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1. Prophetic Rebuke in Acts

Calling for Reform Rather than Rejection of Israel

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Abstract

Paul's quotation of the prophet Isaiah and subsequent announcement that he will proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles in the final verses of the Acts of the Apostles has been read as evidence that the mission to the Jews has come to an end. Against this interpretation, I argue that Paul's words, when read in light of Paul's prophetic rebuke of Jews in Acts 13:41 and Paul's two earlier "turns" to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6), function as part of his gospel proclamation to encourage reform. Just as Paul's use of prophetic rebuke and turns to the Gentiles did not bring an end to the mission to the Jews in the course of the Acts narrative, neither do they end the Jewish mission in Acts 28.

Keywords: Paul, Acts, prophetic rebuke, mission to the Jews, use of scripture

Introduction

In the final verses of Acts, Paul, confined to house arrest in Rome, “called together the local leaders of the Jews” (28:17) and expressed his desire to speak with them about “the hope of Israel” (28:20).¹ The response of the Jewish leaders is moderately positive: “we would like to hear from you what you think, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against” (28:22). On a later day, the leaders of the Jews “came to [Paul] at his lodgings in great numbers” (28:23). Luke reports, “From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets” (28:23). As it regularly has throughout Acts, Paul’s preaching finds mixed reception: “Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe” (28:24).² As the Jewish leaders depart in disagreement, Paul says,

The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, “Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them.”

Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen (28:25b-29).

Luke concludes his account with the claim that Paul “lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:30-31).

These final verses, and particularly the function of Paul’s quotation of the prophet Isaiah within these verses, are a matter of significant scholarly debate. Some scholars argue that with the words of the prophet Isaiah, Paul affirms Israel’s rejection of Jesus as messiah, and announces the end of the mission to the Jews. This position has been most influentially supported by Ernst Haenchen and Hans Conzelmann. Their influence can be seen with regard to Acts as a whole in Lloyd Gaston’s claim that “the theme of Jewish rejection of the gospel and the consequent rejection of the Jews by God is an important one in Acts” (139; see also Gager: 209). Concerning Acts 28:25b-28 specifically, Pervo has taken on the mantle of Haenchen and Conzelmann: “The Jewish people in general are once more and finally labeled as ‘the other’” (684).³

¹ Translations of the Bible are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

² For example, in Pisidian Antioch “many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:43) while other Jews “were filled with jealousy” and “contradicted what was spoken by Paul” (13:45). In Iconium “a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers” (14:1) while “the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers” (14:2). In Thessalonica “some of [the Jews] were persuaded” (17:4) while others “became jealous” and “formed a mob” (17:5).

³ Pervo further claims that “The citation serves to prove that rejection of the message by the Jews accorded with the divine will” (685).

Interpretations of Acts 28:25b-28 pitted against the Haenchen-Conzelmann position build on the foundational work of Jacob Jervell, who sees in Acts the repeated success of the Jewish mission as well as the necessity of this success for the existence of the gentile mission. Reading from this perspective of a positive portrayal of the Jewish mission has led some scholars to observe that the status of the Jewish mission in Acts 28 is open-ended. For example, Robert L. Brawley argues that “. . . at the end of Acts the response of Jewish people to the proclamation about Jesus is left open” (421). Given that the narrative clearly depicts neither the Jews’ rejection nor acceptance of the gospel, Brawley argues that readers have ethical responsibilities “with respect to how we fill in gaps” (423). Christoph Stenschke emphasizes that Acts does not end with Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 6 (254-56). The narrative ends with the claim that Paul continued to proclaim the gospel to *all* (28:30) who came to him. The mission to the Jews cannot have come to an end with the narrative of Acts since the final scene shows Paul preaching to all, both Jews and Gentiles.

