

# Session 1

## Historical Introduction: The Synagogue Context

Romans 9–11: "Paul's Story of Israel," © 2024 Gerald L. Stevens

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### **Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11**

Intro: Historical, Literary Context

- 🌐 Historical: Synagogue Context
- 🌐 Literary: Romans Context

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### **Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11**

Historical: Synagogue Context

- 🌐 **Israel's Synagogue Context**
- 🌐 **Paul's Synagogue Context**

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### **Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11**

Israel's Synagogue Context

- 🌐 **Synagogue Dominance**
- 🌐 **Synagogue Story**

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### 🌐 Synagogue Dominance

- 📖 *Philo: centrality of synagogues in Jewish life*
- 📖 *Jesus: constantly taught in synagogues*
- 📖 *Acts: replete with synagogue references*
  - 🌐 Hellenist movement opposition (Stephen)
  - 🌐 Saul's campaign against Jesus movement

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### 🌐 Synagogue Dominance

Israel's synagogue dominance should be our first hermeneutical impulse toward parsing any problematic statement in Paul's letters. But what story of Israel was the synagogue telling?

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Israel's Synagogue Context

- 🌐 Synagogue Dominance
- 🌐 Synagogue Story

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### 🌐 Synagogue Story

- 📖 *Synagogue legend: the Great Assembly*

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### 🌐 Synagogue Story

A legend developed in postexilic synagogue traditions that controlled its narrative of Israel. The legend was about an assembly of Jewish leaders maintained through time going all the way back to Moses correctly interpreting his law. They called this group the "Great Assembly." This synagogue

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### 🌐 Synagogue Story

legend of the "Great Assembly" asserted a mythical direct line of transmission all the way back to Moses himself to validate the authority of postexilic Ezra teachings preserved in Pharisaic oral traditions. Totally ignored in the legend is that this purported "Great Assembly" body never is mentioned

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### 🌐 Synagogue Story

once in all of Hebrew Scripture. Further, the legend has to leapfrog an entire millennium of Jewish history to concoct this supposed historical connection from Ezra after the exile all the way back to Moses.

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### 🌐 Synagogue Story

- 🕒 *Synagogue legend: the Great Assembly*
- 🕒 *Synagogue legacy: Israel's trajectory*
  - Primacy of Moses: ultimate seer of God
  - Primacy of Ezra: ultimate seer of Moses
  - Sets trajectory of postexilic Israel

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

- *Synagogue legend: the prophets were "opaque"*
- *Synagogue legacy: Israel's trajectory*
  - Primacy of Moses: ultimate seer of God
  - Primacy of Ezra: ultimate seer of Moses
  - Sets trajectory of postexilic Israel

even the prophets were "opaque"

## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

- *Postexilic synagogue developments*
  - Radical changes take place
  - Priests lose religious authority
  - Scribes, Pharisees gain religious authority
  - Hasmonean high priesthood (non-Zadokite)
  - Pharisees gain control of the ruling council
  - Teacher of Righteousness protest (Qumran)

## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

- *Postexilic synagogue developments*
  - Radical changes take place

#### Postexilic Jewish History

|                                      |                            |                             |                           |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Zerubbabel's Second Temple<br>515 BC | Maccabean Revolt<br>167 BC | Hasmonean Dynasty<br>141 BC | Herodian Dynasty<br>37 BC |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|

- Pharisees gain control of the ruling council
- Teacher of Righteousness protest (Qumran)

## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

- *Postexilic Synagogue was stronghold of control and popular impact*
  - Radical changes take place
  - Priests lose religious authority
  - Scribes, Pharisees gain religious authority
  - Hasmonean high priesthood (non-Zadokite)
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Synagogue was stronghold of control and popular impact

## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

#### Postexilic synagogue developments

- Radical
- Background: king Alexander Jannaeus, queen Alexandra Salome
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- Hasmonian high priesthood (non-Zadokite)
- Pharisees gain control of the ruling council
- Teacher of Righteousness protest (Qumran)

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

#### Postexilic synagogue developments

“Neither Jesus nor Paul was the first Jew to find fault with the Pharisee vision of Israel buttressed in authority with its mythic Great Assembly.”  
—Dr. Stevens (p. 100)

