READING ROMANS AFTER THE BOOK OF ACTS

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Abstract: The Acts-Romans sequence, such as found in the Latin manuscript tradition and familiar to readers of the English Bible, is hermeneutically significant and fruitful. Early readers had good reason to place the books together, for the visit of Paul to Rome (Acts 28) is the one anticipated in the next chapter (Romans 1). The Letter to the Romans appears to pick up and develop key themes in the preceding book, and prefixing Romans with Acts promotes a certain reading strategy for the head-letter of the Pauline corpus. The adjoining of Acts and Romans suggests that the accusations made against Paul in the final chapters of Acts (and summed up in Acts 21:28) set the agenda for Romans, in which Paul shows that he does not speak against the people, the law, and the temple. Paul’s gospel proclaims that God will be faithful to the promises made to Abraham, so that Jewish privileges are preserved, the law is exonerated, and a community consisting of believing Jews and believing Gentiles is brought into being.

Key Words: Paul, Romans, Acts, Jew, Gentile, temple, canon logic

No doubt scholars will continue to debate the purpose of Romans, why Paul wrote the letter and how its contents reflect its purpose, but for a complex and sophisticated work like the Letter to the Romans it would be a mistake to think that only one purpose was in the mind of its author.¹ The historical setting of its composition is not the only possible context that matters for the interpretation of a literary work, and in the case of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, it has another Sitz im Leben due to its place within the canonical setting provided by the other books among which it stands. This phenomenon is an aspect of the biblical “paratext” (a term coined by Gérard Genette),² which includes features such as book titles, book order, and internal divisions within books (e.g. paragraphs). These paratextual elements provide a frame of reference for the text and set up certain expectations for subsequent readers.³ In other words, an effect is produced on readers when biblical books are placed in a particular sequence,⁴ for this suggests that neighboring books

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² For a brief survey of proposals as to the purpose of the epistle, see L. Ann Jervis, The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation (JSNTSup 55; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 14–27.


⁴ For the fluidity of the biblical paratext in the digital age, see Jeffrey S. Siker, Liquid Scripture: The Bible in a Digital World (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 161: “The potential exists in a digital Bible to read a passage with dozens of paratexts that serve to modify or provide some form of commentary on the particular biblical text in question.”

⁵ Robert W. Wall speaks of “the interpretive importance of certain canonical markers,” one such marker being a book’s placement within the NT canon; see “Israel and the Gentile Mission in Acts and
are to be viewed as canonical “conversation partners” whose related contents throw light on each other. This canonical frame may provide evidence of how early readers understood the message and purpose of Paul’s Letter to the Romans.

This discussion focuses on book order and in particular the Acts-Romans sequence found in some forms of the NT canon and familiar to readers of the English Bible. Physical contiguity is regularly understood by readers to indicate that there must be a significant connection between books, and the most obvious link in this case is that Acts ends with Paul’s arrival in Rome (28:11–31), which is the visit anticipated by Paul in Romans 1 (vv. 8–15; cf. Rom 15:22–33). The interpretive significance of the propinquity of Acts and Romans is that it supports the supposition that “Luke’s Paulusbild provides the reader of the New Testament with an authorized biography by which to understand the canon’s Pauline corpus.”

In particular, the portrait of Paul in Acts may suggest a particular way of reading Romans and of understanding its purpose.

I. ROMANS AT THE HEAD OF THE PAULINE CORPUS

The early manuscript evidence for the Pauline corpus shows that there was not total fixity in the ordering of the letters, but despite some variation, Romans is almost always in first position and the letters are ordered according to decreasing size. In the present sequence, Paul’s letters are roughly ranked according their (decreasing) length and audience (classified as either churches or individuals), and letters to the same church or individual are placed together. This scheme is exemplified by the oldest manuscript of Paul’s letters (ca. AD 200), the Chester Beatty codex \(\text{P}^46\), except that Romans is followed by Hebrews, Ephesians precedes Galatians, and the manuscript breaks off at 1 Thess 5:28 (folio 97 verso, with seven leaves missing). Though the position of Romans at the head of the Pauline corpus

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10 See Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri: Descriptions and Texts of Twelve Manuscripts on Papyrus of the Greek Bible: Fasciculus III Supplement, Pauline Epistles* (London: Emery Walker, 1936). For the placement of Hebrews after Romans, see H. J. D. Sparks, “The Order of the Epistles in \(\text{P}^46\),” *JTS* 42 (1941): 180–81. The order Ephesians-Galatians in \(\text{P}^46\) is perhaps due to the differing systems of sti-
is due to the mechanical principle of length, being the longest letter to a church, it is also the most treatise-like of the apostle’s letters, and so appropriately functions as the de facto theological introduction to the Pauline corpus. On that basis, if Acts is allowed to influence the reading of Romans, it potentially has a hand in shaping the reading of the Pauline corpus as a whole.

