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DEUTERONOMY 30:11–14
AS A PROPHECY OF THE NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST

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Deuteronomy 30 is arguably the climax of the magnificent sermon of Moses that makes up the large majority of the book of Deuteronomy. There is a question, however, of how vv. 11-14 are to be interpreted within this noteworthy chapter. A quick survey of the way that the various versions of the Bible commonly translate these verses shows that the assumption is that Moses shifts in v. 11 from prophesying of the future (which is what he is doing in vv. 1-10) to exhortation in the present for covenant obedience on the part of Israel. But is this the case? This article will argue for an interpretation of Deut 30:11-14 that sees these verses as forming an integral part of the grand restoration prophecy of vv. 1-10 that immediately precedes the passage in question. Furthermore, it will be argued below that this interpretation of Deut 30:11-14 is confirmed by Paul's use of this part of Scripture in Rom 10:6-8.

I. Viewing Deuteronomy 30:11–14 as a Prophecy of the New Covenant

John Sailhamer in his work on the Pentateuch has suggested that Deut 30:11-14 should be taken as conjoint with the new covenant prophecy of Deut 30:1-10 and that Deut 30:11-14 explains the nature of the new covenant by comparing it with the Sinaitic covenant.¹ Sailhamer notes that it is only in Deut 30:15 that "the perspective and focus on Moses' words" changes from "the future time after the captivity" to the present.² Wayne Strickland has also suggested that Deut 30:11-14 be read in this way.³ Douglas Moo calls the interpretation that takes Deut 30:11-14 as prophetic of the future "an attractive alternative" to the majority position but then rejects this interpretation, citing S. R. Driver's commentary on Deuteronomy in support of his view that "the future time orientation" of Deut 30:1-10 "with its *waw* + perfect verbs" is not

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¹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 473.

² *Ibid.*, 474.

³ Wayne G. Strickland, "The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (ed. Wayne G. Strickland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 250-52.

continued into Deut 30:11.⁴ Thus, it is argued that Deut 30:11-14 is not an integral part of the prophecy of Deut 30:1-10. Rather Deut 30:11-14 is a case of Moses returning to the present, calling upon his audience to accept their obligation to obey the law.⁵ This understanding presumably underlies the traditional English Bible translations of Deut 30:11-14, which set vv. 11-14 in the present tense.⁶

There is evidence from the text of Deut 30, however, that argues against the conclusion that vv. 11–14 refer to the narrative present rather than the future. It needs to be acknowledged at the outset that the relevant qualitative states spoken of in vv. 11-14 are conveyed by means of adjectives, prepositional phrases, and participles, all of which are effectively timeless in Hebrew and which ordinarily take their tense from the context in which they occur.⁷ This means that the verb *to be* has been supplied by the English translators in the present tense in the clauses *this commandment ... is not too hard* (v. 11), *neither is it far off* (v. 11), *it is not in heaven* (v. 12), *neither is it beyond the sea* (v. 13), *the word is very near you* (v. 14), and *it is in your mouth and in your heart* (v.14). While it is true that the translators of the LXX opted for a translation of these qualitative states into the present tense using ἐστίν, the fact remains that the tense of these Hebrew clauses must be determined from the context in which they appear, and this context opens up the possibility that a translation into the future tense is more appropriate.

Is there sufficient reason, then, to understand Deut 30:11-14 as referring to the future? Three reasons emerge from Deut 30 that argue for a future orientation to Moses' words in vv. 11-14. Firstly, v. 11 and v. 14 are introduced by the Hebrew subordinating conjunction כִּי. Both instances of כִּי are translated causally in the RSV by the word *for*. The Hebrew conjunction כִּי is generally understood to have four main functions: it can be used to introduce a subordinate clause of cause, condition, content, or time.⁸ The presence of כִּי in vv. 11 and 14 is significant in that it opens up the possibility of a parallel use with the three instances of כִּי in vv. 9-10. The כִּי in v. 9 is translated causally in the RSV,

⁴ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 652. Thomas Schriener agrees with Moo that “strictly speaking the text [of Deut 30:11-14] is not a future prophecy” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 558). Interestingly, Luther effectively reads Deut 30:11-14 as referring to the future when he says that the effect of Moses' teaching in this passage is to convey the idea that when the word of the gospel is believed in the heart, then “[God's] commandment will become neither too difficult nor too distant” (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* [ed. J. Pelikan; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1960], 9:278).

⁵ E.g., Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 364.

⁶ The KJV, ASV, RSV, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, and ESV, all translate Deut 30:11-14 in the present tense.

⁷ Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 19; and Ellen van Wolde, “The Verbless Clause and Its Textual Function,” in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. Cynthia L. Miller; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 333.

⁸ BDB lists the uses of כִּי under three headings. Apart from the כִּי of content and the causal כִּי, it merges the temporal, conditional, and concessive uses of כִּי under the one heading. Speaking of the conditional כִּי, BDB is of the opinion that כִּי “has a force approximating to *if*, though it [usually] represents a case as more likely to occur than ׀א.”

