of established practices back during Second Temple Judaism, but even more so as we saw when we looked at some of the Old Testament stuff, specifically Malachi, who predicted that the messiah would come or the Messenger would come. And Israel's temple cult priestly system would be reconfigured around the messiah or the Messenger. And really that's all we see Paul doing, too.

So yeah, he is being creative by reconfiguring Old Testament concepts such as faith and Torah-keeping around the messiah. He's doing some new things—some fresh things—because the Messiah has come, so new things are going to happen. But that is still not inconsistent with what we've seen with respect to the messianic profile that we've been talking about up until this point. So there's a balance to be struck.

And I think today when we jump into Romans 4, where Paul brings up the Abraham story, I think we're going to see both of those things in play: the creativity, but even some of the consistency that we've been talking about as well. Romans 4 is an interesting passage. And Paul... In Romans 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, there are at least three different Jewish stories there that Paul reconfigures around the messiah. In Romans 4 it's the Abraham story, which we'll talk about today. And then in Romans 5 he brings up the Adam story and how sin comes through him. Well, I think that's reconfigured around the Christ event as well. And then we won't talk about that, we just don't have time to talk about that one, but... People will have to read my book to see what we do with that. [MSH laughs] (Shameless plug.) [laughs] And then in Romans 6, 7, and 8, some scholars have noticed that Paul is retelling the Exodus story in Romans 6, 7, and 8 because he talks about slavery and bondage and freedom from that—the Spirit leading the slaves out. And of course, that's New Testament language, but it has Old Testament echoes of the Exodus. So I think Paul is alluding to an exodus story there, and he's reconfiguring around the messiah there, too.

But anyway, today, in this episode we'll talk about Abraham. It's an important piece. So Romans 4, Paul brings up the Abraham story to show two things for two reasons. The first thing is just to show that a person doesn't have to keep works of the law like circumcision in order to be in covenant with God. So that's the first thing. The second thing he's going to do with Abraham's story is to show how God has been faithful to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant through Christ and how God has done that. So those two things are why Paul brings up the Abraham story. And essentially, Paul is going to say that Abraham is proof that justification... (There's a big, fancy, \$20-dollar word there. It just means being declared righteous or being declared to be in the covenant family. Justification is a fun word.) But Abraham is proof that justification is not dependent upon works of law such as circumcision. And the reason Abraham is important is because Paul's going to show that Abraham himself—the patriarch of the Jewish nation himself—was justified *before* he performed the work of circumcision.

So there's a few texts that we can look at from Romans 4. We'll look at Romans 4:1-3 and then verses 9-11. I'll go ahead and read that from the ESV here. It says:

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Now that's a quotation from Genesis 15:6. And then Paul goes on. "Is this blessing of forgiveness and righteousness..." That's... I skipped a passage there. But he talks in verses 4-8 about how the blessing of being in covenant comes along with forgiveness, and all those sorts of things. But anyway, he goes on in verse 9 and says:

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

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So what is Paul doing here? Well, Paul is doing something pretty fun. He is showing that a close reading of the Abraham story in Genesis will reveal that Abraham was accepted by God and covenanted with God by faith. And that happens... Of course, we saw it in Genesis 12 and we've talked a lot about that, when God calls and elects Abraham and his family. But then in Genesis 15, he is declared righteous by God in that text. And that's by faith. And it's not until Genesis 17 (so a couple of chapters later) that he gets the seal of righteousness, which is circumcision. Circumcision is what? It literally marks you out as a person of God, right?

And so Paul has noticed something very important. And Paul is exploiting this difference here, and I don't mean "exploiting" in a negative sense. But he's exploiting the fact that Abraham is recorded in the Torah as being righteous by faith before he gets the covenant of circumcision. Now again, we can all see... We can hone in here why that's important. Because if Abraham himself can be declared righteous without being circumcised, then what is to prevent Gentiles from experiencing the same sort of blessing? And I think that's stuff that we need to really understand before we go on. The community at Rome, like many early Christian communities, no doubt would have had a lot of conflict between Jews and Gentiles, and in the Church between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. What was the conflict about? Well, a lot of it came down to "works of law," which is I think a very technical term that doesn't really (in my opinion) mean works in general, like good works in general. I think it means something along the cultic works of the Jewish people. It's those works that made the Jews the Jews: circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, dietary restrictions, and the sort. And what marked them out as unique or holy was, of course, maintaining works of law and going about that. So when Jews became Christians, they would look at their Gentile brothers and sisters and say, "Yeah, yeah. I'm glad you believe in Jesus. But my goodness, why aren't you keeping Sabbath? Why aren't you keeping the dietary laws?" And that's important because that's what marks you out as a covenant member. And Paul's argument really is, "No, no, no, no. What marks you out as a covenant member is faith in Christ. That's what does that. So works of law aren't necessary in that respect. And so let me show you. Look at Abraham."

