

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 422

Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series: Romans 12-16

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Episode Summary

In the preceding episodes, we've seen how Paul reconfigures Old Testament faith, faithfulness, Torah keeping, and Israel's election in light of the work of Jesus and his own encounter with the risen Christ. In this final episode of our series on Paul's use of the Old Testament in Romans, we look at how Paul's reconfiguring of these doctrinal elements factors into Romans 12-16, the epistle's section on practical Christian living. Paul's theological outlook does indeed influence how he articulates what life in the believing Jew-Gentile community of Jesus followers should look like.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 422: Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series: Romans 12-16, 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: I'm able to listen to baseball just most of the day, Trey, so I'm hanging in there.

TS: Well, that's good.

MSH: Believe it not, that's a big part of my day. I just like to have it on and so I can be productive and have my mind thinking good thoughts.

TS: Yeah, do you enjoy going to the games?

MSH: Yeah, I do.

TS: Yeah, have you ever gone to spring training or anything like that?

MSH: I have not. That was one of those things I've been wishing for years to do it and planning...I say "planning," but thinking about it, but I never actually pulled the trigger on it.

TS: Yeah. Does Calvin or anybody in your family... Do they enjoy baseball or are you the only one?

MSH: No, I'm the only one. So I'd... It's something I'd either do with my brother or by myself or get together a small group of friends to do it.

TS: Oh, yeah, you gotta do it with friends. You got to. That's when you get crazy, let loose. I can already see Mike out there getting crazy. Did you ever see that Jimmy Fallon movie about the Red Sox? He was a die-hard Red Sox fan.

MSH: No, uh-uh.

TS: With him and...

MSH: No.

TS: Oh my gosh. It's so good, Mike, you need to see it. You would love it, but he kind of does that with his friends.

MSH: Well, I'm a Red Sox fan, so I probably would, yeah.

TS: Yeah, you would love it. Just google Jimmy Fallon Red Sox movie.

MSH: Well, it shouldn't be hard to find.

TS: Yeah, it's fantastic. I think of you when I see it now because it's that good. So it is worth looking into. But alright, Mike, well here we are. This is the last installment of Paul's Use of the Old Testament and we're wrapping up in Romans.

MSH: Yeah, yeah, it took a while to get here, but, again, I think... I think this will be one of those series that was really worth doing. And as the more people get into it... This doesn't apply to anybody listening now, but don't just jump into the last episode here. You have to listen to all of these in order to get the most out of it. I think as people do that, it will prove to be a valuable series.

TS: Oh, absolutely. Surely, none of our listeners buy a book and turn to the last page and read the last page. That's not our listeners.

MSH: Yeah, I know.

TS: So I don't think we have to worry about that.

MSH: No.

MSH: Well, we're grateful to have Matt Halsted back with us at least one more time (for this series, anyway). Matt, I think this is our twelfth segment here in our series on what Paul does with the Old Testament in Romans. So I think this has been a good series. I think it's an important series, so I'm hoping that most of our audience has sort of caught (hopefully by this time, because here we are at the last one) what we're trying to do here and flesh out the... Starting with the messianic portrait and how Paul reconfigures certain things in the Old Testament in light of his own experience of Jesus and how that has a direct impact on the way he reads the Old Testament... But the way he reads the Old Testament isn't out of step with the way other Jews could have and did read it. They just didn't have... They didn't have that capstone information about Jesus, whereas Paul did.

MLH: Right, yeah, and that for Paul is definitive, right? I mean, it offers a sort of retrospective understanding of the scripture and, namely, his Christology or his messianism, I guess, you could say.

MSH: It's 20/20 hindsight, yeah.

MLH: Yeah, and of course, the minute you go there (the minute you say something like that) is the minute you open yourself up to, "Okay, how do I defend Paul from doing something like radically new in a way that's divorced from the Old Testament story?"

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: And hopefully in this series we've talked about how Paul can really do both and that they're not mutually exclusive. Like Paul can interpret things fresh, but that's in line with the Old Testament story because the Old Testament story anticipated this sort of thing.

MSH: And I know in your book and your academic writing, I mean you go into a lot of Second Temple material we haven't been landing on, at least as far as the series, for the most part anyway. But you know, the audience should know that a lot of these trajectories have histories in the Second Temple literature. It's not all brand new.

5:00

MLH: Yeah, that's an important point, and that was one thing I discovered when I did my Ph.D., is by looking into the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly the Pesharim (which are the Jewish commentaries that were produced and that are part of the Dead Sea Scroll material)... When I looked at those commentaries, I pointed out there were... Well, in terms of approach to scripture, Paul and the Pesharist (the

Jewish commentator), they were operating on the same plane. They interpret scripture in light of their own situation and their own circumstances and so forth. And when I read through those Dead Sea Scrolls line by line reading through the Pesharim, I went back to Paul and I began to notice that, my goodness, he's doing... He's doing different things than the Pesharist is doing, but he is also doing something quite similar at the same time. So I wanted to isolate what's similar and what's different. And really what I found is that... This is a very generalistic way of putting it, but what was primarily different for Paul was that his Christology (his belief about this Jesus of Nazareth person) really impacted the way that he read scripture, and even some of the same scriptures that the Pesharist was looking at. I'm thinking of Habakkuk 2:4, right.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: That's a well-known one. So in my project I wanted to... I wanted to tease out this whole Christological element in Paul, and then when I wrote my book a few years later, I expanded my dissertation to not just look at a few passages, a few chapters in Romans, but to actually look at the entirety of Romans from chapter 1 all the way to the very end. And what I found was that Paul is pretty consistent in the way he interprets scripture throughout the entire book. And so, essentially, my book is an expansion on my dissertation.