NRSV, and NKJV as *for*, but is left untranslated by the NIV. A causal sense fits the context well and is arguably the correct translation at this point: “Yahweh, your God, will make you abundantly prosperous ... for (כי) Yahweh will again take delight in prospering you.” Both instances of כי in v. 10, however, are taken in a conditional sense in the RSV, NIV, and NKJV, and translated by the word *if*. It would seem that these versions have followed the sense of the LXX in taking these two כי forms as conditional, yet it can be argued that a temporal sense of כי seems more appropriate in the context. It is relevant in this regard that the first instance of כי in v. 10 is translated in the NRSV temporally as *when* and the second instance causally as *because*. Verses 9-10 appear in the NRSV as follows:

⁹ and the LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, ¹⁰ when [כי] you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because [כי] you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Given that it has already been prophesied in Deut 30:2, 6 and 8 that Israel would return to the Lord in renewed covenant obedience after the exile, then the translation of both כי conjunctions in v. 10 in the temporal sense as *when* arguably fits the context better than the conditional translation that appears in the RSV, NIV, and NKJV. Because God has just spoken through Moses in vv. 1-10 that Israel would finally return to him in renewed obedience, there can be no “ifs and buts” about Israel returning to the Lord. Interestingly, the translators of the ESV have gone for the temporal sense for both of the כי conjunctions in v. 10. While the causal sense is also possible for both instances of כי in this verse, it can be argued that the temporal sense of כי probably fits the context best on analogy with v. 8, which reads: “and you will again obey the voice of Yahweh and keep all his commandments that I am commanding you today.” Even though no כי conjunction occurs in v. 8, the content and wording of this verse parallels that of v. 10 to a significant extent. Given that v. 8, in speaking of the future obedience of Israel, has a temporal flavor to it, then the parallel in content and wording between vv. 8 and 10 would suggest a temporal sense for both uses of כי in v. 10.⁹

How then does the use of כי in vv. 11 and 14 fit in with the instances of כי in vv. 9-10? The כי in v. 11 is translated causally in the RSV as *for* and emphatically in the NIV and NRSV respectively as *now* and *surely*. While כי can sometimes be translated as an emphatic demonstrative particle (meaning *indeed* or *truly*), the causal use of כי is more common and fits the present context well.¹⁰ If the כי of v. 11 is taken causally, the idea is that Israel will return to the Lord (v. 10) *because* the law will have been written in Israel’s heart (v. 11). Such an interpretation of כי makes perfect sense in the context. But if the כי in v. 11 is taken

⁹ Strickland makes a similar point. See Strickland, “Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 251.

¹⁰ For the emphatic use of כי, see point II. I in the entry for כי in *HAL*.

in close connection with the temporal כִּי clauses of v. 10, then the temporal sense of *when* also becomes a possibility. In this instance, v. 11 would stand in parallel with v. 10, with both vv. 10 and 11 grammatically subordinate to v. 9. While this construction is a possibility, the presence of the paragraph marker פְּתוּחָה between vv. 10 and 11 in the MT suggests some kind of weak discourse segmentation in the transition to v. 11.¹¹ The LXX translation of כִּי as ὅτι also adds weight to the idea that the causal meaning is more appropriate for the כִּי in v. 11 than the temporal meaning.

As for the כִּי in v. 14, the RSV and NKJV render it as the conjunction *but* and the NIV and NRSV as the word *no*. Translating כִּי as *but* or *no* is possible when the כִּי clause is preceded by a negative clause that stands in contrast with the proposition introduced by the כִּי clause, as is the case in vv. 13-14. At the same time, however, it is evident that the כִּי in v. 14 also communicates the idea of causality, because the questions put forward by Moses in vv. 12-13 would not need to be asked *because of* the nearness of God's word to Israel. Interestingly, the כִּי in v. 14 is left untranslated in the LXX.

Therefore, the first reason supporting the reading of Deut 30:11-14 in the future tense relates to the כִּי in v. 11 that subordinates the thought of vv. 11-14 to v. 10. The כִּי in v. 11 ties vv. 11-14 in with vv. 1-10. Given this grammatical connection, the text of vv. 1-10 forms the immediate context of vv. 11-14, and it would be normal to assume that the tense-neutral clauses of vv. 11-14 would then take their tense from vv. 1-10 and be read in the future, the only exception being the participle מְצוּרִים in v. 11, which, being modified by the word הַיּוֹם, is to be translated in the present tense.¹²

On the whole, therefore, reading vv. 11-14 in the future tense seems the most natural reading in the context. Indeed, taking vv. 11-14 in the future tense makes for an excellent sense in that vv. 11-14 would then be speaking of God's placement of his law in the hearts of the people of Israel as the ultimate cause for Israel's post-exilic repentance, thereby recalling the idea of the circumcision of the heart spoken of by Moses in Deut 30:6 and anticipating the new covenant theology of Jer 31:31-34, which speaks of the new covenant in terms of God's law being written on the heart of his people. Whether the כִּי of v. 11 be taken causally (which is the preferred interpretation) or temporally, the implied verbs *to be* in vv. 11-14 should be translated in the future tense; otherwise, the flow of the passage is interrupted without sufficient grammatical or contextual justification.

The second reason for taking Deut 30:11-14 as referring to the future relates to the wording of v. 14 concerning the word being "in your mouth and in your heart." *God's word in the mouth* is associated in the OT with prophesying (e.g., Num 22:38; 23:5, 16; Deut 18:18; 1 Kgs 17:24). Where the *word* in question refers to God's law or commandments, as it does in v. 14, *God's word/law in the*

¹¹ פְּתוּחָה is marked in the MT by the letter פ within the Hebrew text.

¹² The Masoretic accent *atnakh* (marked by the sign אָ in BHS) under the word הַיּוֹם indicates that הַיּוֹם has traditionally been understood as forming part of the אשר clause in v. 11, i.e., the Masoretic tradition takes הַיּוֹם as modifying the participle מְצוּרִים.

mouth is an idiom for having a thorough knowledge of God's law (Exod 13:9; Josh 1:8; Ps 119:43; Mal 2:6-7). The idea behind this idiom is that the person who has God's law in his mouth has studied it to such an extent that he knows the law intimately and can repeat it verbally. The ability to verbalize God's law is a sign that God's law is in one's heart, because "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart" (Matt 15:18; see also Prov 16:23; Luke 6:45). The idea of *words in the heart* is paralleled in Prov 4:4 with a son keeping his father's commandments, and from Ps 119:11 it can be seen that *God's word in the heart* is equivalent to God's *law* in the heart. The concept of *God's law in the heart* appears only a few times in the OT, but it is a highly significant expression used in describing a person who is covenantally righteous. The righteous person is distinguished from the wicked person by having "the law of his God ... in his heart" (Ps 37:31; Isa 51:7).