And so that's where we are with Romans 4. Okay, so that's essentially the argument, right? Um, kind of. There's actually more going on. So I want to ask a question: Does Paul's argument work? Now that seems like a very simple question. But I think it's one that needs to be asked. Does Paul's argument work? Okay, as a historical fact according to Torah, it is true that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised. Fair enough. So far, so good. But the question is, "Is that fact alone enough to conclude that nobody needs to be circumcised anymore?" And I want to say something that might shock people here for a moment, but just stick with me and follow through here, because I'll come back around to solving what might be perceived as a problem. But the

answer is no. I don't think Paul's argument works *if* all he's doing is relying on that one historical fact.

So let's just do a thought experiment, just for a moment. Let's imagine that Paul were to hop into a time machine and he were to travel back in the days of Moses or Joshua or maybe even King David or King Solomon or whatever. And suppose further that Paul stood in front of the Tabernacle or the Temple and he used this very argument in front of the priests. And he said something like, "Hey, everyone, you don't have to be circumcised. After all, if you read Genesis, it's clear that Abraham was justified by faith *before* he was circumcised." Well, all the Temple priests would disagree because even though that's true (they may acknowledge that), it's still true, they would say, that the Torah still commanded the Jews be circumcised.

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So this raises an interesting question we have to ask: "What in the world is Paul doing?" Should we conclude that Paul's argument is faulty—that it fails? And the answer is no. Absolutely not. I don't think so one bit. Because a close reading of Paul's entire argument shows that there's more to his argument than just what we've seen already. In other words, I don't think that Paul's argument is meant to rest entirely upon his exegesis of Genesis. There's more going on. There's more that he's exegeting, if you will. And I think Paul is essentially doing this: he's reading Genesis in light of two things. First, he's reading it in light of his Christology—what he believes about Jesus as messiah. And secondly, he is reading this Abraham story in light of the Genesis 11-12 narrative that we've talked about in previous episodes. And just as a reminder, that Genesis 11-12 narrative is the narrative—the story—that talks about humans going astray at the Tower of Babel (chapter 11), and then God immediately calling the Abrahamic family to be the blessing, to restore and rescue the world (in Genesis 12). So Paul's got that in mind. And in other words, Paul reads the Abraham story as just that—as a narrative—an ongoing story that finds its completion in his messianism or his Christology, which I think is Paul's most basic interpretive assumption.

So to kind of see what I'm doing here—what I mean by all this—we really need to read the next section of Romans 4, just a few verses—Romans 4:13-17. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to read, like, one verse and make a few comments, just to kind of help set the text in clarity and all of that. So Romans 4:13 says this:

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

And again, this is Paul just being very straightforward in his reading of Genesis. It's clear that Abraham was justified by faith before receiving the covenant of circumcision. In other words, he knew that he would receive the promise and the

offspring and the nations by faith. Okay. Easy-peasy, simple stuff. Verse 14 goes on and says this:

¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

What does Paul mean here? Well, he means that the relationship between the Mosaic law and the Abrahamic covenant must not be one of contradiction. In other words, for Paul, the Mosaic law (the Torah), whatever its purpose might have been (he doesn't tell us yet, but whatever its purpose might have been), it cannot be viewed in such a way that it nullifies and negates the original promise made prior to the giving of the law to Abraham. Let me put it another way. The Mosaic covenant has its place, but it's not meant to supplant or to derail the Abrahamic covenant that occurred prior to the giving of the law.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: Next verse, verse 15. Paul says this:

¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

Okay, what does Paul mean here? Well, even though the Torah served to make Israel distinct and separate from the nations, it also served to show how bad Israel was. So if that's the case, how could the Torah ever bring about the promise made to Abraham (that Israel would be blessed and that she would be a blessing or a rescuer of the world)? The law can't do that because if anything, the law just simply pushes Israel into exile among the nations, bringing curses upon Israel, showing that Israel is no better off than the Gentiles. So how could Israel rescue the Gentiles if she exists in exile among them? Okay, the law brings wrath, Paul says. Let me read the last two verses here—verse 16 and the first part of verse 17. Paul says this:

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"

That's a quote from Genesis 17:5. Let me explain this. Okay, so the Mosaic law did two things. It built a wall between Jews and Gentiles—dietary restrictions, marriage laws, and things like that. You know, when you have dietary restrictions, it restricts you from holding feasts with the nations and entering into solidarity or agreements with them. Because again, in those days, feasting was a way of showing and expressing and confessing your solidarity with your neighbors that lived around you. So God instituted the dietary restrictions to help

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keep Israel distinct and separated from the nations, okay? So that's one thing the Mosaic law did. But it also had another purpose. It highlighted Israel's own sinfulness, like I said a moment ago. But the original promise made to Abraham was that all nations—all Gentiles—would be blessed and healed through Israel. And yet the Mosaic law couldn't guarantee any of this. And as I said a moment ago, it's ironic because it actually brought about Israel's own condemnation along with the world and it served as the instrument by which Israel herself would be judged and exiled among the nations. And that's why Paul says everything must go back to the Abrahamic covenant. Why? Because it's the promise that God made to Abraham. And if the world will be rescued through Abraham's family, Yahweh himself would have to bring that rescue plan about apart from Israel's efforts to pursue the law. He just can't use the Mosaic law to bring about the promise to Abraham—the rescue plan. Because I mean, as Israel is performing the law, it's just going miserably. Right? [laughs]

So for Paul, the Abrahamic covenant is *more* than a historical event. It's an *ongoing* story that began long before the Mosaic covenant was enacted. And it's a story that Paul thinks finds fulfillment in Jesus. And it's in that sense that Paul is using that storied approach when he reads the Bible. The Abrahamic story is an ongoing story that finds its completion in Christ.

So maybe just stopping here for just a moment, what I'm suggesting at this point is that this is what it means for Paul to read the text Christologically. He's reading it through the lens of Christ, yes. He's doing something with the Abraham story that could not have been done prior to the Christ event. And so in that sense, yes, Paul is being creative. Yes, Paul is discovering new meaning that might not have been able to be discovered before the Christ event. I grant all of that. It's very creative. He's finding new meaning. Okay. All of that. But. But, but, but... He's not detaching the Abrahamic story and the meaning he finds it in from the Old Testament story itself. I've just said that Paul is reading it in light of this story and in light of the Torah story.

MSH: Would you think it an unfair accusation to accuse Paul of divorcing this from messianism just generally? Because the messianic profile that we've laid out basically illustrates everything you just said anyway, without identifying it as Christ.

MLH: Yeah, I like that. Because that's part of his storied approach. You know, I've been harping a lot on the Genesis 11-12 narrative saying that's vital. And it is. But...

MSH: Yeah, some other Jew could have expected this to culminate with messiah. You know, the Abrahamic covenant culminates with messiah. But even before the Christ event, they could do that, so Paul isn't out of step. But he goes a step further because he is post-Christ.