MSH: What's the title of the book again for our audience?

MLH: *Paul and the Meaning of Scripture*. And it should be out, I'm guessing, in a couple months or in a month or so.

MSH: That's good.

MLH: Yeah, and the book is sort of... It's sort of interdisciplinary at the same time because I employed some insights from an old German philosopher who had done a lot of work on hermeneutic theory, and so I got into obviously Paul and his Jewish context quite a bit. But I also wanted to show that what Paul was doing is hermeneutically viable, like it can be philosophically justified. And so I brought in this philosopher named Hans-Georg Gadamer and used his method (really it's not a method, but it's his insights into hermeneutic theory) to show that, you know, look, Paul was not an interpretive quack, you know?

MSH: Right.

MLH: Paul was doing some serious stuff.

MSH: Or a "hermeneutical hack" is what I like to say.

MLH: That's right! And for my project, when I used Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, it was very appropriate to do that, I think, because Gadamer's hermeneutic theory was basically a critique of enlightenment hermeneutic principles in a sense, right? And oftentimes that's what happens with Paul or any Second Temple or Jewish interpreter: we high and mighty, 21st Century Americans who live in a post-enlightenment idea of hermeneutics, we critique Paul in light of *our* assumptions. And so what Gadamer has done is say, "You know what? The enlightenment itself... Our modern hermeneutic methods, they're not what they were cracked up to be and maybe we need to re-evaluate."

So anyway, that's another conversation. So my approach was sort of interdisciplinary. It was Biblical studies with quite a bit of hermeneutic theory as well.

MSH: So what do we want to cover today? We're in our last installment. So we have Romans 12-16 left, which is typical of Paul. He lays heavy doctrine on us and then he'll shift gears to what he sees as practical ramifications. So is that what we're going to do today?

10:00

MLH: Yeah, that's right, and we divided Romans up into essentially four parts, four sections, and Romans is pretty easy to do in that regard. And so what we did in the last three episodes was look at Romans 1-3, where Paul focuses in on concepts like faith and Torah, Torah keeping, and that sort of thing. We saw how Paul reconfigured those concepts around his belief that Jesus is messiah; in other words, around his Christology. And then in the episode after that, we looked at Romans 4-8, where in those chapters Paul christologically reconfigures Jewish stories. And we looked at the Abraham story in chapter 4, but there are other stories that Paul deals with—the Adam story in chapter 5 and, arguably, the story of the Exodus in chapters 6, 7, and 8. And I think Paul takes those stories and gives them a fresh interpretation in light of his Christology, but nonetheless one that is consistent with his understanding of the original Jewish story itself. Then finally, in the last episode, we looked at Romans 9-11, and that was important to do because what Paul showed us was that the people of God have been christologically reconfigured, right? In other words, the election of God's people and election itself... How does God have a people? All of that is reconfigured around Christ and Christology.

So we've now come to the last part of Romans—Romans 12-16, where as you mentioned, Paul sort of shifts focus away from what we would call doctrinal stuff, justification stuff, righteousness stuff. And he moves on toward ethics and discussions about how we should live as Christ People. And I want to argue that even here, Paul understands Christian ethics in light of Christology—in light of Christ. And he reconfigures the way we ought to live, and that has impacts on how we should interpret Torah and certain laws such as dietary laws and Torah.

That's what we're going to focus on today. And of course, it is important for us to realize that those first eight episodes that we did in this series were important for understanding Romans, because we spent a lot of time going through the story of the Old Testament and outlining the messianic profile that we found there. That was super-important because if we don't have that as our basis, then when we come to the New Testament like Romans, we're going to see Paul do things that seem so disjointed and out of line with what we might expect. But again, that messianic profile was super important in this regard. And so, again, if somebody's listening to this episode without having listened to those other episodes, it is not going to make as best sense as it possibly could. But anyway, so yeah, Mike, that's where we're headed with Romans 12-16.

MSH: Yeah, well it's sort of inevitable, because here you have a circumcision-neutral body (the Church) and ultimately, Paul isn't just writing to an exclusively Jewish audience anyway. So he's going to have to circle back here and apply what he's been talking about.

MLH: Right, yeah, and that's an important point, too—to consider his audience. Because the Roman church would have been a mixed group of Christians—Jew and Gentile. That's why he is spending a lot of time talking about, how does justification work? What does it mean to be in covenant with God? And that's an important question. That's a very practical question because Jews and Gentiles are going to have to figure out, okay, when we sit down to eat a meal, like A) what are we going to eat? And B) what are we going to do when we disagree? And that's why Paul's theology is super-practical. We do have a tendency to separate Paul's theology or doctrine or whatever you want to call it from his ethics, right? And really, we shouldn't do that because it's all one big stream of thought for Paul. And I think we see how all that comes together by doing the thing that we're doing in the series, which is asking the question of hermeneutics. And what we see is Paul's Christological hermeneutics—sort of the thread that units everything together, I think. And we'll see that again today when we talk about Romans 14 and the way Paul envisions this community of believers and how they ought to act with one another.

MSH: Well, I imagine you want to jump right into chapter 12 with the sacrificial language.