Also relevant at this point is the idea of the new covenant in Jer 31:33, where the new covenant is defined in terms of God writing his law on the hearts of the people of Israel, which would cause eschatological Israel not to break covenant with God again (Jer 31:32). Thus, *God's law in the heart* is in effect an idiom for *obedience* (see Ps 40:8). The thinking underlying the idiom seems to be that God's law, which comes from outside through external revelation, needs to be internalized within the heart, and as it becomes internalized in the heart—given that all actions naturally proceed from the heart (Matt 15:19)—the person with God's law in the heart acts in obedience to God.

Having God's word in the mouth and the heart, therefore, speaks of the Israelites having a thorough knowledge of torah and living in obedience to torah. In the light of this understanding, a question needs to be asked in relation to Deut 30:14: can Israel be described at this point in the narrative as having such a knowledge and as showing such obedience (for this is what is implied when Deut 30:11-14 is translated in the present tense)? In answering this question, it should be noted that an obvious difference exists between merely *hearing* the law and *obeying* the law.¹³ It is true that in Deut 30 Israel had been listening to a long sermon in which Moses spelled out for them the details of God's law, preparatory to their entrance into the promised land. But does having heard one long and albeit awesome sermon from Moses mean that the law was presently in the mouths and in the hearts of the people of Israel? Apart from the more theoretical question of the effectiveness of sermon-style communication for the internalization of knowledge, the evidence from the book of Deuteronomy that Israel was currently "rebellious and stubborn" (31:27), that she was already forming rebellious intentions against God (31:21), and that she would soon rebel against God in the future (31:16, 27), suggests otherwise. Thus, it seems that the talk of the law being in Israel's mouth and in her heart was about a phenomenon that was still to be experienced in the future. In this way, the content of Deut 30:14 also argues for a future-time orientation for Deut 30:11-14.

¹³ Paul makes such a distinction in Rom 2:13.

The third reason supporting the proposition that Deut 30:11-14 refers to the future relates to the content of Deut 30:12-13. Moses speaks in v. 11 of the do-ability and nearness of “this commandment that I command you today.” The phrase המצוה הזאת (*this commandment*) obviously seems in the context of Deut 30 to be the Mosaic law.¹⁴ But to what extent is the law of which Moses is speaking in vv. 11-14 identical to the Mosaic law as traditionally known by the Israelites? This question needs to be asked because, as Sailhamer has noted, vv. 12-13 seem to introduce an element of contrast into the equation.¹⁵ The “Mosaic” commandment talked about by Moses in vv. 11-14 would be so near to Israel that they would not need anyone to go up into heaven to receive it for them (v. 12), neither would they need anyone to go over the sea to receive it (v. 13). It seems that a deliberate contrast is being drawn between the situation of the law as described in vv. 11-14 with Moses’ reception of the law at Mount Sinai previously. Moses had to go over the sea and up to heaven (on Mount Sinai as it were), in order to receive the Sinaitic revelation on behalf of Israel (Exod 24:10-18); but the content of vv. 12-13 speaks as if the mediation of Moses either was no longer necessary in the present or else would not be necessary at some time in the future.

One way of capturing the implication of the wording of vv. 11-14 is to say that the commandment or word of God that Moses is talking about in vv. 11-14 is Mosaic but not strictly Sinaitic. But is the law that Moses is talking about in this passage not strictly Sinaitic only in the sense that Israel already has the law (so Moses does not have to ascend Sinai again), or is Moses hinting at a modification to torah that would take place in the future? Paul’s midrash of Deut 30:12-14 in Rom 10:6-8 (examined in further detail below) suggests that the latter alternative is how Deut 30:11-14 was meant to be understood.¹⁶

The implication of all that has been argued above, therefore, is that Deut 30:11-14 should be viewed as an integral part of Deut 30:1-10 and that Deut

¹⁴ Among Jewish commentators, there are two main interpretations of the phrase המצוה הזאת in Deut 30:11. Either it refers to the whole of the Mosaic law or simply to the command of repentance (תשובה) in Deut 30:2. The most famous advocate of the תשובה interpretation is Moses ben Nachmon (1194–1270), better known as Nachmanides or Ramban. Ramban’s commentary on Deut 30:11 is recorded in *Miqraot Gedolot* (New York: Abraham Isaac Friedman, 1965), 5:355, as saying: “Does the sense of ‘for this commandment’ concern the whole torah entirely? The correct interpretation is that when it concerns the whole torah, it says ‘all the commandment which I am commanding you today’ [Deut 8:1], but this commandment concerns the repentance that was mentioned [previously in Deut 30:1-10].” It should be noted that the two main Jewish interpretations of the phrase המצוה הזאת need not be mutually exclusive, since Deut 30:2 and 10 teach that Israel’s post-exilic return or תשובה would involve a return of obedience to the whole of torah. *Repentance* from the OT perspective always involves a return to the way of torah.

¹⁵ Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 473.

¹⁶ The opposite conclusion is presented in *Deut. Rab.*, Nitzavim, 8.6. The teaching that the commandment was not in heaven was meant to prevent Israel from seeking after “another Moses” who would “bring us another Law from heaven” (quoted from C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* [London: Macmillan, 1938], 157-58). As Montefiore and Loewe note, this conclusion was most probably motivated in part by the desire to counter the Christian claim of the revelation in Christ superseding the revelation mediated through Moses.

30:1-10 and 11-14 are to be viewed together as a unit that functions as a detailed prophecy of the eschatological or new covenant restoration of Israel.¹⁷ In the light of this, a suggested translation for Deut 30:9-14 is as follows:

⁹ Yahweh, your God, will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground; for Yahweh will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, ¹⁰ when you obey the voice of Yahweh, your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, when you turn to Yahweh, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹¹ For this commandment which I am commanding you today will not be too hard for you, neither will it be far off, ¹² not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up for us to heaven to bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” ¹³ neither beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” ¹⁴ for the word will be very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.

