

THE WORD OF GOD HAS NOT FAILED

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND ISRAEL'S SALVATION

IN TOBIT 14:3-7 AND ROMANS 9-11

John K. Goodrich
(John.Goodrich@moody.edu)

Summary

Tobit 14:3-7 and Romans 9-11 share several striking verbal and conceptual parallels that invite detailed comparison. Most notably, both Tobit and Paul (1) deny the failure of God's word (Tob. 14:4a; Rom. 9:6a); (2) proceed to unveil a three-phase redemptive history for Israel (exile → partial restoration → full restoration); and (3) utilise their respective storylines to assure their readers in phase 2 that God will bring phase 3 to completion. These and other parallels show not only that Tobit and Paul share a common eschatological perspective, but that they deploy and develop almost identical thesis statements, thereby further demonstrating the proximity of Paul's discourse to contemporary Jewish modes of thought and argumentation.

1. Introduction

Since the arrival of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Paul's epistle to the Romans has received no shortage of comparisons with early Jewish literature. This is especially true of Romans 9-11, where Paul elucidates Israel's plight and salvation-historical situation in ways similar to those expressed in some contemporary Jewish writings.¹ As John Barclay explains, 'Rom. 9-11 stands in close

¹ See E. Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11*, SBLDS 109 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); Bruce W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant: A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11*, JSNTSup 57 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); James M. Scott, 'Paul's Use of Deuteronomic Tradition', *JBL* 112 (1993), 645-65; Sigurd Grindheim, *The Crux of Election: Paul's*

proximity to many discussions of Israel's trials and hopes in Second Temple Judaism, not only in its subject matter and its method (scriptural exegesis), but also in its existential orientation: Paul speaks as a Jew about, alongside and on behalf of his "kinsmen".² One early Jewish discussion of Israel's fate that has been neglected in these recent studies is Tobit 14:3-7. While other comparisons of Romans 9–11 with Second Temple Jewish literature have thrown helpful light on Paul's discourse, this article will show that Paul's rhetorical approach and eschatological perspective in Romans 9–11 can also be read quite profitably alongside Tobit's farewell speech.

2. Initial Parallels between Tobit 14 and Romans 9–11

The similarities begin with the features mentioned by Barclay. Tobit and Paul, for example, share a common concern for their fellow Israelites. Tobit speaks to the fate of 'all our brothers who are dwelling in the land of Israel' (14:4); Paul's concern, too, is for 'my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites' (Rom. 9:3-4).³

Tobit 14 and Romans 9–11 also rely on some of the same scriptural texts. The most obvious shared source is Deuteronomy 28–32.⁴ These chapters were especially influential on Tobit. As David deSilva says, 'The book is deeply infused with Deuteronomy's ideology and phraseology. Tobit understands his people's misfortunes strictly from the viewpoint of Deuteronomy 28–29 (see Tob. 3:2-5), and his hope for the reversal of their fortunes resonates deeply with Deuteronomy 30–

Critique of the Jewish Confidence in the Election of Israel, WUNT 2/202 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 35-76, 136-68; John M. G. Barclay, 'Grace within and Beyond Reason: Philo and Paul in Dialogue', in *Paul, Grace and Freedom: Essays in Honour of John K. Riches*, ed. P. Middleton, A. Paddison, and K. Wenell (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 9-21; John M. G. Barclay, 'Unnerving Grace: Approaching Romans 9–11 from The Wisdom of Solomon', in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11*, ed. F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner, WUNT 257 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 91-109; Jonathan A. Linebaugh, *God, Grace, and Righteousness in Wisdom of Solomon and Paul's Letter to the Romans: Texts in Conversation*, NovTSup 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177-226; A. Chadwick Thornhill, *The Chosen People: Election, Paul and Second Temple Judaism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015).

² Barclay, 'Unnerving Grace', 92.

³ All translations are the author's own.

⁴ References to the Old Testament are to the LXX throughout.