The question of whether the Jewish mission ends in Acts 28 is inherently linked to the question of when Judaism and Christianity developed into separate entities. Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 6 in Acts 28 can be a rejection of Judaism in favor of Christianity only if these are distinct entities. Recent work challenges the claim that Judaism and Christianity split in the late first century, often arguing that anything like a clear division of two separate religions is not evident until the fourth century (Reed and Becker; Boyarin). In light of this work, Christopher R. Matthews has critiqued Haenchen, Conzelmann, and Pervo for “operat[ing] with the problematic assumption that ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’ are known entities” in the late first century (200). Matthews argues that “there is no reason to see Luke’s narrative ending or the citation of the reproof from Isaiah as anything other than an intra-Jewish conversation or dispute” (205).

Continuing in the vein of Jervell and building on the work of Matthews, I argue that Paul’s quotation of Isaiah, when contextualized in the Acts narrative, functions as one of several warnings to Israel to encourage reform. Neither Paul’s proclamation of the gospel to the Jews nor the mission to the Jews more broadly comes to an end with the quotation from Isaiah. Just as the words of the ancient prophets called Israel to change their course, so too does Paul’s quotation of Isaiah. As were Isaiah’s words, so also are Paul’s words to be read within the context of the ongoing covenant between God and Israel. The opportunity for repentance and reform does not end with the narrative of Acts.

Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Context of Isaiah

The portion of “the prophet Isaiah” (Acts 28:25) that Paul quotes for the leaders of the Jews in Rome is Isaiah 6:9-10, which recounts Isaiah’s call. The Lord asks, “Whom shall I send?” and Isaiah replies, “Here am I; send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). Immediately the Lord directs Isaiah to confront Israel with what appear to be words of judgement. The Lord says to Isaiah, “Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand’” (Isaiah 6:9).

In the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), Isaiah is then instructed, “Dull the heart of this people! Make its ears heavy and shut its eyes, lest it see with its eyes, hear with its ears, and its

heart understand and it may turn and will have healing” (6:10).⁴ In the Greek Septuagint (LXX), the verbs of Isaiah 6:10 are not imperatives but aorist indicatives (Witherington: 804). Instead of Isaiah being instructed to cause the people not to understand, Isaiah is told that the people have already shut their eyes and ears: “For this people’s heart has grown fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and they have shut their eyes so that they might not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hear and turn – and I would heal them” (6:10).⁵

In the MT, God instructs Isaiah to ensure that the people do not understand so that they will not amend their ways. In the LXX, God announces that the people have refused to understand. Taking this passage out of its context in Isaiah in the MT, a reader might conclude that God wants to ensure that Israel rejects the healing God offers. Taking this passage out of its context in Isaiah in the LXX, it appears that all is already lost for the people. In both cases, one might conclude that the covenant has come to an end. However, examination of the passage in its context in the book of Isaiah reveals a different meaning. Several details make clear that the covenant continues and that God’s command here is not the final word.

First, the prophet Isaiah’s response to God’s message reveals that Isaiah understands this message to be appropriate only for a limited amount of time. Isaiah inquires, “How long, O Lord?” (6:11; MT and LXX).⁶ Isaiah assumes the continuation of the covenant, and that the people’s lack of understanding is not the final word. The Lord’s response affirms Isaiah’s understanding (Fusco: 7). The Lord replies, “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled” (6:11-13).⁷ The situation of Isaiah 6:10 will come to an end with the destruction of the kingdom.⁸

⁴ This is the translation of Watts: 68. The NRSV, by contrast, translates not “lest it see with its eyes,” but “so that they may not look with their eyes.”

⁵ Translations of the Septuagint are from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. The quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Acts 28:26-27 follows the LXX. The only difference is an insignificant rewording of the introductory phrase, “Go to this people and say.”

⁶ “The meaning of the question then posed by the prophet is disputed (v. 11a). It can be taken to refer either to the duration or to the effect of the task imposed upon him. It probably refers to both” (Kaiser: 83).

⁷ The LXX reads, “Until cities become desolate, because they are not inhabited, and houses, because there are no people, and the land will be left desolate. And after these things, God will send people far away, and those who have been left will be multiplied on the land. And still a tenth part is on it, and it will be plundered again, like a terebinth or an acorn tree when it falls from its station” (6:11-13).