In his final book, Brevard Childs explored the significance of the premier position of Romans. He argued that the rest of the corpus was to be read through the lens of the mature and comprehensive survey of Pauline teaching found in Romans. Childs’s view in part builds on Günther Bornkamm’s famous discussion of Romans as “Paul’s last will and testament.” Both Bornkamm and Childs acknowledge that they go beyond Paul’s stated intention for his letter, but argue the way they do because they claim that Romans, in contrast to the other letters that follow, is less influenced by the contingent, local problems of the church to which it was sent. According to Childs, “the placing of Romans as an introduction was not a tour de force, but was encouraged by the very nature of the letter itself.”

The other part of Childs’s thesis is that Romans and the Pastorals act as bookends, with the Pastorals showing how the letters by the apostle are to be read as Scripture and labelling his teaching “sound doctrine.” As well, the collation of the letters in an epistolary corpus, with a theological framework provided by Romans, makes them all circular letters.

12 The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).
13 Ibid., 7, 66–67, 104, and 117.
15 This is an important aspect of Childs’s argument, see Church’s Guide for Reading Paul, 139, 145, 147, 179.
16 Ibid., 175.
17 Ibid., 75–78, 164–167. For an evaluation of Childs’s approach, see Leander E. Keck, “Faith Seeking Canonical Understanding: Childs’s Guide to the Pauline Letters,” in The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs (ed. Christopher R. Seitz and Kent Harold Richards; BSNA 25; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 103–17 and John C. Poirier, “Order and Essence of Canon in Brevard Childs’s Book on Paul,” BBR 20 (2010): 503–16. Poirier finds fault with Childs for failing to mention that the Pauline corpus was ordered according to the decreasing length of the letters and Poirier sees this rationale for the ordering as ruling out any hermeneutical significance for Romans as the head of the corpus (“Order and Essence,” 505–9). Poirier does not, however, deal with Childs’s positive argument, namely the broad theological scope of Romans itself.
II. THE APPOSITION OF ACTS AND ROMANS

In the English Bible, the Pauline Corpus is prefaced by the book of the Acts, and this canonical position suggests that those responsible viewed Acts as functioning as a bridge between the Gospels and the Letters. In the Muratorian Fragment (ca. AD 200), “the acts of all the apostles” is discussed after Luke and John and before the Pauline Epistles. So, too, in Eusebius, the order of discussion of the homologanмена (acknowledged or recognized writings) is: the Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation; namely, he lists the letters of Paul after Acts. In contrast to all Greek witnesses, in which Acts is always combined with the Catholic Epistles, Acts in the Latin Vulgate is placed between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, and this placement determined book order within the Western Bible, both Protestant and Catholic. This way of ordering the books reflects the concentration upon Paul in the second half of the narrative of Acts (chap. 13 onwards). With Acts strategically placed before the corpus Paulinum, the churches planted or visited by Paul in Acts receive letters from the apostle in the adjoining epistolary section of the canon, with Acts helping to frame the interpretation of these letters. It is intriguing that Acts fails to mention that Paul wrote letters. However, several scholars have recently argued that Pauline letters were used by the author of Acts as one of the unacknowledged sources upon which he drew for his own composition. This view is now widely accepted, and, according to Rich-

If the author of Acts did make use of Romans as a source, his reading of Romans may have materially shaped the portrait of Paul in Acts, which in turn would throw light on how Luke himself understood Romans. This means that a careful comparison of Acts and Romans (a procedure prompted by their canonical juxtapositioning) may encourage the reading of Romans from a certain “angle of vision.” Acts highlights Paul’s efforts to promote unity among believers, especially between Jewish and Gentile believers, and consistent with the Lukan portrait, “for its part, Romans offered a picture of a Paul in pursuit of peace and eager to place himself in a good light with believers who were more observant of Torah.” The promotion of gospel unity among believers would seem to be one of the main purposes for which Acts was written, and a passage such as Romans 9–11 supports the thesis that it is a credible exegetical procedure to read the juxtaposed Pauline Corpus (and especially Romans) from this vantage point. Paul in Acts routinely starts his missionary efforts by preaching in the synagogue (if there is one in the location) until ejected (9:20–22; 13:5, 46; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1–4, 10–12, 17; 18:4, 6, 19; 19:8–10; 28:17, 28). According to Luke, Paul does this as a matter of theological principle (N.B. Acts 13:46: “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you [= the Jews], … we turn to the Gentiles”). In line with this, the priority of the Jews in the divine plan of salvation and their temporary Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199–214; Wolfgang Schenk, “Luke as Reader of Paul: Observations on his Reception,” in Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel (ed. Sipke Draisma; Kampen: H. J. Kok, 1989), 127–39; William O. Walker Jr., “Acts and the Pauline Corpus Revisited: Peter’s Speech at the Jerusalem Conference,” in Literary Studia in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson (ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 77–86; Lars Aejmalaeus, “The Pauline Letters as Source Material in Luke-Acts,” in The Early Reception of Paul (ed. Kenneth Liljestrom; Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 99; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2011), 54–75.