II. Paul's Interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:12-14

In order to bolster the case that Deut 30:11-14 ought to be translated as a prophecy of the new covenant, referring to the future rather than the present, it will be argued below that this suggestion is confirmed by the way in which this passage is used by the Apostle Paul in Rom 10:6-8. It has been relatively common for commentators to suggest that Paul's use of Deut 30:12-14 in Rom 10:6-8 is not a strict exegesis of the passage. Martin Luther, for example, says that Paul's use of Deut 30:12-14 in Rom 10:6-8 is a case of Paul's “tak[ing]

¹⁷ Other evidence in support of taking Deut 30:11-14 eschatologically can be found in Ramban's interpretation of Deut 30:11-14. Ramban (*Miqraot Gedolot*, 5:355) writes: “It is put in the form of the participle to hint at the promise that the future of the matter will be so. The sense is that ‘even if your banishment should be to the end of the heavens [Deut 30:4], and you are under the power of the peoples, you will be able to return to the LORD and do according to all that I am commanding you today.’” In the opinion of the Beit Midrash of the Yeshivat Har Etzion, Ramban notes that “The Torah describes Benei Yisrael's teshuva [*repentance*] in narrative, rather than imperative, form, thus alluding to a divine promise that ultimately, Benei Yisrael, as a group, will perform teshuva. The Rambam similarly writes in his *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhos Teshuva 7:5) that the final redemption will arrive only in the merit of Benei Yisrael's teshuva, and the Torah promised us that we will, eventually, do teshuva” (Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash, Yeshivat Har Etzion, “Parashat Nitzavim-Vayeilekh: Teshuvah,” *The Weekly Mitzva* [5 September 2004], 2-3; cited 22 October 2005; online: <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/mitzva/46nitzavim%20vayeilech.doc>). Similarly, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes that Ramban's view of תשובה is based on Deut 30:1-14, where תשובה appears “not as a command but as a prophecy and promise ... Only through teshuvah will Israel be redeemed, and the Torah has already given the assurance that Israel will, at the end of its exile, finally repent.” Thus, for Nachmanides, תשובה is “an ethical-historical drama of exile and return.” (Jonathan Sacks, “Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha,” in *Internet Parsha Sheet* [10 September 2004], 2-3; cited 20 October 2005; online: <http://www.teaneckshuls.org/parsha/pdf/Devarim/NitzavimVayeilech62.pdf>). N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflection,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. L. E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 658-63, also suggests that, around the time that the Letter to the Romans was written, some Jewish groups were reading Deut 30, including vv. 11-14, as a prophecy of the end-time restoration of Israel. Wright cites in particular the midrash of Deut 30 in 4QMMT of the Dead Sea Scrolls as evidence.

occasion from Moses for composing a new and fitting text against the work-righteous.”¹⁸ John Calvin notes that Paul’s use of this passage may “cause considerable difficulty” for two reasons: “Paul seems to have not only distorted the proper sense of the passage, but also to have changed the words to a different meaning.”¹⁹ Calvin goes on to absolve Paul of the charge of distorting the proper sense of Deut 30:12-14 by taking Paul’s use of this passage as an adaptation of Moses’ words for his own purpose.²⁰ More recent interpreters have also found difficulty with Paul’s use of Deut 30:12-14 in Rom 10. Joseph Fitzmyer, for example, thinks that Paul is not quoting Deut 30:12-14 “in the sense of following what Moses said” but that he “merely borrows phrases from Deuteronomy.”²¹

In contrast to those interpretations that take Paul’s use of Deut 30:12-14 as a loose adaptation of Moses’ words rather than a strict interpretation of the text, the suggestion put forward here is that far from taking Deut 30:12-14 out of context or merely mimicking the language of Deut 30:12-14 for the sake of analogy or illustration, Paul has understood Deut 30:12-14 precisely as a prophecy of the new covenant. It is to be noted here that we are going beyond the position of Schreiner, who agrees with Moo “that strictly speaking the text [of Deut 30:11-14] is not a future prophecy” but that “its placement in the narrative of Deuteronomy (after the prophecies of chaps. 29–30) and Paul’s understanding of salvation history led him to see it as fulfilled in his day.”²² Instead of saying as Schreiner does that the context of Deut 29–30 legitimizes Paul’s interpretation of Deut 30:11-14, we should say that the text of Deut 30:11-14 *both* contextually *and* grammatically looks forward to a future fulfillment, and that Paul saw Jesus as the fulfillment of this important text. Thus, there is no impediment from the perspective of the Hebrew text of Deut 30:11-14 to the view that Paul is interpreting Deut 30:11-14 in Rom 10:6-8 in a way that is consistent with the grammatical meaning of the text. Paul is simply employing a christologically informed method of Jewish midrash, which is consistent with the

¹⁸ *Luther’s Works*, 9:279. Luther interprets Moses in Deut 30:11-14 as teaching the need for God’s people to love the law (ibid., 278). At the same time, he interprets the unusual ordering, where the phrase *in the mouth* precedes the phrase *in the heart* (Deut 30:14), as indicating that “the manner of fulfilling the commandment of God will be through the Word of the Gospel, which is first preached by the mouth and then believed as a result of hearing.” Thus, “Moses directs the people to another Word to come, which, when received in the heart, causes His commandment to be loved.”

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (trans. R. Mackenzie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 224.

²⁰ Ibid., 225.

²¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 588. Mark Seifrid thinks that Paul’s interpretation of Deut 30:11-14 is legitimate but is of the view that “strictly speaking, ‘the righteousness of faith’ does not appear in [Deut 30:11-14]”; yet, Paul has found a parallel in the broader Deuteronomic teaching of salvation by grace (and particularly God’s gracious giving of the law to Israel) with God’s giving of Christ to the world (Mark A. Seifrid, “Paul’s Approach to the Old Testament in Rom 10:6-8,” *TJ 6 NS* [1985]: 35-36).

²² Schreiner, *Romans*, 558.

grammatical meaning of Deut 30:11-14, to defend the Christian gospel from particular Jewish opposition by showing how Jesus Christ and the Christian gospel are the fulfillment of the (eschatological) torah spoken of in this passage of Scripture.²³ We shall now turn to examine the way that Paul does this in Rom 10:6-8.

1. Romans 10:6

But the righteousness which is by faith says thus: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" That is, to bring Christ down.

In this verse, Paul introduces the speech of personified faith. The conjunction δέ signals in this verse a contrast with the content of Rom 10:5. Paul contrasts *the righteousness which is by the law* and *the righteousness which is by faith* (ἡ ... ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοσύνη).²⁴ There is also a contrast here between the content of what the voice of faith says in comparison to the words of Moses in Lev 18:5, which Paul quotes in Rom 10:5. The voice of faith is represented by Paul as repeating part of the wording of Deut 9:4 and presenting a christological interpretation of Deut 30:12.²⁵

The wording μὴ εἴπῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου corresponds word for word to the first clause of the LXX of Deut 9:4 and should be taken as a deliberate quotation from this verse. It is quite significant as a quotation, because Deut 9:4 teaches that Israel is not to think that "it is because of my [i.e., Israel's own] righteousness that Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land." The first person singular pronouns refer here to the nation of Israel. Moo has argued that this connection with Deut 9:4 supports his interpretation of "their own righteousness" in Rom 10:3 and 5 as consisting of individual "human doing," which is "inadequate to bring a person into relationship with God."²⁶ But, in fact, Deut 9:4 supports the opposite conclusion, namely, that the phrase *their own righteousness* in Rom 10:3 and 5 is referring to Israel's national righteousness more than to righteousness considered individually. This can be seen from the fact that Israel's righteousness in Deut 9:4 is contrasted with "the wickedness of [the]

²³ *Midrash* simply means a Hebrew or Jewish form of exegesis. Jacob Neusner identifies three common types of midrash: paraphrastic, prophetic, and parabolic (Jacob Neusner, *What is Midrash* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 7-8). Paul's midrash is an example of prophetic midrash.

²⁴ The interpretation of Rom 10:5 is notoriously difficult, but this author favors the view that Paul contrasts *the righteousness which is by faith* (v. 6) and *the righteousness which is by the law* (v. 5) along salvation-historical lines, where *the righteousness which is by the law* is understood in the common OT and traditional orthodox Jewish sense of being in a right relationship with God as a result of one's personal commitment to the Mosaic covenant. Contrary to way things were under the old covenant, Paul had come to understand that the coming of Christ had ushered in a new stage in God's revelation. Under the new covenant, people would now relate to God on the basis of the new revelation/covenant in Christ instead of the Mosaic covenant, thus bringing about the end of the justifying function that the Mosaic law had once legitimately had with respect to the faithful minority within Israel during the old covenant age (to which Moses testifies in Deut 6:25).

²⁵ The wording μὴ εἴπῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου also occurs in Deut 8:17 (LXX). Paul's concern with righteousness in Rom 10:5-6 suggests, however, that Deut 9:4 is the verse particularly in mind at this point.

²⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 649-51.

nations.” It is to be noted here that the second person masculine singular pronoun is used frequently in Deuteronomy of the nation of Israel as a whole (e.g., Deut 4:33, 35; 7:1-2, 6; 9:1-7).

Speaking of the national righteousness of Israel, it is ironic that the earlier idea of the wickedness of the nations has now in Paul’s day been turned on its head. The Christian claim in the free preaching of the gospel was that righteousness had now come to the nations without the need for the nations to submit to the Mosaic law. The Jewish rejection of this Christian preaching was motivated in large part by a desire to maintain the national righteousness of Israel allegedly in accord with the teaching of Moses, but ironically this Jewish concern in maintaining the traditional concept of righteousness now constituted Israel’s wickedness. The Israel of Paul’s day had in effect made the mistake of asserting her own righteousness over against the righteousness of God proclaimed in the Christian gospel (Rom 10:3), thereby transgressing the command given in Deut 9:4 that Israel should not exalt her own national righteousness.

It is not arbitrary, therefore, that Paul introduces his quotation from Deut 30:12-14 with a quotation of the first clause of Deut 9:4. Apart from the semantic connection between the verb תאמר in Deut 9:4 (found as εἴπησ in the LXX and in Paul’s quotation) and the infinitive לאמר in Deut 30:12 that lends itself to such a merging following the common rabbinic exegetical method of *gezerah shavah*, the quote from Deut 9:4 with its negative imperative also makes a reasonably good paraphrase of the introductory part of Deut 30:12, which is also in the negative.²⁷ The rabbinic method of merging of Scriptural quotations was typically employed by Jewish rabbis as a means by which a number of Scriptural ideas could be related together. This means that Paul intends that his readers should read Deut 30:12-14 in the light of Deut 9:4. Deuteronomy 9:4 reminds us that, ultimately speaking, the possession of the land and life in the land (which equates to the pre-eschatological experience of eternal life in the OT age) is something that is given by God (Deut 8:1; 9:3, 5).²⁸ Paul’s use of part

²⁷ The rule of *gezerah shavah* links verses that contain the same words or expressions together. For a comprehensive summary of Jewish hermeneutical principles dating from before A.D. 70, see David Instone-Brewer, “Theology of Hermeneutics,” (11 March 2005); cited 4 November 2005; online: <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/staff/Instone-Brewer/TheolHermeneutics.htm>. For a brief summary of Pauline exegetical techniques, see Daniel Hayden King, “Paul and the Tannaim: A Study in Galatians,” *WTJ* 45 (1983): 361-62.