⁸ “If one asks how Isaiah’s prophecy of judgment was fulfilled, one must point to the blows which fell upon the northern kingdom in the years 734–21, leading to the destruction of the state, the severe defeat of the southern kingdom in 701, and finally to its collapse in 587” (Kaiser: 85). Kaiser states that “God’s answer [to Isaiah’s plea for mercy] is a decisive negative” (84) since the kingdom will be destroyed. However, the destruction of the northern and southern kingdoms is not the end of the covenant between God and Israel, and within the canon, Isaiah 1–39 does not stand on its own but with Second and Third Isaiah.

Second, in the subsequent chapters of Isaiah, God speaks messages of hope for the future through the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah announces hope in the person of a future king: “there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish” (9:1), and “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse” (11:1). Isaiah announces hope for the recovery of those sent into exile: “On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt . . .” (11:11), and “But the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land; and aliens will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And the nations will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess the nations⁹ as male and female slaves in the LORD’s land; they will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them” (14:1-2).¹⁰

The God who delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt will deliver Israel from future threats. The God who established the covenant with Israel will not abandon Israel. The prophet proclaims, “You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me” (Isaiah 12:1). Though the words of Isaiah 6:9-10 appear to be words of final rejection when taken out of context, when taken in context, they signify a temporary punishment in the context of Israel’s ongoing covenant with a gracious God.

This brief study of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the context of Isaiah demonstrates that the meaning of prophetic speech is dependent on its context. Thus, to understand how Isaiah 6:9-10 functions in Acts 28:26-27, it is necessary to place it in the context of the whole of Acts. Three elements of Acts 28:25-28 must be understood in light of related passages elsewhere in Acts: (1) Paul’s use of the words of Isaiah in light of Paul’s quotation of Habakkuk in Acts 13; (2) Paul’s claim that the words of Isaiah were spoken to “your ancestors” in light of the two other instances in which one Jew, speaking to a group of Jews, says “your ancestors” rather than “our ancestors”; and (3) Paul’s announcement that he will proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles in light of Paul’s two earlier similar claims.

Prophetic Rebuke

Acts 28 is not the first time that Paul has quoted prophetic rebuke in the context of proclaiming the gospel to Jews. In Acts 13, shortly before Paul announces that he is “turning to the Gentiles” (13:46), Paul quotes the words of the prophet Habakkuk: “Look, you scoffers! Be amazed and perish, for in your days I am doing a work, a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you” (Acts 13:41, quoting a variant of Habakkuk 1:5).

Looking at these words out of their context in Acts 13, it appears that Paul is accusing those in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia of being “scoffers,” and he is commanding them to perish. However, it is clear that Paul intends the quotation not as a rejection but as a warning (Bock: 460; Fitzmyer: 519; Parsons: 196; Roberts Gaventa 2003: 201; Talbert: 131; Witherington: 414; Kurz: 217) because he introduces it with the words, “Beware (*βλέπετε*), therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you” (13:40).

⁹ The Hebrew says “them” rather than “the nations.”

¹⁰ In this passage, the MT and the LXX are similar.

The audience's response confirms that they understand Paul's quotation from Habakkuk as a warning rather than as a rejection. First, Paul is invited to speak on the same topic the following week. Luke records, "As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people urged them to speak about these things again the next sabbath" (13:42). Second, many of those in attendance cannot wait until the following sabbath to listen to Paul, and they follow him. "When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews (πολλοὶ Ἰουδαίων) and devout converts to Judaism (τῶν σεβομένων προσηλύτων) followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God" (13:43). Rather than interpreting the words of Habakkuk as a rejection, Paul's audience heeds them as a warning, and they take steps to learn more about Paul's message.¹¹ Prophetic rebuke functions as a warning in Acts 13. This gives us cause to at least consider that the prophetic rebuke in Acts 28 functions in the same way.