27 Richard I. Pervo, Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2006), 145. Pervo uses this discovery to support his view that Acts is a second-century composition, but Lukan use of the Pauline corpus does not need to lead to this conclusion, especially if Paul himself (or one of his immediate company shortly after his death) was responsible for the publication of the corpus (à la the theory of Stanley Porter).


29 Pervo, Dating Acts, 55 (addition mine). However, I do not agree with Pervo when he claims: “Luke’s Paul is … a ‘revisionist’ Paul, a figure shaped to meet the needs of a later era” (Dating Acts, 55 [suspension points mine]). In fact, I would see thematic match-ups between Romans and Acts as throwing doubt on the theory of Pervo, for it suggests that the contents of Paul’s letters acted as a constraint and helped mold the Lukan portrait of the apostle.


31 Jacob Jervell, The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 68–76 (75: “We are … in Romans 9–11 confronted with that part of Paul which above all is the basis and foundation of the Lukan Paul” [suspension points mine]). For this paragraph, I acknowledge my substantial dependence on Jervell.
rejection of the gospel as grounds for a mission to the Gentiles are also repeatedly stated in Romans and must be viewed as key themes in the epistle (1:16: “to the Jew first and also to the Greek”; 2:9–10; 11:11–15, 19–20; 15:8–9). This is an example of how the reading of Acts alerts the reader to what is a significant theme in the book that follows.

Another, not unrelated, example is found in Acts 10:34, where Peter proclaims to Cornelius the theological axiom that “God shows no partiality” and on that basis proceeds to preach the gospel to Gentiles and witnesses their conversion. The same theme of divine impartiality dominates Romans 2 (esp. 2:11), with both texts using the same rare Greek term (προσωπολημία; cf. its use in Col 3:25 and Eph 6:9 in application to the fair treatment of slaves). The identical theme of God’s equal treatment of Jews and Gentiles is voiced by Peter using different wording in Acts 15:9. The system of chapters (capitulation) in Codex Vaticanus (B 03) of the early fourth century is the oldest such system known for the NT. The beginning of the second chapter of Romans in Vaticanus (V2) is placed at 1:18, which the editors of NA27 (who place a blank line after 1:17) view as the start of the body of the book. The next chapter in Vaticanus commences at 2:12 (V3). This division has the effect of making the final statement of the preceding chapter a punchline (2:11: “For God shows no partiality”). This way of dividing the text of Romans suggests that 2:11 summarizes the opening argument of the letter. It also makes the first sentence of the next chapter in Vaticanus (2:12) a statement of theme for the new chapter. As noted by Bassler, the statement about divine impartiality rounds off the argument, and 2:11 is a restatement and refinement of the thought in 2:6 (“For [God] will render to every man according to his works”). The viability of the demarcated section in Vaticanus is supported by the inclusio of the motif of divine wrath (1:18; 2:8–9), with the section demonstrating that both


33 The connection is noticed by Jouette M. Bassler, Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom (SBLDS 59; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 176, and Anthony J. Guerra, Romans and the Apologetic Tradition: The Purpose, Genre and Audience of Paul’s Letters (SNTSMS 81; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 58 n. 63.


35 Bassler makes reference to the chapter division in Vaticanus (Divine Impartiality, 122), noting that the codex regards 1:18–2:11 “as a single thought unit” and that the kephalaiia of Codex Alexandrinus (A1, A2) also begin at 1:18 and 2:12; cf. H. F. von Soden, Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments: in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt hergestellt auf grund ihrer textgeschichte; I. Teil: Untersuchungen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911), I.1.461.

36 Bassler, Divine Impartiality, 126.

Jew and Greek are subject to God’s judgment and reward. According to Bassler, “the statement that God is impartial functions as a terse summary of the entire preceding unit,”38 which does not explicitly mention Jews or Gentiles (as noted by Bassler) and so applies equally to both groups. Bassler argues for the unity of 2:12–29 (= V3) on the basis of the word chain: ἀνόμος – νόμος – περιτομή – ἀκροβυστία,39 and because 2:28–29 is a restatement (albeit in different terms) of the opening statement of the unit in verses 12–13,40 namely that God ignores all external distinctions and is only interested in deeds. As well, this thesis can be understood as a development of the thematic statement at 2:11.41 In this way, the opening of Romans can be viewed as a theological recapitulation of leading themes and missionary events in the preceding book of Acts. Prefixing Romans with Acts promotes a particular reading strategy for the head-letter of the Pauline corpus, namely Romans, like Paul’s own ministry as depicted in Acts, promotes the unity of all believers (Gentile and Jewish) in a gospel that offers salvation to all who believe.