15:00 **MLH:** Yeah, that's right. So let's do that. Let's look at Romans 12:1-2 because you're right, the language of sacrifice is there. And we would read this and just kind of glaze over it and let our eyes just pass over it without thinking much about it, but I want to suggest that we don't do that, because the word "sacrifice" as an Old Testament concept is very important. And so let's read Romans 12:1-2. This is from the English Standard Version. Here's what Paul says. He says:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

MLH: Okay, so when I read that, there were lots of words like “you” or “your.” And in the English translation, you don’t really get the fact that in Greek those words are actually in the plural. Okay, so what I’d like to do is read a translation that I wrote, and you’ll get a sense more of what Paul’s actually saying because he’s addressing the entire group of Christians here. So let me reread it. This time this is my translation from the Greek. He says this:

Brothers and sisters, I encourage *you all* through the mercies of God to present *your bodies* as a living sacrifice [singular], holy and acceptable to God—which is the reasonable act of worship for *you all*. And do not let *yourselves* be conformed to this age, but let *yourselves* be transformed by the renewal of the mind [singular] so that *you all* can discern what the good and pleasing and complete will of God is.

MLH: So what’s really interesting there is you have this mix of plural and singular here that I think that really needs to be brought out more than the English Standard Version. It really shows, right? So why is this important? Well, because he encourages everybody (all of the different Christians at Rome—the Jews, the Gentiles, just all the people) to come together as a *singular* living sacrifice and to have a *singular* new renewed mind so that together they all can have a better idea of what God’s will is for their church—for their lives as Christians. And so you have this sort of play that, yeah, there’s many in the church... There’s many different people in the church, but there’s actually in God’s eyes at least, one singular sacrifice. Now that’s very important because as a church that has many Gentiles in it, Paul is transferring Old Testament language of sacrifice to not just the Jews, but even to the Gentile population in the church. And if we take into account all the other stuff Paul says in Romans, like Romans chapter 2, where Paul says that circumcision isn’t even required anymore for Gentiles, and yet he still sees these uncircumcised Gentiles as pleasing sacrifices and actually being part of the greater covenant community... He sees these Gentiles as being fully included such that they, themselves, can be seen as part of the one singular sacrifice, the one people of God. Okay, so that’s very important.

To kind of press the point even further, let’s look at that word “sacrifice.” Here Paul uses the word *θυσία* (*thysia*—*thu-see-ah*), and it’s an important word. In the Old Testament (places like Leviticus chapter 1, Leviticus chapter 2), we get some descriptions about burnt offerings and grain offerings and so forth. And in the

Greek Old Testament that word *thysia* is used there. So let me just read Leviticus 1:9. This comes from the Lexham English Septuagint. It says this:

⁹ And they will wash its internal organs and its feet with water. And the priests will place everything upon the altar. It is a burnt offering, a sacrifice [*thysia*], a sweet-smelling odor to the Lord.

MLH: And the same word is applied to the grain offerings of chapter 2. So Leviticus chapter 2, verse 1 says:

And when a person presents an offering as a sacrifice [*thysia*] to the Lord, his offering will be the finest flour, and he will pour olive oil upon it, and he will place frankincense upon it; it is a sacrifice [*thysia*].

20:00

MLH: Now this gives us English speakers more of a sense of the radical nature of what Paul is doing here in Romans 12, where he is calling Gentiles' sacrifices *thysia*. And what Paul is really doing... What's going on in the back of his mind is that the Gentiles are completing or fulfilling the law (the Torah) And again, the idea is that they are doing this as people who are uncircumcised. And then again, Romans 12 needs to be interpreted in light of Romans 2 and 3, where Paul says circumcision of the heart is what matters, not circumcision of the flesh. And moreover, according to Romans 3, that Christians fulfill the law. We complete the law. Romans 10:4 says that Christ is the *telos* of the law. In other words, he is the culmination of the entire law. So everybody who is in Christ, Jew and Gentile, they (by default of being in Christ) fulfill the law. And it's an easy thing to say after this that we are the sacrifices. We embody everything that the sacrificial system desired—not because there's anything special about us, but because we are in Christ, in whom the sacrifice was made in his body.

MSH: Well, you would think this... To put it mildly, you would think this is going to cause offense to somebody.

MLH: Absolutely. I mean, yeah, yeah, this is... This is not something that would allow Paul to make too many friends, right? [laughs]

MSH: I mean, they're still going to be worshipping... What comes to my mind is that you have this... Even today you have congregations that want to incorporate more Jewish stuff, okay, more messianic... like messianic congregations and that. There certainly is a spectrum there. I don't think that this cuts that off. I don't think that an individual local church today needs to be worried about how much of that they do, but they need to still realize what the theology is behind it.

MLH: Right.

MSH: So that we don't end up recreating divisions among us.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: Whereas Paul is trying to get everybody on the same page, essentially.

MLH: Right, right. Yeah, we never want the assumption to be, "Okay, let's include more Jewish elements in our worship services because that's the *better* thing to do," right? Or "anybody who doesn't do that is somehow not following scripture or anything," right?

MSH: Right. Yeah, it's an occasion for judgment and I don't want to... I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, because Paul is going to get into some of that in Romans 14, but yeah, that's the idea.

MLH: Right, right. Yeah, and I mentioned a moment ago that Paul envisions this diverse community as being one collective sacrifice—one *thysia*—and he gives us the logic later in Romans 12. Just a few verses down in verse 5, he talks about this community as being one body in Christ. He also talks a lot about this in 1 Corinthians, and how as Christians we are the body of Christ. And that really carries the logic, because as Christians we believe that Jesus' body is the place of sacrifice. And if we are united to Christ and we embody him, then it makes sense that we, too, would be called sacrifices. And that's the logic that Paul is using here. But the point I want to make is that Paul is reconfiguring this community (these believers) around his Christology—around the messiah. And so, in terms of hermeneutics, this is an important thing because Paul is really asking the Gentiles and the Jews in this church to reinterpret themselves. Because there might be division in the church, there are some who might look down on their Gentile friends for not being circumcised, and there might be Gentiles who look down upon their Jewish friends for maintaining dietary laws or something. Paul is asking them to take a step back, take a deep breath, and say, "Okay, let's offer a new interpretation of our community. Let's put on some Jesus lenses and look at each other through the Jesus perspective. And what do we see?" He's saying, "Look, we see one body. We see one collective sacrifice." And so really, Paul's ethics is grounded in his hermeneutics. I mean, that might be controversial to say, but I think something like that is the truth. He has such a thoroughgoing Christological hermeneutic that he thinks it should impact the way we treat one another, and that's what we're seeing.