In Acts 28, Paul's quotation of the prophet Isaiah is framed by his proclamation of the gospel in Rome, first to "the local leaders of the Jews" (28:17) and then to "all who came to him" (28:30; Witherington: 803). As he has throughout his mission in Acts, Paul proclaims the gospel first to the Jews before proclaiming it to the Gentiles as well. And, as has regularly been the case throughout Acts, Paul's proclamation of the gospel meets with mixed reception. Among the leaders of the Jews, "some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe" (28:24).

One significant difference between the prophetic rebuke in Acts 13 and the prophetic rebuke in Acts 28 is its placement. In Acts 13, the prophetic rebuke from Habakkuk precedes any recorded response from Paul's audience. It is followed immediately by a positive response from some "Jews and devout converts to Judaism" (13:43), those who heed Paul's warning and act to prevent the words of Habakkuk from being fulfilled in them. A week later, "the Jews" (13:45) respond negatively. Thus, some heed Paul's warning while others do not.

In Acts 28, by contrast, Paul's preaching produces a mixed response among the Jewish leaders who have gathered to hear him *prior to* his prophetic rebuke from Isaiah. Luke reports that "Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. So they disagreed with each other" (28:24-25). The order of events suggests that *either* those Jews who "refused to believe" (28:24) *or* the disagreement amongst the Jews (28:25) prompts the prophetic rebuke. Yet, there is a disconnect between Luke's report of the mixed response and Paul's prophetic rebuke from Isaiah. Paul is presented as speaking to some who believe and accusing them of not understanding.

When, in Acts 28, Paul quotes the words of Isaiah 6:9-10, they apply to only a portion of his audience (Brawley: 420). These words do not apply to those in Paul's audience of whom it has just been said that they "were convinced by what he had said" (28:24). These Jews have listened and understood, and the words of Isaiah do not apply to them. It is only those who "refused to believe" (28:24) who risk becoming the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah (Hamm: 124). Isaiah 6:9-10 can serve as rejection only for those of whom it is true.

¹¹ Paul's proclamation does not meet with rejection until the following sabbath, when "the Jews saw the crowds" and "were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul" (Acts 13:45).

One might then ask whether this prophetic rebuke can function as a warning *after* the response is reported, after some Jews have “refused to believe” (Acts 28:24). Given that Paul continues to proclaim “the kingdom of God” (28:31), the possibility of seeing and listening and understanding remains open. Their initial response to Paul’s message need not be their final response.

An alternate translation of one word within the quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10, in fact, produces a text that suggests hope for a different response. The word μήποτε is translated in the NRSV as “so that they might not” (Acts 28:27). The text thus reads, “For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; *so that they might not* look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them” (28:27). Witherington has observed that μήποτε “is usually rendered ‘lest’ (in order that not), but it certainly could be rendered ‘perhaps’” (804-5; see Liddell and Scott). In that case, Acts 28:27 would read, “For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes. *Perhaps* they will look with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I will heal them.”¹² In this translation, Paul notes that some hearts have been hardened (as reported in 28:24), but he continues to have hope for them.

By contrast with the NRSV’s translation, this more hopeful translation correlates with the end of the narrative of Acts. Paul remains in Rome, “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31) to “all who came to him” (28:30). “All” presumably refers to both Jews and Gentiles. As he has done throughout his mission in Acts, Paul continues to proclaim the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. The narrative comes to an end, but the proclamation of the gospel does not.

Whose Ancestors?

As introduction to Isaiah 6:9-10, Paul says, “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors” (Acts 28:25). Several commentators claim that when Paul refers to Isaiah’s audience as “your ancestors,” he is separating himself from his audience and refusing to claim their ancestors as his own (Lüdemann: 345; Pervo: 684; Talbert: 227; Witherington: 802). While the phrase “our ancestors” is extremely common in Acts (3:13; 4:25; 5:30; 7:2, 11, 12, 15, [19], 38, 39, 44, 45 [twice]; 13:17; 15:10; 22:14; and 26:6), regularly appearing in speeches given by major characters to emphasize their ancestral connection with their audiences, the phrase “your ancestors” occurs only four times, in 3:25; 7:51, 52; and 28:25. While the two occurrences in Acts 7 clearly function to create distance between the speaker and his audience, this is not the case with the use of “your ancestors” in Acts 3:25 and 28:25.