III. ROME AS A DESTINATION IN ACTS

As already noted, Acts ends with Paul in Rome (28:11–31), and it is fitting that Romans should immediately follow in modern printed Bibles (reflecting the Vulgate tradition), with Paul in Rom 1:8–15 and 15:22–29 discussing a possible visit to Rome. It is plain that the Roman terminus of Paul’s movements dominates the last phase of the narrative of Acts, starting from 19:21 (“After I have been there [= Jerusalem], I must also see Rome”). This is a major turning point in Acts and comes immediately after the summary statement of the gospel’s progress in 19:20 (“So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily”). The transition to a new phase in the story is also marked by the opening of verse 21 (“Once these things had been fulfilled”). Luke signals what will be the itinerary for the rest of the book of Acts, namely a journey to Rome via Jerusalem.42 The significance of the goal of the journey is underlined by the language of divine necessity (Paul “must” [δεῖ] see Rome), implying that this is God’s will.43 This interpretation is supported by the way in which Paul’s stated resolution is prefaced: “Paul resolved in the Spirit,” indicating the leading of God’s Spirit. Later, the Spirit provides inspired premonitions

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38 Bassler, Divine Impartiality, 135.
39 Ibid., 137.
40 Ibid., 139.
of what he will face in Jerusalem (20:22–23; 21:11), but these are not understood by Paul as reasons for not proceeding with his plan.\textsuperscript{44} There are also visions granted to Paul that assure him that he will reach Rome (23:11; 27:23–24). Paul’s appeal to Caesar is a further step toward the goal of visiting Rome (25:11–12, 21). The sea voyage to Rome is described in some detail (Acts 27), and finally, it is stated that he arrived in Rome (28:14, 16).

It could be argued that the Roman destination is signalled as early as the phrase “the end of the earth” in the programmatic statement of Acts 1:8, with this being the mandated end goal of the gospel mission. Wall notes the use of the singular (“the end [ἔσχάτου] of the earth”), which he says is not to be generalized to mean the ends of the earth, indicating that Luke is indeed thinking of Rome.\textsuperscript{45} The beginning and end of Acts are connected and frame the intervening narrative as shown, for instance, by the inclusio of references to God’s “kingdom” (1:3, 6; 28:23, 31) and to the activity of teaching by Jesus and Paul (1:1; 28:31 using the term διδάσκω).\textsuperscript{46} Paul’s two-year residence in Rome (28:30), the center of the Gentile world, is an indicator of the worldwide spread of the gospel,\textsuperscript{47} but it has this function whether or not Rome is equated with “the end of the earth.” Despite the possible association forged between the two in Pss. Sol. 8:15, the reuse of the Greek phrase in Acts 13:47 (quoting Isa 49:6) in parallel with “to be a light for the Gentiles” suggests that it signifies the Gentile world as a whole.\textsuperscript{48} As well, Rome holds a climactic geographical position near the end of the list of foreign visitors to Jerusalem at Pentecost in Acts 2 (v. 11: “and visitors from Rome”), as is fitting for a narrative that starts in Jerusalem and ends in Rome.\textsuperscript{49} Here, then, are two (albeit subtle) indicators that the Roman destination may have been in the author’s mind from the beginning of Acts.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{44} As noted by John B. F. Miller, both Paul and those trying to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem see their actions as in accordance with the Spirit, see Convinced that God had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God’s Will in Luke-Acts (Biblical Interpretation Series 85; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 225–29.


\textsuperscript{46} For these and other links, see Miekeal Parsons, The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts (JSOTSup 21; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 156–59.

\textsuperscript{47} According to Wall, “Rome symbolizes the universal significance of Paul’s previous ministry” (“Romans 1:1–15,” 150).


\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, the Roman terminus may be in the author’s mind as early as the reference to the decree of Caesar Augustus in Luke 2:1 (Plümacher, “Rom in der Apostelgeschichte,” 168).
IV. APOLOGETICS IN ACTS AND ROMANS

My thesis is that Romans can be understood as an answer to the false charges levelled at Paul in Jerusalem, for in Acts 21:28 the Jews accuse Paul in these words: “This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place,” with their words that follow showing that the place referred to is the temple (“he has defiled this holy place”). The charge that Paul has an anti-law message is also alluded to by James in 21:21 (“they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs”). Likewise, two of the charges are again mentioned by Paul in Rome in 28:17 (“I have done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers”), so that Paul feels the need to defend himself against the same kind of slanderous charges in Rome.

Within a wider reading of Acts, the charges are anticipated by the similar accusations made against Stephen by “false witnesses” in 6:13 (“This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law”). This is one aspect of the typological link between Stephen and Paul. If the summary reports of the progress of the word in Acts are accepted as structurally significant (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31), the second major section of the book (6:8–9:31) is the account of the death of Stephen and the raising up of a second “Stephen” in the person of Saul who was present at Stephen’s death (7:58b; 8:1a). Stephen and Saul (Paul) have the same opponents (6:9; cf. 9:29), both preach boldly, both face life-threatening plots, and both see visions of Jesus, and so it is to be expected that Paul will later have to answer the same kind of charges as Stephen did.