And so that's why this is important. I mean, at first glance, all of this kind of appears to be of very little significance, right? But in fact, it kind of gives us a preview into how Paul is interpreting things in light of his Christology. He interprets *thysia* (sacrifice) in light of his Christology. He is interpreting his people in light of Christology. And when we recall some of our episodes, particularly the

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Malachi episode that we did (which I still find myself thinking about because I just think Malachi is the perfect introduction to Romans)...

MSH: Yeah, I would agree. I think about that one a lot, too.

MLH: Yeah, yeah, and I'm thinking of it, really, since we recorded that episode. And as you and I were preparing for it and thinking through it, some of the things that we discussed, I hadn't really considered that much before, and so it's something I'm still musing on. But let's just remember what Malachi said. He accuses the Jewish priestly system of being corrupt and not being able to fulfill their vocation as priests. He says something like, "As priests, you should guard knowledge, but you're actually leading people astray." And so they've been unfaithful to their vocation. And yet Malachi also reaffirms Israel's election at the same time—that "I have loved Jacob; I have set my covenant love on Jacob." And the name of Yahweh will be spread throughout the whole world... you know, that kind of language. And we asked ourselves in that episode... Oh my goodness, how does Malachi envision that Yahweh's name would be great in the earth and that Israel can still maintain her elect status and yet Israel be a complete failure in her rebellion? How does that happen? Well, that's where Malachi's messiah (or messenger) came into play, because when we looked at that passage, Malachi was very, very clear. He said essentially that the messenger (the messiah) would purify the offerings and the sacrifices and that he would, in a sense, reconfigure the whole priestly system around himself, and that is how the program of Israel being the rescue plan for the world would continue.

And with that in the background, we come to Paul here and he is doing much the same thing. He is saying that the sacrifices—the sacrificial system—is indeed continuing. It's going on. It's going strong through the Messiah People, and it really makes you wonder, okay, was Paul reading Malachi? And more than likely, yes, he knew the story.

MSH: Yeah, the chances are high.

MLH: Right, right. Here's the real question: Are we reading Malachi? I mean, we read Paul, but do we read Malachi? And if we don't, then what Paul is doing here really loses its depth and its beauty, if you will. Yeah, so anyway... So the point that I'm making here is that Paul is interpreting the community and he is interpreting, once again, a Jewish concept of *thysia* (sacrifice) around the messianic figure. Malachi said this would happen. Paul is doing it. It makes perfect sense.

Now let's kind of shift gears here because that observation we just made can lead us yet again into seeing how Paul can interpret text from scripture christologically as well. And so one thing I want to say... I just want to emphasize

this before we get into it. Paul's christological interpretations... They are not at odds at all with that messianic profile that we have documented throughout the Old Testament. And I think if we were to read Paul in light... Well, let me back up. If we failed to read Paul in light of that messianic profile that we have talked about, then Paul's going to appear to be doing something completely strange, very odd, and enigmatic, right? But when we take the messianic profile into account (the writings of Malachi for example), then Paul's hermeneutic begins to make a lot more sense. So we can say, yes, on the one hand that Paul's interpretations are fresh, they are new, but we must also say that the Old Testament story—the narrative—anticipated all that Paul was doing at the same time. So that's something to consider.

30:00

Okay, enough of all that. So let's just look once again at another example from this last part of Romans, where Paul takes an Old Testament scriptural text and interprets it christologically. I think Romans 15:3 is a good text to look at because there he is going to quote from Psalm 69:9. So let me give some people some background on all of this first. What is Paul doing? Well, basically what Paul wants is all of the Christians at the Roman church—Jew and Gentile—to be united in love for one another, right? He doesn't want divisions or anything of the sort. Now specifically here, Paul's going to talk about dietary laws and food convictions and all of that, because among Jews and Gentiles there is major disagreement about this sort of thing and there's a lot of disunity with respect to those dietary laws. But what he's going to say is that all Christians, no matter their conviction on this, they should be gracious. They should be loving toward all of their fellow believers even when they disagree with them. And this is a point of contention here, but we need to note it, which is that Paul does not think Christian unity should be configured around dietary laws—even the dietary laws prescribed in Torah. And as you mentioned, this would draw the ire of many of his Jewish friends, of course, but Paul is going to push back and say, no, no, no, there's freedom in Christ and this is okay to do. But (and this is important) Paul does not think that Christians should use their freedom in such a way as to make their brothers and their sisters stumble. So out of love inspired by Christ, they should kindly abstain from those actions that would prove unnecessarily offensive to their brothers and sisters.

So what I want to do is look at Romans 14:1-3 just to sort of get a taste of that context. So Paul says, Romans 14:1-3... This is from the English Standard Version. Paul says:

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

MLH: And so for Paul, this is the new way of living. This is the new ethic that Paul envisions, that believers should not feel as if they are wrong for not abiding by the dietary laws, but they should also temper their freedom with love toward those who simply have a different opinion. In other words, Jews and Gentiles should get along. They shouldn't pass judgment on each other in this regard. And so, in order to illustrate what that is going to look like... In order to illustrate that type of love and deferment to your brother and sister, what Paul is going to do later is he is going to prop up Jesus as that supreme ethical example of someone who loves well.