²⁸ From the Deuteronomic perspective, it does not follow that the gift nature of salvation rules out the covenant obedience of God’s people as one of the means by which God brings about the reception of the gift by his people. This is relevant to the exegesis of Deut 9:4. This verse needs to be read in conjunction with Deut 8:1, which speaks of the covenant obedience of Israel as being a necessary condition for entrance into and possession of the promised land. Deut 11:8-9 also links Israel’s keeping of the law with the possession of the land and long life therein. At first glance, Deut 8:1; 11:8-9; and Deut 9:4-6 seem to contradict each other. On the one hand, it *is* because of national righteousness that Israel will possess the land; on the other hand, it is *not*. The solution to this seeming contradiction is found in Deut 9:5, which says that it is God who will drive the nations out of the land for Israel. Although Deut 9:3 also speaks of *Israel* “driv[ing] them out”, even there it is *God* who goes “before [Israel] as a consuming fire.” In other words, God’s action is the determinative factor; but God’s action and the covenant obedience of his people go together, precisely because part of God’s action involves working the requisite covenant obedience in his people. Thus, God gives his people the land by enabling them to possess it through covenant obedience, and so the

of Deut 9:4 as an introduction to his interpretation of Deut 30:12-14 seems to imply, therefore, that the Israel of his day, in her preoccupation with keeping the law of Moses, was guilty of losing sight of the fact that eternal life is ultimately the work of God. However God would choose to achieve his work of eschatological restoration, Israel must accept it; but the Israel of Paul's day was unwilling to do this.

The question τίς ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν is an edited quotation from the LXX of Deut 30:12. As mentioned above, the point of this question, once Deut 30:11-14 is acknowledged as forming an integral part of the restoration prophecy in Deut 30:1-10, is that the word of God will be nearer to God's people at the time of the eschatological restoration of Israel than it was under the old covenant age. The expression τοῦτ' ἔστιν is a formula of identification familiar to "midrashic explication."²⁹ The clause Χριστὸν καταγαγεῖν, therefore, is best understood as an infinitive clause specifying the purpose behind going up to heaven. That is to say, at the time of the eschatological restoration of Israel, it would not be necessary for anyone to go up to heaven in order to bring Christ down. This seems to be a reference to Christ's incarnation, as most commentators have recognized.³⁰ Paul's point seems to be that, through the incarnation, the fullness of the Word of God has come near (similar to John 1:14 and Heb 1:2-3).

It is to be noted that Paul in this verse substitutes Christ for *המצוה* or ἡ ἐντολή to which Moses was referring in Deut 30:11-12. *המצוה* is used in the singular elsewhere in Deuteronomy to denote the Mosaic law as a whole (e.g., Deut 5:31; 6:1, 25; 8:1; 17:18-20; 31:5). Thus, the commandment in view in Deut 30:11-13 seems to be the whole law of Moses.³¹ Paul, therefore, has substituted Christ for the whole of the Mosaic law. At this point, our Protestant systematics may move us to ask how this is possible?³² Is this merely a case of Paul

necessary condition for inheriting the land is fulfilled. A similar pattern can also be seen in Deut 8:17-18 where Moses speaks of how God would empower Israel so that Israel would "get wealth" in fulfillment of what God had covenanted with Abraham. Thus, God acting to fulfill his covenant responsibilities involves God causing Israel to keep hers. This is also what we see in Deut 30:11-14.

²⁹ Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 123. A number of scholars have argued that the wording τοῦτ' ἔστιν fits the pattern of Jewish *pesharim*, such as is attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* [Waco: Word Books, 1988], 603; and John Davies, "The Heart of the Old Covenant," in *Evangelism and the Reformed Faith and Other Essays Commemorating the Ministry of J. Graham Miller* [ed. C. R. Thomas; Sydney: Christian Education Committee, Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1980], 38). This has been disputed by Seifrid, who argues for a common Hellenistic explanatory sense to τοῦτ' ἔστιν (Seifrid, "Paul's Approach," 31-34). But given that Paul is engaged in a Jewish exegesis of Deut 30:11-14 in the context of a Jewish debate over righteousness, it is best (contra Seifrid) to see some connection with Jewish midrashic methodology in Paul's use of τοῦτ' ἔστιν, as Longenecker has suggested.

³⁰ For a good summary of the scholarly views, see Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 655.

³¹ Davies states that by using the word *commandment* Moses "sums up the whole of what is required of Israel as one obligation ... which is a commitment of love and loyalty to the Lord" ("Heart of the Old Covenant," 36).

³² Davies notes that "commentators have found [Rom 10:6-8] to be most perplexing, since Paul uses a passage which, in its original context, undeniably refers to the **law**, to demonstrate ... the righteousness that comes by **faith**" ("Heart of the Old Covenant," 38).

mimicking the language of Deut 30:11-14 for the sake of argument, or is it a case of Paul treating Deut 30:11-14 in an analogous fashion, or is Paul actually suggesting that Christ can be equated with the law? How we answer this question has large implications for how we understand Paul's attitude to the law elsewhere in his writings.

The suggestion offered here is that Paul, far from separating law and gospel at this particular juncture, acknowledges that a fundamental unity exists between the two in Christ. For Paul, the simple fact of the matter is that Christ is eschatological torah and vice versa.³³ Paul sees Christ as being the whole fullness of deity (Col 2:9), the supreme revelation of God, hence, the embodiment of torah. Thus, the Mosaic, yet "non-Sinaitic" torah hinted at in Deut 30:11-14 is none other than Jesus Christ himself. Christ fulfils the law of Moses and transforms it at the same time. Paul's point in Rom 10:6, therefore, is that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Deut 30:12. In the new covenant age of the restoration of Israel, torah comes down out of heaven without any human intermediary, being incarnate in Christ, who is the Word/Law of God become flesh. This means that the revelation that was delivered through Moses has been superseded (just as the teaching of a guardian is outgrown when the child entrusted to his care reaches the age of majority, Gal 3:24; 4:1-5), and Moses himself no longer functions as a mediator between God and his people in the way that he did previously. Therefore, Paul writes: "What once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it" (2 Cor 3:10).