Further comment is required on the attitude to the temple in Acts, for Stephen’s speech (Acts 7) is often viewed as anti-temple, however, Stephen does not reject the temple so much as relativize its importance, for he makes the point that the manifestation of God’s presence was not (and cannot be) limited to the temple (7:2, 30, 44, 48). Luke’s interest in the temple is plain in the Gospel, which begins and ends in the temple (Luke 1:8–23; 24:52–53) and features Jesus teaching daily in the temple during his final week of ministry (19:47–48; 21:37–38; 22:53). In Acts,

51 Cf. Acts 6:11 (“We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God”), and 6:14 (“for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us”).


54 Note the Asian (= Ephesian?) connection of the accusers in both 6:9 and 21:27–29; see Oskar Skarsaune, _In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity_ (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 153–54.

the first believing community regularly meets in the temple and the apostles teach 
in the temple (2:46; 3:1; 4:2; 5:12, 20, 25, 42), so that it is probably best to see 
the community of believers as the fulfilment of and replacement for the temple. 
The temple and priestly leadership has been superseded by the new community and its 
apostolic leadership. The preaching of the gospel begins in the Jerusalem temple 
and fans out from there. Consistent with this Lukan focus, the rebuilt “dwelling of 
David” (15:16 RSV quoting Amos 9:11–12) is understood by James as the end-time 
reconstituted temple that consists of believing Jews and Gentiles that is forming 
through the preaching of the gospel. Luke’s account of the council in Acts 15 is a 
major turning point in Luke’s story (and the prophecy of Amos 9 plays a crucial 
part). At the council meeting the threat to the gospel mission to Gentiles is dealt 
with by recourse to OT prophecy. Immediately after this is the beginning of the 
extension of the gospel into Europe (Acts 16).

The charges against Paul come in the context of his trip to Jerusalem to hand 
over the collection, as Paul mentions in Acts 24:17: “Now after some years I came 
to bring to my nation alms and offerings.” As noted by Christopher Mount, “Paul’s 
collection is for the author [of Acts] as an example of his general piety toward his 
people and the temple, the issue about which he is being falsely charged.”
The narrative of Acts shows that the charges against Paul cannot be sustained. In Acts, 
almsgiving is a mark of piety (cf. Tabitha [9:36] and Cornelius [10:2]) and is connected 
to the temple (N.B. the beggar at the gate of the temple [3:2]). Far from attempting to profane the temple, as he was accused of doing in 21:28 and 24:6, 
Paul’s obedience to the law is on display in his entering the temple as advised to do 
by James (21:22–26). As well, his defence includes the claim that at an earlier date 
he was praying in the temple where he received a vision (22:17).

It does appear that Acts is, at least in part, an apologia for Paul, his message 
and his mission, and was written by Luke to provide a certain image of Paul, 

Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154–84; Craig R. Koester, The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old 
Glenny acknowledges: “If the ‘tent of David’ is rebuilt for the purpose that the remnant of men and all 
the nations may seek the Lord, ‘the tent’ could refer to Jerusalem, including the temple, but it must refer 
to more than simply Jerusalem” (Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septua 
gint of Amos [VTSup 126; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 222). In Amos 9:11 (MT), the “booth of David” is best 
understood as referring to Jerusalem as a cultic centre, with the temple as its focal point, see Sabine 
Nägele, Lamihütte Davids und Wolkensohn: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Studie zu Amos 9,11 in der jüdischen 
und christlichen Exegese (AGJU 24; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 211–14; Greg Goswell, “David in the Prophecy of 
59 Mount, Pauline Christianity, 156 n. 255.
60 This is most obvious in chaps. 21–26; see, e.g., Paul W. Walaskay, “And So We Came to Rome”: The 
Political Perspective of St Luke (SNTSMS 49; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 50–52;
which climaxes with the speeches of Paul in Jerusalem, in which he defends himself against charges brought by the Jews (e.g. the vehement denial of Paul in 25:8). Paul is allocated four speeches in the final chapters of Acts, which are identified by Greek noun or verb as apologia (22:1; 24:10; 25:16; 26:1–2, 24). According to Alexander, the last and longest speech of Paul before King Agrippa as a prestigious representative of Diaspora Judaism (ch. 26) suggests that this is the chief target audience for the apologetic in Acts, namely the book is “a plea for a fair hearing at the bar of the wider Jewish community in the Diaspora, perhaps especially in Rome.” In the narrative flow of Acts, the recorded speeches of Paul in Jerusalem anticipate and give the substance of what he will say when he gets to Rome and is invited to defend himself and his message to the Jewish community leaders of that city (28:21–22). Their invitation is the occasion of Paul’s last apology in the book of Acts (28:23). This final scene is probably the clearest indicator of the situation of the ideal reader of Acts, so that Luke’s story of Israel’s recurrent rejection of the Gospel and of Paul’s repeated attempts to win his own people to faith in Christ invites the kind of theological reflection that is seen in Paul’s Letter to the Romans, especially Romans 9–11.