- Teacher of Righteousness protest (Qumran)

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

#### Synagogue impact (first century)

- Coupling oral law to written law
- Great Assembly patent on Torah interpretation
- Jesus: rejected Great Assembly vision of Israel
- James: on-going struggles with synagogue vision
- Saul of Tarsus: conflict focused in one person
- Paul of Antioch: synagogue priority, traditions

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## Israel's Synagogue Context

### Synagogue Story

#### Synagogue impact (first century)

“Perhaps, though, history still may reveal in the end that Saul of Tarsus was the greatest rabbi Israel ever had.”  
—Dr. Stevens (p. 105)

- Paul of Antioch: synagogue priority, traditions

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Historical: Synagogue Context

- 🌐 Israel's Synagogue Context
- 🌐 Paul's Synagogue Context

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Context

- 🌐 Paul's Synagogue Centrality
- 🌐 Paul's Synagogue Crisis

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### 🌐 Paul's Synagogue Centrality

#### 👤 *Jewish Heritage: Family, Language*

- 🌐 Tarsus, Roman citizenship (Acts 21:39; 22:3, 28)
- 🌐 Tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5)
- 🌐 Skilled tradesman (Acts 18:3)
- 🌐 Jerusalem family (sister, nephew, Acts 23:16)
- 🌐 Aramaic (Acts 21:40; 1 Cor 16:22)
- 🌐 Hebrew (1 Cor 3:19; 2 Cor 8:15; 2 Tim 2:19)

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### 🌐 Paul's Synagogue Centrality

#### 👤 *Jewish Heritage: Family, Language*

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- 🌐 Hebrew (1 Cor 3:19; 2 Cor 8:15; 2 Tim 2:19)

“Saul”  
namesake

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Centrality

#### Jewish Heritage: Pharisaic Training

- Educated, literate, Hillelite Pharisee
  - Scriptural knowledge (quotes, illustrations)
  - Argumentation (midrashic, Jewish methods)
  - Beliefs (eschatology, resurrection, angeology)
  - Progressive (place of gentiles in future world)
  - Distinctive zeal (Phil 3:6; Rom 10:2; Acts 22:3–5)

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

Acts 21:37; 2 Thess 3:17; Phil 3:5; cf. Gamaliel as teacher (Acts 22:3)

### Paul's Synagogue Centrality

#### Jewish Heritage: Pharisaic Training

- Educated, literate, Hillelite Pharisee
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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Centrality

#### Jewish Commitment: Synagogue Preaching

- Synagogue activity obvious in Paul's letters
- Synagogue priority seen in missionary strategy
  - Synagogue always first preaching station
  - Synagogue leaders converted in Corinth
  - Synagogue mission in Rome (Acts 28:17–28)

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Centrality

#### Jewish Commitment: Synagogue Preaching

Crispus (Acts 18:8), and, likely Sosthenes as well (Acts 18:13–17; cf 1 Cor 1:1)

- Synagogue activity obvious in Paul's letters
- Synagogue priority seen in missionary strategy
  - Synagogue always first preaching station
  - Synagogue leaders converted in Corinth
  - Synagogue mission in Rome (Acts 28:17–28)

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Context

- Paul's Synagogue Centrality
- Paul's Synagogue Crisis

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### ● Paul's Synagogue Crisis

- *Saul's zealot activity in Jerusalem*
  - Death of Stephen (Acts 8:1)
  - Ravaging the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1; Phil 3:6)
- *Saul's territorial expansion of persecution*
  - Authority by high priest commission (Acts 9:1)
  - Effort centers on synagogue control (Acts 9:2)

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### ● Paul's Synagogue Crisis

- *Saul's zealot activity in Jerusalem*
  - Death of Stephen (Acts 8:1)
  - Ravaging the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1; Phil 3:6)
- *Saul's territorial expansion of persecution*
  - Authority by high priest commission (Acts 9:1)
  - Effort centers on synagogue control (Acts 9:2)

“and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus”

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### ● Paul's Synagogue Crisis