2. Romans 10:7

Or "Who will descend into the abyss?" That is, to raise Christ up from the dead.

The question τίς καταβήσεται εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον is based on the question מי יעבר־הים לנו אל-עבר הים which appears in Deut 30:13. It is apparent that Paul has modified the original wording of Deut 30:13 to form a rhetorical counterpart to the question τίς ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν in Rom 10:6. In particular, the word καταβήσεται (*descend*) has replaced the word יעבר־הים (*traverse*), and the word ἄβυσσος (*abyss*) has replaced the phrase עבר הים (*the region beyond the sea*). This is obviously a christological interpretation of Deut 30:13. Paul is justified in changing *the region beyond the sea* to *the abyss* or *the deep*, because the abyss is simply the lower regions of the sea; and just as the sea is viewed in the Bible as being a symbol of chaos and death (e.g., Exod 15:4-5, 10, 12; Ps 18:4-5), so too is the abyss (e.g., Ps 107:25-29).³⁴ Paul brings out the connection between the abyss and death by paralleling τὴν ἄβυσσον with ἐκ νεκρῶν. Israel's journey into the sea was, in effect, a baptism into death (1 Cor 10:2).³⁵ Once again Paul uses the identifying formula τοῦτ' ἔστιν to introduce an explanatory clause, namely, Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναγαγεῖν. This clause is best understood as

³³ The term *eschatological torah* denotes the form that God's law would take in the new covenant age. Eschatological torah is the torah that would be written by the Spirit of God on the hearts of eschatological Israel (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27), which is also the torah that the nations would come to Zion to learn and keep (Isa 2:1-4).

³⁴ For a good discussion on the various scholarly views relating to Paul's use of ἄβυσσος, see Seifrid, "Paul's Approach," 18-19.

³⁵ For the association of baptism with death, see Mark 10:38-39; Rom 6:3-4; and 1 Pet 3:20-21.

an infinitive clause specifying the purpose for going down to the abyss. Similar to what was seen in Rom 10:6, Paul once again substitutes Christ for *הַמָּצוּחַ* or *ἡ ἔντολή*.

The import of Paul's use of Deut 30:13 here is that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Deut 30:13. The fact that Moses had to lead Israel across the sea in order to receive God's law shows that the law was not yet in Israel's heart. Israel's journey through the sea on the way to Sinai was symbolic of the externalization of the law outside the national heart of Israel that characterized the whole of the old covenant age. The perennial problem of Israel under the old covenant was that the law externalized on the tablets of stone had to become internalized on the tablets of the hearts of the people as the condition for the promised covenant blessings to be fulfilled, but this did not happen on the national scale required. As can be seen from passages such as Deut 30:1-10, Israel had to keep covenant with God in order that the covenant blessing of life might be realized. The problem was, however, that Israel on a national level consistently failed to keep covenant with God. This is precisely the problem that the OT as a whole is concerned to point out. This is *the old covenant conundrum*, that Israel had to keep covenant with God for the fullness of covenant blessing to come but proved time and time again to be unable to do this.

The old covenant failure of Israel is undoubtedly a tragic story; but at the same time that it traces the woes of the nation, the OT bears witness to the solution to the old covenant conundrum. The solution, identified by Moses and the prophets in the prophecies of restoration, is what Jeremiah famously termed the *new covenant* (Jer 31:31). By means of the new covenant, the problem of the externalization of the law in Israel would finally be solved by God acting through his suffering yet Spirit-filled Servant and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit to write or internalize his law in a comprehensive way in the national heart of Israel (Jer 31:33). Thanks to this special work of God, Israel would finally be enabled to keep covenant with God (Ezek 36:27) with the result that the promise of the blessing of life would finally be fully realized (Ezek 36:28-30, 33-35).

It is believed here that Paul clearly understood the nature of the old covenant conundrum as outlined above and the OT gospel of the new covenant as the solution to this conundrum. The gospel that Paul preached was, after all, the gospel "which [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures concerning his Son ... Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:2-4). Paul's christological interpretation of Deut 30:13 simply asserts, therefore, that the eschatological internalization of the law and the restoration of Israel have been achieved through Jesus Christ. Through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus inaugurated the new covenant and is in the process of writing eschatological torah on the hearts of God's people as he, who is the supreme expression of torah, dwells in their hearts through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:3-4).

It is also suggested here that, as a result of seeing Jesus enthroned as Messiah in heaven, Paul clearly understood the implication that the coming of the new covenant in Christ had for the place of Moses in salvation history. The coming of the fullness of divine revelation in Christ had effectively relegated the divine

revelation given to Israel through Moses to the status of a revelation of second-order magnitude. The Mosaic law for all its perfection (Ps 19:7) was not meant to be “the be-all and end-all” of divine revelation (2 Cor 3:7-11; Heb 1:1-2; 2:2-3). Because Christ through his death and resurrection has brought the law or word of God directly into the hearts of God’s people through the Holy Spirit, the mediation of Moses is no longer required. In fact, Paul understood that, in God’s plan of salvation, the mediation of Moses goes together with the veiling of the hearts of the people of Israel, “because only through Christ is [the veil] taken away” (2 Cor 3:14). Therefore, to maintain the mediation of Moses now that the Messiah has come is to side with condemnation instead of justification (2 Cor 3:9) and to submit to slavery instead of freedom (Gal 3:25-26; 5:1). To maintain that the mediation of Moses is still required after the coming of the Messiah is a case of zeal without knowledge (Rom 10:2). It is to stumble against the Messianic stone of stumbling (Rom 9:32-33) and constitutes disobedience to the truth (Rom 2:8).