This suggests that there is a measure of truth in the thesis of Jacob Jervell that Romans is a letter to Jerusalem, though his theory fails to convince as a total explanation of the purpose of Romans. Jervell argued that attempts to explain the occasion of Romans primarily on the basis of the situation and needs to the Roman church lead nowhere, and that the solution is to pay attention to Paul’s immediate situation and travel plans (his intention to come to Rome via Jerusalem). According to Jervell, in Romans “Paul sets forth and explains what he, as bearer of the collection given by the Gentiles for the mother congregation in Jerusalem, intends to say so that he as well as the gift will not be rejected.” In summary, “In Romans Paul is absorbed by what he is going to say in Jerusalem.” On this theory, the apostle writes with the aim of enlisting the understanding, support, and prayers of the Roman church as he faces an uncertain reception from both unbelieving Jews and the


62 Ibid., 201–205.
63 Ibid., 205.
65 “The Letter to Jerusalem,” in The Romans Debate (ed. Karl P. Donfried; rev. and exp. ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 53–64. For example, Jervell too quickly discounts the Spain link, for “although the structure and key themes of Romans 1–11 are probably shaped largely by Paul’s anticipation of his Jerusalem trip,” part of Paul’s purpose in writing is to lay a platform for Roman support of his Spanish mission (15:22–28) and so it comes in the form of a “theological resume” (Sam K. Williams, “The ‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans,” JBL 99 [1980]: 250, 254).
67 Ibid., 56.
68 Ibid., 60.
Christian congregation in Jerusalem (15:30–33; cf. Acts 21). Paul asks for prayer (15:31), and the content of his letter shows why he and his “service” are worthy of acceptance. Paul's last journey to Jerusalem is the canonical setting of the theology of his letter to the Romans. On that basis, Jervell sees the issues discussed in Romans 9–11 as the heart of the message of Romans, with Paul dealing with objections he expects to face in Jerusalem.

V. READING ROMANS AFTER ACTS

The canonical juxtapositioning of Acts and Romans suggests the possibility that the accusations made against Paul in Acts, wherein he is accused of speaking against the people, law, and place, set up the agenda of Romans. This is not to deny that there are important differences between Acts and Romans; for instance, the former book focuses on the accusations made by unbelieving Jews about Paul’s message and mission (though see Acts 21:21), whereas the latter has in mind possible misunderstandings of believers (though note Rom 15:31). As well, in Acts the speeches of Paul in Jerusalem are a rehearsal for what he will say to the Jewish community in Rome, whereas (according to Jervell) Paul's Letter to the Romans is a rehearsal of what he will say in Jerusalem. The difference in foci is enough to show that neither text is to be allowed to exercise total control over the interpretation of the other. The propinquity of the two books in some forms of the NT canon is a post-authorial phenomenon, with book order reflecting the perceptions of ancient readers, who were right, however, to detect the presence of significant connections between these two canonical portions, and the “canon logic” of the appended letter to the Romans is that it is an authentic summary of Paul's teaching that demonstrates that he has been maligned. In what follows, I will summarize the letter in a way that brings out this connection.

In the first place, Paul does not speak against the people, and all of Rom 1:18–4:25 can be placed under this heading. The gospel first of all means an authoritative proclamation of coming judgment (1:18; 2:16), for the wrath of God hangs over humanity (1:18–3:20), both Jews and Gentiles (2:9–10: “the Jew first and also the Greek” [x2]). The impending universal judgment includes “those who are under the law” (3:19). Gentile believers are a living rebuke to the Jews, for those “who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires” (2:14 RSV modified) and “those who are physically uncircumcised … keep the law” (2:27). Paul acknowledges the privileges of the Jews (2:17–20; 3:1–2), which are “much in every way” (3:2), but the fact of sin means that the Jews are “not entirely” better off (3:9 [a

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69 In what follows I acknowledge my substantial dependence on the classic article by Williams, “The ‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans.”


71 Here the only privilege mentioned is their possession of “the oracles of God” (3:2), but this theme will be elaborated and the list of privileges extended in 9:4–5.
better translation of οὐ πάντως than the RSV “not at all”\textsuperscript{72}, for they, like the Gentiles, merit the judgment of God due to their sin. Paul is here defending two things: he is defending the conversion of the Gentiles as a crucial part of the eschatological plan of God and at the same time he is defending the specialness of the Jews. The Abrahamic promise, given in response to the universal problem of sin (Gen 12:1–3), is what binds these two concerns together. Paul seeks to demonstrate that the gospel he preaches is in full accord with the divine plan, which is nothing other than the outworking of the Abrahamic promise. In line with this, the thesis statement in 1:16–17 refers “to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” and “the righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ read as a possessive or subjective genitive\textsuperscript{73}) is best understood as God’s faithfulness in keeping his promise to Abraham.\textsuperscript{74}