MLH: Yeah. That's exactly right. And that's why we don't want to say Paul is reinventing the wheel or that he's inventing theology or anything. You just don't want to do that because we don't have to. I mean, I'm not trying necessarily to defend Paul. I'm just saying, let's account for all the data here because the data speaks for itself. What is the data? Well, we've looked at it. The messianic profile has anticipated all that we're seeing Paul do. So even if there's discontinuity between the fresh meaning that Paul's finding and maybe the stuff before the Christ event, there's difference there. There's discontinuity. But only in the sense (ironically and interestingly) that Paul is tracing another line of *continuity* back between the messianic profile.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: So yeah, it's a both/and. And they're not mutually exclusive. You don't have to say, "*Either* Paul is being creative *or* he's reading it in light of the context or something." I mean, these two can go together. And I'm not going to get into it here. But that's part of what I did in my book that's coming out in a few months. I not only get into the biblical data—the text—but I offer what I think to be a really good way of understanding all of this on a philosophical level, like in terms of hermeneutic theory. Like, how do we understand things at all? How do we interpret events, books, plays, dramas, conversations? And what I show in my book is that there's always a creative element here, but that doesn't lead us to relativism. I'm not a textual relativist. I don't think the Bible can mean anything that we want it to mean, and I don't think Paul thought that. Yeah, he's being creative, but he's an artist. And as every good artist does, you always paint within the boundaries of a canvas. And what we're really suggesting here is that canvas is the messianic profile. Right? He doesn't get outside of that profile. So is there creativity? Sure. But is it relativistic? Absolutely not. There's no evidence, I think, that leads us down that path.

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A buddy of mine, he's a biblical scholar, Matthew Thomas is his name... He's written, by the way, an excellent book on Paul's works of the law and stuff. But he makes a comment (and I just love the way he refers to this)... He said, "I just want to be a referee. I'm just saying, 'Here's what the data says. Here's what we cannot say about Paul or whatever. And here's what we can say. That's just what the data says.'" So I'm just really trying to be a referee as I look at some scholars who say Paul's reinventing the wheel. I was like, "Man, guys. But you're not paying attention to the data." [laughs] You know? "You don't have to say that." And so I'm just trying to kind of play referee here as best as I can with the data that I've got.

The thing here... I've just said that Paul is rereading the Abrahamic story along Christological lines. I'm not just making that up. I think there's evidence in Romans 4 for that. And it just really... His Christology rises to the surface here, and you can tell that he's reading it Christologically. And here's some verses

from Romans 4 I want to read. And it really just highlights that point. So Romans 4:17-25. It says this in ESV:

¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he [MLH: this is Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He [MLH: Abraham] did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him [MLH: Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Now what I think here is that Paul is retelling this Abraham story with the language of Christology, or more specifically the language of death and resurrection. I mean, notice how Abraham (according to Paul) believed in God who “gives life to the dead [to the νεκρός]. That’s “dead” language there that we want to tally up. It says that Abraham did not weaken in faith. He considered his own body as good as νεκρός—as good as dead. And so again, the language of deadness is important. But then he describes Sarah’s womb as barren. And in Greek it’s literally “deadness” [νέκρωσις (*necrosis*)]. And so you don’t really get the full picture in the ESV here because it kind of covers up the stitching here that Paul is weaving in the language of deadness. And then... So he’s basically said Abraham’s body was dead; Sarah’s womb was dead. God raised him from the dead; God raised her womb from the dead. That’s the assumption, because he goes on at the end like we read. It says, “All of this was written not for their sake alone, but for ours.” Because it’s counted to us. Righteousness is counted to us who believe in him who raises the dead—who raised Jesus from the dead. And so I think what Paul has done here is essentially told the Abrahamic story with the language of deadness and resurrection. He’s primed it to be applicable to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

MSH: Yeah. Look what he’s going to do in Romans 5. So he’s setting up Romans 5 there.

MLH: Yeah, that's exactly right. Mm hmm. Yeah. And man, I wish we had more time to talk about it in this episode. But really, Paul's going to do the same thing with the Adam story as he does here with the Abraham story. He retells it kind of creatively but still very consistently. Very consistently, in fact, with the Genesis story. But there's still some creative elements there. But my point is if you just read Romans 4:17-25 and you read it closely, especially paying close attention to the Greek words here, you'll see that motif of deadness and resurrection has been implanted in the Abraham story so that it can be applied to the Jesus story. And again, this is slightly creative here, but it's not inconsistent with the Abraham story, by any means. He's just saying, "Hey guys. There's a connection here."