32 (Tob. 13:2, 5-6).⁵ The influence of Deuteronomy on Tobit is particularly apparent in Tobit's farewell discourse in 14:3-7, as shown in a seminal article by Alexander Di Lella, who identifies no less than nine Deuteronomic themes within the speech.⁶ It is also noteworthy that Tobit, like Moses, offers two testaments (Tob. 4:3-21; 14:3-11; cf. Deut. 31:1–32:47; 33:1-29).⁷ It could be said, then, that the character Tobit, at least toward the end of the narrative, was modelled on the Deuteronomic Moses.⁸

The influence of Deuteronomy 28–32 is likewise apparent on Romans 9–11. Paul rewrites Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in Romans 10:6-8 to explain 'the righteousness that is by faith', and he cites Deuteronomy 29:4 in Romans 11:8 to explain God's hardening of Israel.⁹ Paul also quotes Deuteronomy 32:21 in Romans 10:19 ('I will make you *jealous* of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry') and alludes to the same text in 11:11 and 14, where the jealousy motif resurfaces.¹⁰ In addition to these explicit references to Deuteronomy 28–32, it is probably the case that Deuteronomy 28–32 provides a kind of narrative substructure for Romans 9–11 and perhaps the entire letter.¹¹ As Richard Hays

⁵ David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 72. Cf. Richard A. Spencer, 'The Book of Tobit in Recent Research', *CurBS* 7 (1999), 147-80.

⁶ Alexander A. Di Lella, 'The Deuteronomic Background of the Farewell Discourse in Tob 14:3-11', *CBO* 41 (1979), 380-89. Scholars have also shown that Tobit 12 relies on Deut. 31:14-30, and Tobit 13 on Deuteronomy 32; cf. Steven Weitzman, 'Allusion, Artifice, and Exile in the Hymn of Tobit', *JBL* 115 (1996), 49-61; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 305; Richard Bauckham, 'Tobit as a Parable for the Exiles of Northern Israel', in *The Jewish World around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 433-59, esp. 436.

⁷ Carey A. Moore, *Tobit: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 40a (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 293.

⁸ Micah Kiel, 'Tobit and Moses Redux', *JSP* 17 (2008), 83-98.

⁹ See also Deut. 30:6//Rom. 2:29; Deut. 32:43//Rom. 15:10.

¹⁰ Guy Prentiss Waters, *The End of Deuteronomy in the Epistles of Paul*, WUNT 2/221 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 207: 'Paul's repetition of the verb παραζηλοῦν, a verb used elsewhere in Romans only at 10:19, and in Paul, only at 1 Cor 10:22, strongly suggests a return to Deut 32 in the argument of 11:11-16. This fact, combined with the appearance of a form of ἔθνος at both 10:19 and 11:11b renders a relationship among Deut 32:21a, Rom 10:19, and Rom 11:11b (11:14) virtually certain.'

¹¹ Richard H. Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9–11*, WUNT 2/63 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994), 285: 'The Song influenced Paul not only in the jealousy motif but also in respect to the election, fall, and salvation of Israel, and the salvation of the Gentiles. Paul's Heilsgeschichte was similar to that of the Song of Dt. 32.1-43 and of Deuteronomy as a whole.'

famously observed: ‘Deuteronomy 32 contains Romans *in nuce*.’¹² J. Ross Wagner agrees: ‘By tapping into the Song of Moses through his quotation of [Deut.] 32:21, Paul sets up a suggestive intertextual relationship between this well-known poetic depiction of Israel’s election, unfaithfulness, and redemption and his own account in Romans of Israel’s stumbling and ultimate salvation.’¹³ The importance of Deuteronomy for the development of Paul’s discourse in Romans 9–11, then, can hardly be overstated.