Romans 3:1–7 is a key passage (to be taken up and developed in chaps. 9–11),\textsuperscript{75} and the Jewish privilege highlighted is that “they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (3:2), with Paul first and foremost having in mind the divine promises given to Abraham (chap. 4), which were the gospel announced beforehand (1:2; cf. Gal 3:8). But “some” (τίνες) of the Jews have failed in their responsibility as stewards of the promises.\textsuperscript{76} They persist in their blindness to the truth revealed to Abraham and the prophets (3:21), the truth that on the basis of faith God seeks all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, as his children. Over against the “unfaithfulness” (ἀπιστία) of some Jews, Paul sets “the faithfulness (πίστιν) of God” (3:3). God’s fidelity to the divine plan announced to Abraham will not be annulled by the unbelief of some of his chosen people. In 3:3–7, God’s faithfulness, righteousness, and truthfulness (ἀλήθεια) are virtual synonyms.

Through the death of Jesus, God keeps his promise to Abraham by making people from all nations his sons (3:21–4:25), so the righteousness of God is his faithfulness to his promises to Abraham, promises which focus on the eschatological gathering of all the nations into the people of God. This occurs “apart from law” (χωρὶς νόμου; 3:21) and “through the faith of Jesus Christ” (interpreting πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive), that is, the faith of Christ that made him willing to die on the cross (3:22; cf. 3:25).\textsuperscript{77} By justifying Gentiles by faith

\textsuperscript{72} For a survey of the exegetical difficulties in Rom 3:9, see Robert Jewett, Romans (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 256–59. See the helpful comments of Douglas J. Moo, who, however, finally comes to a different interpretation than the one offered here (The Epistle to the Romans [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 200 n. 16).

\textsuperscript{73} Just as “the wrath of God” (1:18 ὀργὴ θεοῦ) is a possessive or subjective genitive (God’s character expressed in action), referring to God’s wrath against sinful humanity.

\textsuperscript{74} Williams, “‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans,” 265. I will not enter into the huge scholarly debate over this issue.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 265 n. 74, 280.

\textsuperscript{76} Some, not all, were unfaithful, for there is a Jewish remnant (cf. 11:5).

and not by works of the law ("for all who believe"), God removes any barriers to the Gentiles' realization of the divine blessing and he keeps his promise to Abraham (cf. 15:8–9). In teaching this, Paul is not overthrowing the law (3:21b, 31), for, as depicted in the book of Genesis, Abraham is the model for both the uncircumcised believer and the circumcised believer (4:11–12).

Far from speaking against the people, Paul's heartfelt concern for his "brethren," his "kinsmen by race," is that they be saved (9:3; 10:1). Romans naturally follows after Acts 28, for Romans explains the Jewish hardening predicted in the extensive quotation from Isaiah 6 of Acts 28:26–27, with this theme taken up in extenso in Romans 9–11 (esp. 11:25). Some three times in the narrative of Acts, Jewish unbelief causes Paul to turn to the Gentiles (13:46; 18:6; 28:28), but Paul never repudiates the Jewish people nor gives up efforts to win them (28:30: "[he] welcomed all who came to him"). Since the ending of Acts mentions both Jews (28:17) and Gentiles (28:28), the "all" in 28:30 must refer to both. Romans 9–11 is Paul's final vindication of God's faithfulness, noting especially 9:6 ("But it is not as though the word of God had failed"), thinking particularly of the Abrahamic promise.

80 The pathos of Paul over his fellow-Jews is palpable, for despite all their privileges (9:4–5), they are not enjoying the blessings described in chapter 8, whereas they should have been the first to receive them.

82 God has not rejected his people (11:1). Their stumbling does not mean that they (Israel) have fallen (11:11). There has been no change of intention on God's part, for God does not change his mind about his gifts and calling (11:29). All Israel will be redeemed and saved according to promise (11:26–27). Of this outcome, the present Jewish believing remnant (including Paul himself) is the guarantee (9:27; 11:1–5, 16). Indeed, the salvation of the Gentiles and of Israel are mysteriously intertwined. Israel has heard the word of the gospel (10:14–21), for the OT proclaims it in the prophetic writings, especially the Servant passages of Isaiah (10:15–16 quoting Isa 52:7 and 53:1). This
prepares for the special role of Paul himself, the Servant, who seeks to make Israel “jealous” by magnifying his ministry to the Gentiles (10:19; 11:11, 14). Paul’s Gentile mission in no way denies or undermines Jewish privileges but will be the very means of winning over disobedient Israel (11:30–32). The argument refutes any idea that Paul speaks against the people.