3. *Romans 10:8*

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,” that is the word of the faith that we are preaching.

The clause ἀλλὰ τί λέγει focuses the reader’s attention in on Deut 30:14, which speaks of the eschatological internalization of God’s law in the hearts and mouths of Israel. Paul continues his personification of the righteousness by faith (Rom 10:6), which is the voice of the Christian, the person who understands God’s plan of salvation in Christ. Paul’s quotation of Deut 30:14 is perhaps an edited version of the LXX translation of this verse or more likely a direct translation from the original Hebrew of parts of Deut 30:14, although Paul leaves untranslated the intensifying adverb מאד and the infinitive clause לעשות. The *word* in question at this point is the word of God, which in the context of Deut 30 is the Mosaic *commandment* or torah (see Deut 30:11) that would be obeyed in the time of the eschatological restoration of Israel. According to Deut 30:14, this eschatological torah or word would be “near you” (קרוב אליך) and “in your mouth and in your heart” (בפיך ובלבבך), that is, it would be internalized in the heart and lived out in the speech and in the lives of God’s people in the time of the restoration. The implication of Paul’s personification of the righteousness by faith is that the person who understands God’s plan of salvation does not ask for an intermediary, as the people of Israel asked Moses to be on their behalf (Deut 5:27). Instead, such a person realizes that the word of God has come near in Christ. To maintain Moses as mediator in the new covenant age is to reject God’s plan as revealed in Deut 30:11-14.

The clause τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως ὃ κηρύσσομεν identifies the eschatological torah prophesied about in Deut 30:11-14 with the Christian gospel. This is an equation of great import and is highly significant for the question of Paul’s understanding of the word *t Torah*. Paul describes the eschatological *word* as τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως, *the word of faith*. Schreiner notes that scholarly opinion has been divided as to whether *the word of faith* refers to “the content of the faith ...

or to the act of trusting.”³⁶ It seems clear, however, that if Paul is indeed engaging in a Christian midrash of Deut 30:14 in this verse, then *the word of faith* refers to the content of the eschatological word of God that would be believed in the new covenant age. The eschatological word of God, which is the gospel, comes to all people with divine authority, calling upon people of all nations to have *faith*, i.e., to accept the gospel message that centers on the proclamation that Jesus is the risen Christ and Lord of all. It is true that Christian faith as the acceptance of the gospel message is summarized in the oral confession that “Jesus is Lord”—the proof of Jesus’ lordship being his resurrection from the dead (Rom 10:9)—but the correspondence of Rom 10:8 with Deut 30:14 argues in favor of the phrase *the word of faith* as referring to the content of what is believed.

But how is it that Paul can equate the *word* or *commandment* of Deut 30:11 and 14 with the Christian gospel? It is important to keep in mind that, for Paul, Christian faith is ultimately about submission to the lordship of Christ (Rom 10:9). Believing the gospel is, therefore, submission to the lordship of Christ. And because Christ is Torah—the ultimate revelation of God—believing the gospel is the equivalent of submission to eschatological torah. Thus, it is through faith in the gospel of Christ that the law in its eschatological form comes to be written on the heart, because the gospel—the revelation and proclamation of Christ as Lord—is eschatological torah. By receiving the gospel and thus Christ into our hearts through faith, eschatological torah is present in our hearts, and we are enabled to keep our covenant obligations to God and receive the fullness of covenant blessing (Rom 2:29; 8:2-4, 7-8) in fulfillment of the grand OT prophecies of restoration such as Deut 30:1-14; Jer 31:31-33; and Ezek 36:27-30.³⁷ The phrase ὃ κηρύσσομεν (*which we preach*) has the effect of linking the eschatological torah of Deut 30:11-14 with the gospel preached by Paul, and is further proof that *the word of faith* has content rather than confession in view. Paul understood that the Christian gospel was the word of God (1 Thess 2:13). Understanding this divine origin of the gospel motivated Paul to defend the gospel from all opponents, and particularly from the attacks of his fellow Jews, because, as far as Paul was concerned, what he had been called to preach was (among other things) the fulfillment in history of what had been prophesied so long ago in the wonderful restoration oracle of Deut 30:1-14.

III. Concluding Remarks

Our investigation of Rom 10:6-8 has shown that these verses constitute a christological midrash of Deut 30:11-14. Paul’s interpretation reveals that he

³⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 559.

³⁷ An important implication arising from Paul’s identification of *the commandment* with *Christ*, and *the word* of torah with *the gospel*, is that the biblical dichotomy between law and gospel should not be absolutized in the way that it has been in certain circles of Protestant theology, as if *law* and *gospel* were always mutually exclusive concepts. Such formulations of the law/gospel dichotomy effectively deny the OT prophecies that speak of the gospel in terms of the divine writing of eschatological torah on the hearts of God’s people, and also end up denying the important truth that Christ as the incarnate Logos is *Torah personified* and that, in him, law and gospel are ultimately *one*.

clearly understood the import of Deut 30:11-14 as speaking of the internalization of eschatological torah in the hearts of the people of Israel in the age of the new covenant and that the *commandment* or *word* spoken of by Moses in Deut 30:11-14 was a prophetic reference to Jesus Christ, the ultimate Word of God, and also to the derivative word of the Christian gospel that is proclaimed by Christian preachers. Thus, Paul's interpretation of Deut 30:11-14 confirms the argument presented in the first part of this article that Deut 30:11-14 should be taken as going together with Deut 30:1-10 to form a single oracle concerning the eschatological or new covenant restoration of Israel. In other words, Deut 30:1-14 is a prophecy of the new covenant in Christ.