Okay, now, Romans 15:1-3 is where Paul is going to quote the passage from the Psalms—Psalms 69:9—and he is going to interpret that Psalm christologically, okay? So let me read that. This is Romans 15:1-3 from the English Standard Version. Paul says, he says:

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written [in Psalm 69:9], “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”

So that's the line from Psalm 69: “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”

Okay, so like, what in the world is Paul doing here? So again, Paul takes this Psalm (which was originally written by David) and he interprets it as a prayer of Jesus himself, as if Jesus actually said those words. So in other words, David's voice is transformed into the voice of Christ. Now again, what are Paul's motives for doing that? Well, the motives are, he is admonishing the strong believers, those who feel like they don't have to abide by the dietary laws... He is saying to them to bear up with their weaker brothers and sisters—those who think they need to abide by the dietary laws. And he wants the weaker Christians to bear with the freedom that these other Christians have, okay? And so in that sense, both sides, I think, are meant to carry the burdens of the other. That is what the overall context suggests—that both sides need to be patient with one another. And Paul wants the Roman church to see how Jesus is a model of that kind of burden-bearing, patient love—someone who can carry the reproaches and do so with grace.

Okay, that's easy enough, but here's something I want to point out. It's a bit of an enigma, or something that is sort of hard to understand at first glance. So if you go back in the original context of Psalm 69, you will see that this is a prayer that is a plea for God to save David, who apparently was experiencing some sort of difficulty, some trauma of some sort. So he is crying out to God for help. Now initially it would seem difficult to apply that entire text to Jesus. So for example, in

verse 5 of Psalm 69, David says this. He says:

**⁵O God, you know my folly;
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.**

So the question here is, how can Paul legitimately interpret this text christologically, because if you go back and read the context, the person talking (who, apparently, Paul wants that to be Jesus)... The person talking admits to being sinful and doing wrongs and being foolish. So how could that be Jesus? We know Jesus to be perfect. So it's sort of a rule of thumb... This is what I do when I read my Bible: I always ask questions. I don't want to be afraid of hard questions. You know, what in the world is Paul doing here? And I think the Bible can handle those sorts of questions, and so I just ask them and see where they lead me. So I encourage everybody to...

MSH: This is almost like the situation you get into with parables. Is it legitimate to press a parable? Is a parable trying to make one point or 20, you know?

MLH: Yeah.

MSH: Like pressing all the details into service.

MLH: That's right. Yeah, yeah, that's definitely something to consider here, too. And as I think about this, I come up with a couple of options that we can do, and one of them is just don't press it... Don't make it do more than what it's intended to do. Maybe Paul doesn't want...

MSH: Right, maybe Paul had something specific in mind as opposed to every last detail in mind.

MLH: Yeah, that's right, and I think that's very possible. And of course, now the next question would be, okay, if that's the case, if Paul's picking and choosing, what gives him the right to pick and choose, right? How would that work?

Well, what I want to suggest is that there's a logic to his picking and choosing, if indeed that is what he's doing. If he's just picking and choosing this one verse to be the voice of Jesus and he doesn't want to apply all those other verses as the voice of Jesus, then what gives him the hermeneutical right to do that? Now it could be that he is picking and choosing, and if so, I want to propose a logical answer to that. But it might also be that he's not picking and choosing. Let's just say maybe he wants all of the Psalms, or all of the verses in that Psalm, to apply to Jesus. How would we make sense of that? So what I want to propose is that we can make sense of both of those. And I'd be interested to hear what you think about this, Mike, but I'm just saying either way, worst-case scenario, I think Paul comes off still looking completely logical, hermeneutically speaking, here for sure.

So here's sort of my solution, sort of the method of how I'm approaching this. I want to propose two things. 1) That Paul is reading these Old Testament passages (or this Old Testament passage) in a storied sort of way—in light of the messianic profile. We've talked a lot about that. So Paul is doing that, but he's also doing something else. 2) He reads the Old Testament passage in light of what he believes about Jesus of Nazareth; namely that he is the messiah, that he's the crucified and resurrected messiah. Okay, that's important. So let's look at those two things. "How is he reading it in light of the storied messianic profile" sort of way and "how would that help us make sense of this?"

Okay, so here's what we're going to do. Let's look at that question. At this point in our series, it shouldn't be surprising at all that Paul would interpret a Davidic Psalm christologically or messianically.

MSH: Right.

MLH: Right? So I mean that's our first obvious thing if we remember...

MSH: Yeah, his justification is his christology.

MLH: Yeah, yeah. That's right. I mean, it just shouldn't be surprising that when he reads a Davidic Psalm that he's going to think "messiah." Why is that? Because we've traced in previous episodes the messianic profile.

MSH: Yeah, we have a new David. That's how Romans opens.

MLH: That's right. That's exactly right. Yeah, it does. Romans 1:3—that he is the offspring of David. So remember that one of those core motifs of that messianic profile was a Davidic sonship, right? I mean, that was... That's all over the place, okay? So let's not be too surprised that Paul is doing what he's doing with this David text. Okay, and it also shouldn't be surprising that this text in particular, which spoke of David bearing reproaches from sinful people... It shouldn't be surprising that he would take that passage and apply it to Christ, because remember the messianic profile was that of a servant. And if we recall from Isaiah, a suffering servant. And we've already seen, too, in past episodes that Paul places Jesus into the role of Isaiah's servant when he writes in Philippians 2:5-11 (the Christ Hymn), where Christ is called a servant.