Beyond these commonalities, Tobit 14:3-7 and Romans 9–11 share several additional points of verbal and theological contact that, when examined closely, help to illuminate Paul’s argument. We will now unpack them in detail, showing that: (1) both Tobit 14:4a and Romans 9:6a deny the failure of God’s word; (2) both verses are followed by the presentation of a three-phase storyline for Israel (exile → partial restoration → full restoration); and (3) both authors utilise their respective discourses to assure their contemporaries in phase 2 that God will bring phase 3 to completion. In other words, this comparison will reveal a shared eschatological perspective in which *the complete and total fulfilment of God’s promises concerning the future of Israel are, from the perspective of both authors, vouchsafed by the partial fulfilment of God’s promises in the present*. Hence, both Tobit and Paul can confidently assert that ‘God’s word has not failed’, and, ‘All Israel will be saved’. This insight helps to establish the meaning of Romans 9:6a as a thesis statement for chapters 9–11, as well as contributes to our understanding of the proximity of Paul’s discourse to contemporary Jewish thought.

3. God’s Faithfulness and Salvation in Tobit 14:3-7

The 2nd or 3rd century BC book of Tobit is a story about personal loss and eventual triumph. Tobit, a pious Naphtalite, is deported during the Assyrian exile to Nineveh with his idolatrous kindred where he finds

¹² Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 475.

¹³ J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul ‘in Concert’ in the Letter to the Romans*, NovTSup 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 194. Cf. Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 439-73; David Lincicum, *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter with Deuteronomy*, WUNT 2/284 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 153-66.

favour with the Assyrian king Shalmaneser (1:10-13). Following Shalmaneser's death, his son Sennacherib no longer tolerates Tobit's acts of charity. Tobit's property is therefore confiscated (1:16-20), and later his sight is lost as a result of ill-placed bird droppings (2:10). After praying for healing (3:1-6), Tobit sends his son Tobias with Azariah (the angel Raphael disguised as a hired assistant) to Media to collect an old debt (4:1-21). On the way Tobias catches a fish that Azariah realises has medicinal value, being useful for both demon exorcism and vision repair (6:1-9). Once they reach Media, Tobias meets and marries his cousin Sarah, whose demon Asmodeus had killed each of her previous seven husbands prior to consummation. With the fish's heart and liver, however, Tobias exorcises the demon and survives the wedding night (3:7-15; 6:10–8:21). After Azariah retrieves Tobit's money (9:1-6), Tobias and Sarah accept their inheritance and depart for Nineveh (10:1-13). Upon arrival, Tobias applies the fish gall to his father's eyes and successfully heals him (11:1-13). Tobit, having now recovered his sight and received the repayment of the debt and a new daughter-in-law, blesses the Lord and celebrates with his family (11:14-18). As Tobit prepares to pay Raphael for his assistance, the angel reveals his true identity, exhorts Tobit and Tobias, and ascends to heaven, causing both father and son to bless the Lord (12:1-22). The book closes in chapters 13 and 14 with two speeches from Tobit anticipating Israel's return from exile.

The exilic setting of the story, especially emphasised in the book's concluding chapters, is important for interpreting its theological message.¹⁴ Richard Bauckham, classifying the work as 'an Israelite religious *novella*' and 'parable', convincingly shows that 'Tobit's story functions in the wider national-historical framework of the book as a model for the past, present and future of Israel, a personal story with which the national story can be compared'.¹⁵ Understood this way, the story's plot, especially the miraculous reversals, are instructive for the author's original audience. The eventual healing of Tobit's sight, repairing of his finances, and multiplying of his family demonstrate God's ability and eventual plan to reinstate Israel's covenant blessings.

¹⁴ Will Soll, 'Misfortune and Exile in Tobit: The Juncture of a Fairy Tale Source and Deuteronomic Theology', *CBQ* 51 (1989), 209-231.

¹⁵ Bauckham, 'Tobit as a Parable', 433-34.