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And so that to me is evidence—some data that I need to take into account. "Yeah, okay, Paul." Paul's reading it Christologically. And I've already showed (I think convincingly) that Paul's argument that circumcision is not required for Gentiles can't rest on just his reading of Genesis 12 apart from his Christology—apart from the Christ event, because that reading wouldn't make sense. It wouldn't be persuasive, really, unless you believe Jesus is the Messiah who was dead and resurrected. So that's an important element. And so it's... Paul is exegeting the Old Testament text of Genesis but he's also exegeting that messianic profile. And again, I keep reminding the audience of this, but it's important. Go back and listen to the Malachi episode. Because Malachi predicted and foretold how Israel's vocation would be reconfigured around messiah. And you see that here with Paul. The Abrahamic story implied there is the vocation of Israel is reconfigured around the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. So that's important stuff.

So let me see... what else did I want to say here? The conclusion really from all of this is largely an ethical one. Because for Paul, life in the community is very important, and he wants the Jews and Gentiles to get along. And so he's showing how, in many respects, Abraham... "Yeah, he's the father of the Jewish nation, but he's also in the same position as our Gentile brothers, who don't have the covenant of circumcision yet, but they do have faith in Jesus the Messiah, who fulfills the Abrahamic covenant."

So all of that is important here. And I want to say something really important about this. This doesn't mean that Paul is imposing on the text or that exegesis isn't important. I'm not saying that at all. I think Paul's Christology is consistent with that Old Testament messianic profile that we've been talking about. And so in one sense, even though Paul is reading the Abrahamic story creatively by means of his Christology, we have to remember where he gets his Christology from. He gets it from the Old Testament. [laughs] Right? And so in many ways, what we see in the Abraham story is Paul exegeting Genesis *and* exegeting Christology. And that's a very important piece. I said that Paul gets his Christology from the Old Testament. That's true. But it was really driven home with the Christophany that he experienced on the road to Damascus.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: So I don't want to take that away. That's equally important for Paul. It's not *more* important than the Old Testament, but it's certainly not less.

MSH: Yeah, he couldn't just go look it up in there it is.

MLH: No.

MSH: You need the resurrection event to be your hindsight.

MLH: Yeah, you do. It serves as a lens for Paul. You know, it's interesting that when we read Romans 4, Paul's not arguing *for* the resurrection of Jesus, he's arguing *from* the resurrection of Jesus. So he's writing to a community that already believes that Jesus rose from the dead. And that is a filter of sorts. It's a pre-judgment. It's an assumption that he is taking to the text of Scripture. Now again, that's why I said earlier that it doesn't mean Paul is unilaterally imposing an assumption on the text that results in interpretive violence or anything like that. No, not by any means. Because like I said, his Christology came from the Old Testament as well. There is that element of Christophany, but that Christophany that he experienced on the road to Damascus...

MSH: That's what's really missing. There's this resistance to the idea that Paul got his Christology from the Old Testament, which is what put us into this series in the first place.

MLH: Absolutely.

MSH: You know, if you lack that, you're going to say things like that and produce misguided conclusions.

MLH: Right, right. So part of my, I guess it's a strategy (but again, I'm just trying to play referee here) is that when people say those sorts of things, I want to just remind them that no, Paul had a high view of Scripture and it was a normative view of Scripture. He thought Scripture was authoritative and he believed Scripture had something to say. And he makes arguments from Scripture. You know, he's arguing from Scripture here. He's arguing from the Abrahamic story to make a point. Well, if he's arguing from Scripture, that means he has a high view of it and that he gets his theology *from* Scripture. And so when I hear people say that Paul misquoted something or that Paul's taking something out of context or anything like that, or even that Paul is giving new meaning to the text, I will grant that yeah, Paul is giving fresh meaning or new meaning to a text. You know, I don't have to ignore that bit of the data here to make the case for how Paul is also exegeting the text, that he's also getting meaning from the text itself, because I don't see those two things as mutually exclusive. And I know, one

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temptation, especially for those in my camp (again, evangelical or whatnot)... The temptation is to ignore how Paul is creative with the text or to ignore how Paul finds new meaning or fresh meaning in a text. And I understand that temptation because you want to preserve Paul's consistency with the Old Testament and so forth. But what I've tried to argue for is that we can still say that Paul is doing something fresh and new with the text *and* that he's consistent with the Old Testament story—the messianic profile itself. And that's where more liberal people probably (and I hate the categories like "liberal" and so forth, but anyway, I'm just going to use it)... There's where some more liberal scholars are going to say, "Well, no. It's just all fresh. It's all new. Paul's inventing theology here" or whatever, all the while ignoring other parts of the data that shows how Paul is *very* consistent with the messianic profile.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: So maybe that's sort of a strategy to... You know, I'm try thread that needle between Paul's... what we see, some fresh interpretation, and his consistency with the Old Testament. There's a fine way of doing that—a needle. And again, in my book, I give a philosophical defense of that, or a way of understanding how that's even possible hermeneutically in terms of hermeneutic theory. But that's a totally different conversation. Well, it's not totally different, but it's too far afield.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: But we don't have to go there for our purposes here.