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And so just those two things... I mean, Paul is doing something very consistent with the messianic profile. He's not doing anything too weird at all, actually. And so we've also seen how David language and servant language merge from time to time in the Old Testament. That was part of the messianic profile. So again, we shouldn't be surprised to see this idea of Jesus bearing reproaches in light of a Davidic text because this idea of a suffering servant and David language, they come together quite well in light of the profile that we've crafted.

So here's what I'm going to conclude on this part. I think Paul is just simply a good Jew who knew the Jewish story and that's why it's not surprising to see him read texts like this in light of his messiah. His belief is in the messiah and in the messianic profile. I think Paul's interpretations do not make sense if we abstract him from the Jewish story (from the Jewish background), but when we place him within that world (that Jewish background world), then his interpretations, I think, make pretty good sense.

But there's also a little bit more going on. I think Paul is doing more than reading Psalms 69 in light of the messianic profile or in light of the messianic story. He's doing that, but he's also reading it in light of what he believes about the historical person known as Jesus of Nazareth, particularly in light of Jesus' death and resurrection. So for Paul, Jesus' death and resurrection, they provide what we talked about—that retrospective understanding of the text.

Okay, so here's what I would say. It's not enough for Paul to read this text in light of the Old Testament's messianic profile. He needs someone to fit that profile as well. And as it turns out, that's what he has in Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, who was resurrected. And so we have to recognize that this element is in place, and it helps us make sense of Paul's interpretation. But our question still remains, right? How could Paul use this Psalm to speak of Jesus when, in fact, that Psalm assumes that the speaker is foolish and sinful? So I want to focus in on that question. So let's look deeper at Paul's Christology.

So in the greater context of Romans, as well as in his other letters, I think it's clear that Paul places a lot of emphasis on the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus, and that goes without saying. So for example, Paul presents Jesus as someone being without sin. So think of 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus knew no sin. He also presents Jesus as the Son of David, and that's something that you mentioned a while ago, Mike, from Romans 1:3. So for Paul, Jesus is without sin and he's the son of David, and that means that he is the ideal son of David—the perfect son of David. And I think that's an important point that we can make because... Okay, in one sense Paul doesn't need all of Psalm 69 to line up with Jesus because Jesus is a better David. I mean, that's his assumption, I think. And so for Paul, that doesn't matter that the original speaker of Psalm 69 was sinful and foolish. He can selectively draw from other parts of that Psalm to make his point about Jesus because he believes Jesus is the ideal Davidic king.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: He's the better David.

MSH: This is the better David so what would we expect?

MLH: Right. Well, I think we would expect this: by quoting that particular Psalm in the way that he does, Paul actually highlights the contrast between Jesus' sinlessness and David's sinfulness. Right?

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: And that doesn't work against Paul's interpretation. I mean, I think if anything it reinforces his fundamental assumptions about Jesus—that he's the better Davidic king, the one we've all longed for, right? So, okay in one...

MSH: It also reintroduces the whole humility aspect of this. You know, where Jesus was willing to be reproached.

45:00

MLH: Right, absolutely, yeah, yeah. Yeah, he was, and voluntarily willing to play the role of a servant, as well, for sure. That's part of the messianic assumptions and profile that Paul shares with the Old Testament for sure. So I mean I think in one sense, then, Jesus... For Paul, Jesus is a resurrected son of David—a new version, a better version, the Old Testament's intended version. Okay, so that might make sense of why he selectively does this. If we just say, "Well, Paul doesn't want all of the text to be applied to Jesus," okay, well here's our justification. It doesn't have to be all applied to Jesus because Jesus is the better David. We actually need a contrast between the original David and this new resurrected David. But, okay, it's possible (and I tend to think it's likely) that maybe Paul envisioned Jesus owning even that part of the Psalm that speaks of the sinfulness and the foolishness of David. Okay, so how would that work? Well, I think it's because of what Paul believes about what happened to Jesus on the cross. So if you look at other letters that Paul wrote... If you look at a place like 1 Corinthians 1:18 where Paul talks about the cross as a display of power, but he also says that it also looked quite foolish and like folly—the cross is folly and foolishness to some people. And that's an interesting thing because okay, maybe... Maybe Jesus can in a sense be applied back to those Psalm 69 tests that speak of David's folly and his foolishness, because Jesus carries that stuff for David and for all of us, right? So maybe, in a sense, we can interpret it like that.

The other thing we see from Paul's letter to 2 Corinthians is that the cross made Jesus look like he was crucified in weakness, but of course he lives by the power of God. So 2 Corinthians 13:4... So the cross shows Jesus to be pretty weak. I mean, it's in his weakness that he dies. He hands himself over to death. The cross even made Jesus look like a criminal, like someone sinful. He who knew no sin became sin for us—2 Corinthians 5:21 again. And so in one way, maybe those texts that speak of David's sinfulness can be applied to Jesus in this manner because the messiah is the one who carries our folly, our sin, and then he'll carry David's, too.

So yeah, maybe you have that going on, but my point is this: either way, Paul's interpretation (his christological interpretation) of Psalm 69 makes sense no matter how we choose to go. If we just say Paul can selectively do what he's doing or if Paul intends the whole of Psalm 69 to apply to Jesus, I think there are hermeneutical ways to get around that.