- *Damascus Road: cruciality of the vision*
  - Clear in Acts (rehearsed three times)
  - Clear in Paul (rehearsed multiple times in letters)
- *Damascus Road: inherent Pharisaic appeal*
  - Pharisaic zeal (which Saul never lost)
  - Pharisaic doctrines (resurrection, etc.)
  - Hillelite focus on gentile proselytism

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue

Acts 9:3–18 (narrative)  
Acts 22:1–21 (speech to crowd)  
Acts 26:1–23 (speech to Agrippa II)

#### *Damascus Road: crucial for the vision*

- Clear in Acts (rehearsed three times)
- Clear in Paul (rehearsed multiple times in letters)

#### *Damascus Road: inherent Pharisaic appeal*

- Pharisaic zeal (which Saul never lost)
- Pharisaic doctrines (resurrection, etc.)
- Hillelite focus on gentile proselytism

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue

1 Cor 9:1; 15:8–11  
Gal 1:12–17  
2 Cor 11:32–33  
Eph 3:2–3

#### *Damascus Road: crucial for the vision*

- Clear in Acts (rehearsed three times)
- Clear in Paul (rehearsed multiple times in letters)

#### *Damascus Road: inherent Pharisaic appeal*

- Pharisaic zeal (which Saul never lost)
- Pharisaic doctrines (resurrection, etc.)
- Hillelite focus on gentile proselytism

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

#### *Damascus Road: redirected hermeneutic*

- Great Assembly myth exposed
- Synagogue authority challenged
- Prophetic authority reestablished (esp. Isaiah)
- Mosaic tradition transcended
- Abrahamic promise refocused (via incorporation)

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

#### *Damascus Road: reimagining Israel (six plot turns)*

- Adam: story of Israel and creation
- Abraham: story of Israel and the nations
- Moses: story of Israel and the law
- David: the story of Israel and kingship
- Isaiah: the story of Israel and exile
- Ezra: the story of Israel and return

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9-11

story begins and ends with a powerful, purposeful God

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

#### Damascus Road: revisioning Israel (six plot turns)

- Adam: story of Israel and creation
- Abraham: story of Israel and the nations
- Moses: story of Israel and the law
- David: the story of Israel and kingship
- Isaiah: the story of Israel and exile
- Ezra: the story of Israel and return

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9-11

story of election, promise, faith, and community

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

#### Damascus Road: revisioning Israel (six plot turns)

- Adam: story of Israel and creation
- Abraham: story of Israel and the nations
- Moses: story of Israel and the law
- David: the story of Israel and kingship
- Isaiah: the story of Israel and exile
- Ezra: the story of Israel and return

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9-11

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

law compromised by sin = history of Israel fraught with failure

#### Damascus Road: revisioning Israel (six plot turns)

- Adam: story of Israel and creation
- Abraham: story of Israel and the nations
- Moses: story of Israel and the law
- David: the story of Israel and kingship
- Isaiah: the story of Israel and exile
- Ezra: the story of Israel and return

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9-11

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

language of "Messiah" is the redemption of kingship in Israel

#### Damascus Road: revisioning Israel (six plot turns)

- Adam: story of Israel and creation
- Abraham: story of Israel and the nations
- Moses: story of Israel and the law
- David: the story of Israel and kingship
- Isaiah: the story of Israel and exile
- Ezra: the story of Israel and return

## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

#### *Damascus Road: revisioning Israel (six plot turns)*

- Adam: story of Israel and creation
- Israel as "light to the nations" as solution to exile
- David: the story of Israel and kingship
- Isaiah: the story of Israel and exile
- Ezra: the story of Israel and return

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

#### *Damascus Road: revisioning Israel (six plot turns)*

- Adam: story of Israel and creation
- Abraham: exposing need to distinguish observance of law and obedience of faith
- David: the story of Israel and kingship
- Isaiah: the story of Israel and exile
- Ezra: the story of Israel and return

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## Paul's Story of Israel: Romans 9–11

### Paul's Synagogue Crisis

#### *The Synagogue and the Coming of Messiah*

- Good news: God fulfills every promise ever made
  - God fulfills promise to Israel, nations
  - God consummates creation in Israel
- Bad news: synagogue rejection of God's Messiah
  - Paul's anguish: Israel's eschatological stumbling
  - Paul's resolution: Romans 9–11

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