In Acts 7, Stephen, a Jew and a member of the Way (the gathering of Jesus’s followers), having been charged with speaking “blasphemous words against Moses” (6:11), defends himself before the Jewish council by means of a speech in which he summarizes the history of Israel through the time of Solomon. Throughout the speech, Stephen emphasizes his ancestral ties to his audience. He begins his speech by saying, “The God of glory appeared to

¹² “This rendering makes better sense in our context here, and is probably how Luke understood the quotation” (Witherington: 805).

our ancestor (τῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν) Abraham” (7:2). Concerning Jacob and his sons, Stephen says, “*our* ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν) could find no food” (7:11) and Jacob “sent *our* ancestors (τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν)” to Egypt (7:12). Then “*our* ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν)” died in Egypt (7:15). Pharaoh “dealt craftily with *our* race (τὸ γένος ἡμῶν)” (7:19). Moses was with “*our* ancestors (τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν)” in the wilderness, and “he received living oracles to give to *us* (ἡμῖν)” (7:38). “*Our* ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν) were unwilling to obey him” (7:39). “*Our* ancestors (τοῖς πατράσιν ἡμῶν) had the tent of testimony in the wilderness” (7:44). “*Our* ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν) in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before *our* ancestors (τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν)” (7:45). As Stephen tells his story of Israel, he identifies himself with his audience, the Jewish council.

However, at the end of the speech, Stephen turns to accusation of the Jewish council, and he says, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as *your* ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν) used to do. Which of the prophets did *your* ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν) not persecute?” (7:51-52a). Though Stephen affirms his ancestral ties to his audience when he recounts their shared history, he differentiates himself from them in the present. Stephen associates himself with Moses and the prophets while accusing his audience of being the descendants of those who refused to listen to Moses or the prophets. In Acts 7, Stephen’s shift from “our ancestors” to “your ancestors” is significant. Accusing the Jewish council of being like *their* ancestors, Stephen speaks words of accusation with no hint of invitation.

The appearances of “your ancestors” in Acts 3:25 and 28:25 are to be distinguished from the appearances of “your ancestors” in Acts 7 in two ways. First, in both Acts 3:25 and Acts 28:25, the manuscripts display textual variants, some reporting that Peter and Paul speak to “your ancestors,” and others reporting that they speak to “our ancestors.” Many manuscripts have “our ancestors” in Acts 3:25 (Ⲙ*, C, D, Ψ, 0165, 323, 614, 1241, and majority), many have “our ancestors” in Acts 28:25 (L, 614, 1241, 1505, and majority), and two have “our ancestors” in both locations (miniscules 614 and 1241). Scribes did not find it contradictory to write “our ancestors” in these verses; this suggests that neither Peter nor Paul is creating distance between himself and his audience.

Second, whereas in Acts 7, Stephen is defending himself against charges by turning the charges back on his accusers, in Acts 3 and 28, Peter and Paul are proclaiming the gospel in the hope of convincing their audiences that Jesus is the Messiah sent by the God of Israel. In Acts 3, Peter gathers together in Solomon’s Portico those Jews who witnessed the miracle he performed. Proclaiming that it “is through Jesus” that the man has been healed (3:16), Peter announces Jesus as God’s servant, raised from the dead. Peter invites his audience, “Repent therefore, and turn to God” (3:19). When Peter speaks of “your ancestors,” he does so in the context of assuring his audience of their chosenness: “You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to *your* ancestors (τοὺς πατέρας ὑμῶν), saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways” (3:25). In this context of invitation to God’s elect, “your ancestors” serves to emphasize the special place of the audience in God’s plan.