So the point... Again, the overall point is pretty simple. It's that Paul interprets texts in light of the messianic profile, but he also interprets texts in light of what he *believes* about the death and the resurrection of Jesus, who is the messiah, the Christ. So you have those two aspects at play. It's almost as if the Old Testament's messianic profile and Paul's assumptions about Jesus of Nazareth that he experienced on the Damascus Road... It's almost as if they complement each other. They come together, and the result is his fresh understanding of the Old Testament text. So, I mean, that's my way of looking at this and I think it works, in my opinion.

MSH: Yeah, well, I... I think either one of those like you laid out is certainly possible, because what you now have is you don't have all of those thoughts extending directly from somewhere in Romans, but you do have them extending from somewhere else in Paul. Paul does say all those things.

MLH: Right.

MSH: So, I mean it's certainly fair to bring them to bear in a passage like this.

MLH: Right, yeah, because I'm very interested in Paul's assumptions. Like I'm very interested in the way in which he read text because...

MSH: If Jesus is the sin bearer, Paul doesn't need to be shy about him bearing sin.

MLH: Right, exactly.

MSH: Why would he be shy about that point if that's part of the servanthood.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: You know, taking the reproaches. And it is, and we can use the Psalm that way.

MLH: Yeah, absolutely. It's perfectly legitimate. It's hermeneutically viable. There's nothing weird or illogical about it once you have those two things in play. You have his Christology as sort of an assumption that he brings to the text, but you have to have his messianism—the messianic profile that comes from the

text, right? And perhaps it makes sense to see it like this that the messianic profile provides categories or...

MSH: Yeah.

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MLH: ...things that can be filled in with his assumptions about Jesus. That's the way they... They kind of interlock and they're mutually interpretive. So in my book, I say that the Old Testament text is the answer to Paul's questions about Jesus of Nazareth—the historical person. But it works the other way around, too. Jesus of Nazareth, the historical person, is the answer to the question of the Old Testament messianic texts. They go together. It's question-and-answer. Both pose questions and give answers to the other. Paul's assumptions and the Old Testament's messianic profile, they interlock; they come together.

MSH: I think that “categories” is a good way to look at it.

MLH: Yeah, it helps me to conceptualize it like that.

MSH: Well, we've used words like “elements” before. That's all we're really talking about.

MLH: Yeah, right, or motifs or something like that, yeah.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: Yeah, and the idea of a story, too, is... The story continues in Jesus. And so what that means is exactly what Paul says in Romans 10:4, that Christ (or again, *Christos Mashiach*—the messiah), he is the *telos*, the culmination of the Torah. In other words, he's the culmination of this longstanding story that has been going on for a long time that is completed in Christ. And you need Christ to make sense of this story, but you need the story to make sense of the resurrected Christ. It's... They go together quite well. And again, I keep coming back to something you said on social media. I think I mentioned this a few episodes ago, but I just love the way you put it is that we... How did you say it? You said our Christo-centric reading of scripture shouldn't be an excuse to override the original context of scripture or to contradict the original context or something like that. And I love that because when I saw that I'm like, man, that's exactly what I'm trying to say is that Paul's Christology (you know, his Damascus Road experience or whatever), that is the way he read the Old Testament scriptures. But he doesn't do violence to the Old Testament scriptures by contradicting them or anything. He just completes them. And the two can go hand-in-hand together. So yeah, so hopefully this series of episodes show how that works. We've kind of looked at the mechanics of it all, right? You know, how does it work in the level of detail? And hopefully this is helpful to a lot of the audience and the people thinking through these issues.

MSH: Later in Romans 15, Paul quotes the Old Testament really rapid-fire in verses 8 through 13. Do we want to say anything about that?

MLH: Yeah, yeah. It would round off the discussion, I think, really well because this is the way Paul follows up all the stuff that we'd been talking about a moment ago. So yeah, let me read Romans 15:8-13 from the ESV. It says... Paul says this. He says:

⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written [Psalm 18:49],

**“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and sing to your name.”**

¹⁰ And again it is said [Deuteronomy 32:34],

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

¹¹ And again [Psalm 116:1],

**“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples extol him.”**

¹² And again Isaiah says [Isaiah 11:10],

**“The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope.”**

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

MLH: So, yeah, like you said, it's rapid fire kind of stuff.

MSH: Is that first Psalm reference... Was that Septuagint or is that Masoretic Text?

MLH: Oh, yeah, this is going to be the MT... Yeah, that's from Psalm 18:49. Yeah, yeah, that's from the ESV.

MSH: Just for listener's sake.

MLH: Right. Yeah, that's a good point. So yeah, yeah. I think it's... It was Psalm 17 in the Septuagint, but anyway, yeah. So he's throwing out these rapid-fire texts here, but it's actually a really important text because it's sort of the theological underpinning or the way Paul understands the ethics of how Christians should relate to one another. Because notice he said in that text in verse 8... He said that Christ became a what? A servant. There's our language again. "A servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness to confirm the promises given to the patriarch."

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Now that idea of Christ being a servant is important. (It's *diakonos* in the Greek.) And of course, "servant" is a loaded term in the messianic profile, but the point is that by coming and showing up, by being crucified and resurrected, Christ has actually fulfilled the Old Testament promises, the covenants and all of that. So this is important for us in light of our series because Paul does not think that Christ or his Christology contradicts the Old Testament covenant promises, right? He fulfills them. He confirms them, right? It's very important.

MSH: Well, it seems like it's... It's almost a necessity.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: I mean, he's almost... He's almost putting it out to the Jews, "Look, your own scriptures say that the Gentiles are going to become worshipers of Yahweh."

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: And here's the means to do so. Why would you deny that?