MSH: Yeah, well this is good. Again, I'm just hoping that listeners realize why we spent the time going through the profile.

MLH: Right.

MSH: Because Paul does say things that are new. He does refract the Old Testament through his experience of the resurrected Christ. And that's okay. [laughs]

MLH: Right! Right.

MSH: You know, it's okay because what he says is he's just going to be filling in gaps that others before him (including himself) were not able to fill in. They hadn't seen the outcome yet. So again, Paul is very consistent in terms of where he plays—the sandbox he's playing in—but he brings a lot new to it because of his experience with Christ.

MLH: Right. That's exactly right. It's a bit like... You know, Jesus is called Christos or Messiah in the New Testament. And if you go back and you look at all those references to messiah (*mashiach*) in the Old Testament, you're going to find that they're references to historical figures. Well, what we don't want to do is say, "See! All these references to *mashiach* are all references to Jesus. You interpret those Christologically." And in that sense, you're kind of ignoring the original context. No, I mean, it's just talking about Cyrus or it's talking about a priest or something like that, right? So we do want to be careful. And I know you've noticed this and you've called people out on it, and rightfully so, to say, "Okay, don't impose unilaterally on these texts. These texts just speak about historical figures or whatnot."

MSH: Yeah, there's no need to over-interpret it.

MLH: Right. Absolutely. And yet, you know, like you and I have been talking about, yeah, that messianic profile, even those references to *mashiach*, they contribute something to a Christological hermeneutic, right? But we really do. We just want to be real careful not to impose unilaterally on the text. I think I mentioned before that our interpretation of the text should be dialogical, not unilateral. And by dialogical, I mean that yeah, we recognize we bring assumptions to the text, but we want to make sure that our assumptions are the right assumptions. And that's where the text can critique our assumptions. And when you read a text, say, like Genesis 1-2 (the creation story is there, you know), I do not recommend imposing on that text modern scientific assumptions. That's just not going to work. That's a unilateral, unjustified hermeneutic approach. We want to enter the world of that text. And you know, we realize that it's going to say something to us, and we do read it for our times, and we do acknowledge that. But that's precisely the point. It's a conversation, but we have to let the original text be the original text. We cannot impose on it or smother it in our own modern assumptions, because then you've broken down any possibility of conversation with the text, because there's no other text anymore. It's just you reading your assumptions into it and then reading out your own assumptions.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: So we need to be careful of that as well. And again, I just refer everybody to my book because I talk about all this in the book and how to thread that needle as best as we can.

40:00

MSH: Yeah, and that, of course, is certainly recommended. Well, this is a good place to wrap up and just say thanks again for being on with us. We talked through... this is a familiar passage (Romans 4), but I think as familiar as it is, it should serve (and I think it did)... I could see how Paul could do what he does with the text and still be faithful to it. So thanks for being with us again.

TS: Alright, Mike, another good one in Romans. It's interesting. It's very interesting, this whole series. And finally to be here in the New Testament and see the payoff of what y'all have laid the groundwork for. It's good stuff.

MSH: Yeah. Yeah. I think especially in Romans 4 with the Abraham story, you can see a lot of these things come together. And we didn't mention too much about Paul doing this elsewhere, but he does the same thing in Galatians 3, where it's just point-blank. "If you're Christ's, you're Abraham's seed," speaking to both Jews and Gentiles. It's not about ethnicity. It's about following the gospel and embracing the gospel. So I think we can see what Paul does in Romans and Galatians, these books especially. But since our focus is Romans, Romans 4 is a good place to illustrate it.

TS: Alright, well we'll be looking forward to Romans 9-11 next week. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.