As in Acts 3, so also in Acts 28, the speaker refers to “your ancestors” in the context of proclaiming the gospel with the hope of convincing the audience. Concerning Paul’s meeting with the leaders among the Jews in Rome, Luke writes, “From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets” (28:23). After quoting what the prophet Isaiah said “to *your* ancestors” (28:25), Paul continues “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:31) to “all who came to him” (28:30). Paul’s continuing proclamation suggests his hope for a positive response. What, then, ought the reader to make of Paul’s announcement that “this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles” (28:28)?

Paul’s Three So-Called “Turns” to the Gentiles

Acts 28:28 is not the first time Paul announces that he will proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. It has been widely observed in scholarship on Acts that on three occasions (Acts 13:46, 18:6, and 28:28), Paul, having experienced rejection of his gospel proclamation by Jews, announces that he will take his message to the Gentiles (see Pervo: 681).¹³

The first such instance is in Acts 13. Paul’s proclamation of the gospel in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia initially receives a positive response. As Paul and Barnabas leave the synagogue, “the people urged them to speak about these things again the next sabbath” (13:42), and “many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God” (13:43). However, on the next sabbath, so many gathered to hear Paul that “when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul” (13:45). In response, Paul and Barnabas announce that they will now proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles: “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since (ἐπειδὴ) you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning (στρεφόμεθα) to the Gentiles” (13:46).

The use of the term “Jews” in this pericope, as elsewhere in Acts, is problematic (Roberts Gaventa 2003: 202; Talbert: 131; Witherington: 414). Note that, within the space of three verses, Luke says both of the following of Jews: “many Jews . . . followed Paul” (13:43) and “the Jews . . . contradicted what was spoken by Paul” (13:45). While Luke is careful to specify that “many” rather than all Jews followed Paul, he then shifts to his conventional use of “the Jews” to refer to those Jews who are not members of the Way or have rejected the proclamation of the gospel. In Acts 13, it is clear that “the Jews [who] . . . contradicted what was spoken by Paul” (13:45) cannot refer to all Jews, for Paul himself is a Jew. Additionally, it is most likely that those Jews who were previously interested in Paul’s message remain interested.¹⁴

¹³ Matthews (190-206) likens the claim that after Paul thrice turns to the Gentiles, the Jews have lost the possibility of salvation to the “three strikes and you’re out” rule in baseball.

¹⁴ Acts is not the only text from its time period in which a term that marks Jewish identity is used inconsistently. Texts that negotiate the boundaries of Jewish identity use “Israel” with multiple meanings. In the Damascus Document, “Israel” refers both to the Jews of whom the text approves and to all the rest of the Jews: “But with those who remained steadfast in God’s precepts, with those who were left from among them, God established

Paul and Barnabas's response to the rejection of "the word of God" (13:46) by "the Jews" suggests that it is the Jews' rejection of the gospel that causes this "turning" to the Gentiles. However, the reader already knows that Paul will proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles apart from any requirement of Jewish rejection. In Paul's call in Acts 9, God describes Paul as "an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (9:15; Fitzmyer: 521). Then, in Acts 13, immediately after Paul and Barnabas are "set apart" (13:2) to proclaim the gospel, they journey to Cyprus where Sergius Paulus, the proconsul in Paphos, "summoned [them] and wanted to hear the word of God" (13:7; Talbert: 132). Before his "turn" to the Gentiles in Acts 13:46, Paul has already proclaimed the gospel to one of the Gentiles, and he "believed" (13:12).

Paul and Barnabas have no further success with Jews in Antioch. Gentiles become believers (Acts 13:48), while the Jews incite the leading citizens and instigate "persecution against Paul and Barnabas" (13:50). However, as soon as they arrive in Iconium, at the beginning of the next chapter, "Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers" (14:1). Therefore, after Paul's proclamation meets with rejection by some Jews, and he states that he will turn to the Gentiles, his proclamation to Jews in Antioch of Pisidia comes to an end. However, when he arrives in his next city, he immediately proclaims the gospel in the synagogue, where he clearly expects to find Jews. Paul's turn to the Gentiles in Acts 13 is thus location-specific (Gonzalez: 161; Kurz: 219; Witherington: 415). The mission to the Jews has not come to an end.