Second, Paul does not speak against the law. The theme of the law dominates 5:12–7:25, having been touched on in 3:31 (“we uphold the law”). Romans 5:12–21 continues the “much more” argument begun in 5:9–10, yet it also begins a new section. Death is due to sin, not due to the law, for sin is much older in human experience. So too, the reign of death was established long before Moses (5:14). The law caused an “abounding” of sin among the Jews (5:20), for it made the situation worse by making sin more culpable, but this is more than compensated by the “super-abounding” of God’s grace in the work of Christ. The Jew under the law is actually worse off than the Gentile, because of an “abundance of sin.” On the other hand, they find in Christ an “abundance” of grace to offset their former disability. Paul’s apology for the law continues in chapter 7, in which he offers a vigorous defence of the law as “holy, just, and good” (7:12), though severely restricting its functions (7:6). Paul speaks from his past experience as a Jew under the law, so that the first-person pronoun “I” in Romans 7 is generalizing (as in 3:7), yet he also speaks about it from the theological stance gained from the gospel. References to coveting (7:7) and being deceived (7:11) also recall the Adamic fall into sin in Genesis 3. The upshot is that all the blame goes to sin, and the law’s dignity is upheld.

Last of all, Paul does not speak against the temple, though, as in Acts, due to the work of Christ the temple is radically redefined as the believing community indwelt by God. This aspect of Paul’s argument is more difficult to detect, because the temple is not mentioned as such in Romans, but three sections of the letter (5:1–11; 8:1–39; 12:1–15:6) display motifs connected to the temple (e.g. glory, Spirit, sacrifice, building). Romans 5:1–5 sounds themes that will soon be explored at greater

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83 According to Williams, “This is an argument, he hopes, which will convince his detractors in Jerusalem that his missionary endeavor is by no means anti-Jewish in its import” (“Righteousness of God” in Romans,” 248).

84 In both 3:31 and 10:4, the law is viewed as a witness to the righteousness that comes by faith and so points to Christ; see C. Thomas Ryhne, Faith Establishes the Law (SBLDS 55; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981). Likewise, Robert Badenas, Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4 in Pauline Perspective (JSNTSup 10; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 118: “Paul clearly states in Rom 10:4 what he had only hinted in the previous verses, namely that Christ embodies that righteousness which the law promised, that righteousness which some Gentiles obtained through faith and which Israel rejected.”


86 Ibid., 110.


88 For the temple in Paul’s thinking more generally (e.g. 1 Cor 3:16: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple...?”), see D. R. de Lacey, “οἱτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς: The Function of the Temple as a Metaphor
length in Romans 8, namely 5:1–2 (justification-glorification) will be expanded on in 8:1–17, and 5:3–5 (suffering-assurance) will receive fuller exposition in 8:18–39. On this understanding, 5:1–11 and chapter 8 form an inclusio around the long section about the law (5:12–7:25) which is the heart of Paul’s letter. Romans 5:1–11 follows logically from the end of the previous chapter (5:1: “Therefore, …”), with these verses summarizing the outcome of justification. Mention of the indwelling of God’s Spirit (5:5) and the hope of sharing “the glory of God” (5:2) shows that the temple theme is present. Likewise, chapter 8 describes the liberty of Paul the Jew who is indwelt by the Spirit and has the sure hope of glory.

The temple theology of chapters 12–15 builds on this presentation, beginning as they do with the language of sacrifice (12:1: “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice”), and closing with the thought that proper behavior aims at “upbuilding” others (15:2 πρὸς οἰκοδομήν; cf. 14:19; 15:20; 1 Cor 14:12), and a quotation in 15:3 from Ps 69:9, which speaks of zeal for God’s house. Godly behavior that benefits fellow believers can be viewed as temple-building. The answer to the chaos of sin depicted in Romans 1, which chapter draws on the narratives of Genesis 3–11, is God’s goal of restoring an Edenic sanctuary. In line with such a typological analysis, the harmonious relationships of Romans 12–15 are in stark contrast to the terrible effects of sin in Romans 1. This is the final telos of the gospel, namely the prospect of ridding the creation of the effects of sin (cf. 8:18–25).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

While not suggesting that the Acts-Romans sequence is the only context for interpreting Paul’s famous letter, I have argued that the juxtapositioning of the two works, such as occurs mainly in the Latin manuscript tradition and reflected in the English Bible, is hermeneutically significant and fruitful. Early readers had good reasons for placing these books side by side in the way they did, for the books can be understood to throw light on each other. Romans can be viewed as a theological recapitulation of leading themes and events in the preceding book, and prefixing Romans with Acts promotes a particular reading strategy for the head-letter of the
Pauline corpus. Romans can be read as a canonical answer to the false charges leveled at Paul in Jerusalem, where in Acts 21:28 the Jews accuse him in these terms: “This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place.” The act of adjoining Acts and Romans can be taken as implying that these accusations set up the agenda of the Letter to the Romans, in which Paul shows that he does not speak against the people, the law, and the temple. Paul’s gospel proclaims that God will be faithful to the promises he made to Abraham, promises that embrace both believing Jews and believing Gentiles in God’s saving purposes for the world.