MLH: Right, right, exactly, yeah. It's followed up with that Psalm where it says, "I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing to your name." And so the idea here is that Paul wants to show that the Gentiles... They're brought in into this covenant family, in a sense, to bring praise to God for the mercy that they've been shown. And so he evokes a Psalm and brings a Psalm in to complement this idea of Gentiles coming in and singing the praises of God, which is a very important theme in the Old Testament, not least with respect to Genesis 12. where Abraham is called in the first place. You know, Abraham is THE patriarch, right? Genesis 12. He's called. His family is called to be the blessing to the nations and to restore the nations. And so Paul is bringing the Psalm in to link up with that.

MSH: That takes you back to Malachi, too.

MLH: Yeah.

MSH: Israel fails her election (her elective vocation), but Christ succeeds at his.

MLH: Right. That's exactly right, and all of this is Christological. Like God is confirming all this through Christ. That's how he starts off in verse 8. It's always through Christ. So, yeah, so then you have another little text here.

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

MLH: This comes from Deuteronomy 32 and it's an interesting text in many respects, but there are some differences here being the Septuagint and the MT, as I recall. But nonetheless, Paul is importing some of this back to feed into the whole Jew/Gentile idea and how all of it is confirmation of the promises of God to the patriarchs. Because again, we have to remember that the patriarchs such as Abraham... He was promised that the Gentiles would be blessed through him, and this is what Paul is envisioning at the end of his letter. Then again you have the Isaiah text. Isaiah 11:

**“The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope.”**

MLH: Lots to be said about all of these texts here, perhaps in much more detail. But again, the point in terms of the way Paul presents them is that he is viewing Jesus, obviously, as the long-promised root of Jesse who has come, who has confirmed the promises to Abraham. But he has also brought in the Gentiles as well. And this ends with a blessing, of course.

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

MLH: Again, he wraps it up. He wants the church to be unified and to interpret themselves as being part of this long-awaited fulfillment that Jew and Gentile could once again come together in unity. It's through the Holy Spirit. And again, I love how he mentions the Holy Spirit here, because with Pentecost the nations are gathered, and the Holy Spirit follows up on them and you have the reversal of Babel. Everybody can understand each other again, right?

So we haven't talked much about the spirit in Paul's theology, but it is... He is very important to Paul's conception of all of this, for sure.

MSH: Yeah, at the very least you wouldn't get to the end of the letter here and justify disunity or lend any credence to it. I mean, this is what Paul's been angling for the whole time.

MLH: Yeah.

MSH: So...

MLH: And he's saying that this is what the text, the Old Testament, has been angling for the whole time too.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: Because he says in verse 8, "All of this confirms the promises to the patriarchs."

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: Yeah.

MSH: So let the scripture be fulfilled.

MLH: Yeah, as it is written.

MSH: Get out of its way.

MLH: That's right. That's right. Uh huh. It's all so important for Paul. Again, in my book, I start off with saying that Paul respects the Old Testament. Contrary to what we may think, he respects it. And again, contrary to maybe some of our modern assumptions and some of our commitments to an overt literalism or rigidity of Biblical interpretation, Paul can do some fresh things with the text.

MSH: Or critics.

MLH: Yeah, or critics. That's right. Yeah. Paul's still doing some fresh things with the new... I mean, I admit that. I said that before: I just want to be kind of that referee. I just want to say, "Okay, here's what Paul's doing. Let's admit it. And over here, here's what Paul is doing. Let's admit that. But where do we get?" And we do get radical freshness and newness in Paul's interpretations, but there's a logic to it. He's not a textual relativist. He's not someone who thinks the...

MSH: Yeah, he's not... He's not just making stuff up.

MLH: No.

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MSH: No, because... "Oh, this will sound good." No, he has to tie it somewhere.

MLH: Right, yeah. He has a high view of scripture. I firmly believe that.

MSH: Well, thanks again for being with us, Matt. I mean, I think this was a good way to end our series, again, just with some of the things that Paul was hoping would come out of this practically for the Romans, and obviously for us as readers as well. It's certainly applicable. So thanks again for spending your time with us and for the work you've put into this.

MLH: Yeah, thanks again, Mike, and to your audience for allowing me to be on in the series and talking about my passion. I love scripture. [laughs] I know you love scripture and it's been great chatting with you about this topic. So thanks again.

TS: Alright, Mike, well, it's sad that we're wrapping up this particular series, but it's been a good one. The payoff was good. It was a great series!

MSH: Yeah. Yeah, I think it... I think this is one that it might... On the surface of it, especially if people try to jump in somewhere in the middle (which again, we certainly advise against that)... This is going to be one of those series that you have to go back to the beginning to appreciate. And if you do... I think the more people do that, the more they'll see the importance of it.

TS: I mean, I envision a class somewhere in seminary or somewhere in Bible college teaching this maybe. I don't know, Mike.

MSH: Yeah.

TS: Maybe they'll use the episodes for the class material. Who knows?

MSH: That's true!

TS: But it was that kind of quality. And again, be looking for Dr. Matt Halsted's book, which should be out, I guess, any week now.

MSH: Yeah, have a look out on Amazon and you can either order or preorder.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, I guess we're going to do some Q and As.

MSH: Yeah.

TS: And then over the horizon will be the Walton series—the Demons Series, I believe. Is that correct?

MSH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm thinking it's... That's not going to be terribly long in terms of a series, but yeah, that is over the horizon.

TS: Okay, well good deal. Alrighty. Well, we certainly enjoyed it and it we want to thank Dr. Matt Halsted for joining us and we want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.