The second instance of Paul's announcing that he is taking his gospel to the Gentiles is in Acts 18. Having arrived in Corinth, Paul befriends "a Jew named Aquila" (18:2) and spends "every sabbath . . . in the synagogue" trying "to convince Jews and Greeks" (18:4). The narrative reports that when Silas and Timothy arrive, "Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus" (18:5). Quite suddenly, in the very next verse, Luke reports, "When they [i.e., the Jews] opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles'" (18:6). As in Antioch of Pisidia, so also in Corinth, when Paul encounters opposition to his message from Jews, he announces a turn to the Gentiles. In Acts 18, Paul does not actually use the verb "turn," as he did in Acts 13, but the idea is implied by his saying, "from now on" (18:6), he will preach to Gentiles.

Whereas in Antioch of Pisidia Paul no longer preaches to Jews after his "turn," the same cannot be said of his experience in Corinth. After Paul's announcement that he "will go to the Gentiles" (18:6), several elements of the narrative suggest that he has not really left the Jews.

his covenant with Israel (בריתו לישראל) for ever, revealing to them hidden matters in which all Israel (כל ישראל) had gone astray: his holy sabbaths and his glorious feasts, his just stipulations and his truthful paths, and the wishes of his will . . ." (CD-A III, 12-16). In 1 Maccabees, "Israel" refers both to the nation as a whole and to that portion of the nation deemed faithful by the text. First Maccabees reports that "many ever from Israel gladly adopted his [Antiochus IV Epiphanes's] religion" (1:43), but then shifts to a more restrictive use of "Israel": "Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had" (1:52-53).

Immediately after Paul's announcement of his turn, "he left the synagogue¹⁵ and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue" (18:7). To be sure, Paul is now in the house of a non-Jew who worships God, but he is mere yards from the synagogue. Were the reader to suspect that Paul's preaching to Jews would be likely to continue under such circumstances, this suspicion could be confirmed in the following verse, which announces that "Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household" (18:8).¹⁶ Paul has convinced not just any Jew, but a leader in the synagogue.

Additionally, while Paul is still in Corinth, where he remained for "a year and six months" (Acts 18:11), an attack on Paul by "the Jews"¹⁷ indicates his continued proclamation among them. The Jews report to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, that Paul "is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law" (18:13). The charge is ambiguous, and could refer to either the Law of Moses or Roman law. Gallio's response assumes the former. He says, "If it were a matter of crime or serious villainy, I would be justified in accepting the complaint of you Jews; but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and *your own* law (περὶ λόγου καὶ ὀνομάτων καὶ νόμου τοῦ καθ' ὑμᾶς), see to it yourselves" (18:14-15; emphasis added). Why the Jews would be concerned about Paul's persuading the Gentiles "to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law" (18:13) of Moses is unclear. It is more reasonable to assume the Jews' complaint refers to Paul's persuading *Jews* "to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law" (18:13).

As opposed to Paul's "turn" to the Gentiles in Antioch, his "turn" to the Gentiles in Corinth does not bring an end to his preaching to the Jews even in Corinth. The narrative suggests Paul's continued proclamation of the gospel among Jews in Corinth, in addition to his continued preaching to Jews in synagogues at the subsequent stops along his journey. Upon leaving Corinth, Paul journeys to Ephesus, where he "went into the synagogue and had a discussion with the Jews" (Acts 18:19), who "asked him to stay longer" (18:20). Following Paul's first two "turns" from the Jews to the Gentiles, the mission to the Jews continues in full swing.

What does this suggest about Paul's announcement of his proclamation to the Gentiles in Acts 28? That Paul's two earlier "turns" to the Gentiles did not bring an end to the mission to the Jews increases the likelihood that the third "turn" does not either.

Two differences between Paul's turns in Acts 13 and Acts 18 and the account in Acts 28 provide further evidence that Paul's announcement in Acts 28 does not mark the end of the mission to the Jews. First, in Acts 28, opposition to Paul's message is not attributed to *all* Jews. In both Acts 13 and Acts 18, Luke says that "the Jews" oppose Paul's message, though it is clear from the narrative that the term "the Jews" cannot actually refer to *all* of the Jews. Acts 28 is different. Here Luke reports that "Some were convinced by what he had said, while

¹⁵ The Greek says "there," but it is clear that the synagogue is the intended referent.

¹⁶ In her footnote to Acts 18:7-8 in the *HarperCollins Study Bible* (2006), Roberts Gaventa notes, "The conversion of *Crispus* (see 1 Cor 1.14) indicates that Paul continues to preach among Jews, despite v.6, and that his proclamation meets with success even among synagogue leaders."

¹⁷ As above, "the Jews" does not refer to all Jews, but to those not associated with the Way.

others refused to believe. So they disagreed with each other” (28:24-25a). The narrative gives no indication that *all* Jews have rejected Paul’s message.

Second, whereas in Acts 13 and Acts 18, Paul’s announcement regarding the Gentiles indicates that he will now proclaim the gospel to them *instead of* to the Jews, Paul’s announcement in Acts 28 does not indicate that proclamation to the Gentiles will replace proclamation to the Jews.¹⁸ Paul simply states, “Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen” (28:28). The narrative then indicates, in several ways, that Paul continues to proclaim the gospel to Jews, even in the same locale, as he also did in Acts 18. First, the narrator reports that while Paul lived under house arrest in Rome for two years, he “welcomed *all* who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:30-31, emphasis added). The narrative does not specify that Paul restricts his proclamation to Gentiles or that only Gentiles visit Paul. Second, given that it is “the believers” (28:15) and “the local leaders of the Jews” (28:17) who know of Paul’s presence in Rome, it is they who are most likely to visit Paul and hear his preaching. Additionally, in support of the idea that some of the Jewish leaders would be likely to return to Paul’s lodgings, numerous ancient manuscripts preserve an additional verse after Paul’s quotation of Isaiah: “And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, arguing vigorously among themselves” (28:29, preserved in L, 104, 323, 614, 945, 1241, 1505, the majority, and Old Latin manuscripts). Just as the Jewish leaders “disagreed with each other” (28:25) concerning Paul’s preaching before Paul’s quoting of Isaiah, so too do they disagree concerning Paul’s message after hearing the prophetic rebuke. The debate between those Jews convinced by Paul’s teaching and those rejecting Paul’s teaching continues. If Paul’s quotation of Isaiah in Acts 28:25b-27 is intended to bring an end to the mission to the Jews, the scribes who included 28:29 did not know it. Instead, the manuscripts that they passed down include a continuing debate among Jews about the gospel proclamation. Paul continues to proclaim the gospel to *all*, which further argues against the theory that Acts 28 brings an end of the mission to the Jews.

Conclusion

Just as the words of Isaiah 6:9-10 did not serve as a final rejection of Israel when spoken by the prophet Isaiah, neither do they serve as a final rejection of Israel at the end of Acts. Just as the prophetic rebuke from Habakkuk 1:5 in Acts 13 warns Paul’s audience to believe his proclamation so that the words of Habakkuk are not fulfilled in them, so too does the prophetic rebuke from Isaiah 6:9-10 in Acts 28 warn Paul’s audience to believe his proclamation so that the words of Isaiah are not fulfilled in them. Just as Paul’s first two “turns” to the Gentiles do not bring an end to his proclamation of the gospel to Jews, neither does his third announcement that he will proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul’s prophetic rebuke serves as encouragement to his fellow Jews to “understand . . . and turn” (28:27), and Paul’s continued preaching over the span of two years demonstrates that he has not given up on them. Neither Paul’s proclamation of the gospel to the Jews nor the mission to the Jews in general comes to an end with Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 6.

¹⁸ “It is interesting that this third statement is the only one of the three where in fact Paul does *not* say explicitly that he is *turning* from the Jews to the Gentiles” (Witherington: 805-6).

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