As Jill Hicks-Keeton explains, ‘since God has been faithful to an individual Israelite, God will be (and is) faithful to all of Israel’.¹⁶

The message of Tobit, then, is principally about *theodicy*, about God’s righteous and merciful dealings with Israel, and especially about his faithfulness to his covenant people and his intentions to restore them from misfortune.¹⁷ Tobit’s confidence in God’s faithfulness to fulfil his promises concerning Israel’s national restoration motivates and permeates Tobit’s farewell speech (14:3-7).

3.1 Tobit’s Thesis Statement (14:3b-4a)

The farewell speech begins with Tobit instructing Tobias and Tobias’s sons to flee to Media in order to escape God’s coming judgment upon Assyria. Tobit’s counsel is then followed by a lengthy explanatory statement (14:4a) that serves as the thesis to be expounded upon in the ensuing verses (14:4b-7). As we shall show (see Figure 1), within this thesis statement Tobit repeatedly grounds his instructions upon his confidence in *God’s word*:

³ ... Child, take your children ⁴ and hurry off to Media, *for I believe the word of God* that Nahum spoke about Nineveh, that all these things will occur and happen to Assyria and Nineveh. And whatever the prophets of Israel, whom God sent, spoke, all of it will happen. And *none of all their words will be lacking* and all things will transpire in their times. And there will be more salvation in Media than among the Assyrians and in Babylon. *For I know and believe* that all that God said will be fulfilled and will occur, and *the word from the prophecies will in no way fail*.¹⁸

Figure 1: The Structure of Tobit 14:4a

Exhortation: καὶ ἀπότρεχε εἰς Μηδίαν

Grounds (a): ὅτι πιστεύω ἐγὼ τῷ ῥήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ Νινευη ἃ ἐλάλησεν Ναουμ ὅτι

(1) πάντα ἔσται καὶ ἀπαντήσῃ ἐπὶ Αθουρ καὶ Νινευη

(2) καὶ ὅσα ἐλάλησαν οἱ προφῆται τοῦ Ἰσραηλ οὓς ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς πάντα ἀπαντήσῃ

(3) καὶ οὐ μῆθ' ἐλαττωνοῦνται ἐκ πάντων τῶν ῥημάτων

(4) καὶ πάντα συμβήσεται τοῖς καιροῖς αὐτῶν

¹⁶ Jill Hicks-Keeton, ‘Already/Not Yet: Eschatological Tension in the Book of Tobit’, *JBL* 132 (2013), 97-117, esp. 103. And elsewhere: ‘the foundational theological principle that the narrative promotes is the hope that God will heal a broken Israel. Tobit thus affirms that the present reality will be changed dramatically’ (98).

¹⁷ For theodicy in Tobit, see Micah D. Kiel, *The ‘Whole Truth’: Rethinking Retribution in the Book of Tobit*, LSTS 82 (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 2.

¹⁸ My translation, based on the Greek text of Codex Sinaiticus (S).

Explanation: καὶ ἐν τῇ Μηδία ἔσται σωτηρία μᾶλλον ἢπερ ἐν Ἀσσυρίοις καὶ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι

Grounds (b): διὸ γινώσκω ἐγὼ καὶ πιστεύω ὅτι

(1) πάντα ἃ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς συντελεσθήσεται καὶ ἔσται

(2) καὶ οὐ μὴ διαπέσῃ ῥῆμα ἐκ τῶν λόγων

Two features of the passage are worth noting: (1) Tobit's bracketing the passage with the verb πιστεύω as the grounds for his instruction; and (2) his abundant use of absolute terms (πάντα, ὅσα, μηθέν, οὐ μή). While Joseph Fitzmyer is perhaps correct to note how in 14:4a 'the dying Tobit's discourse has become long-winded and repetitious', the speech's recurring emphasis on trusting God's word serves to underscore the author's principal and unmistakable message – *God will fulfil his promises to Israel*.¹⁹

It is also important to observe how the string of statements climaxes: 'the word from the prophecies will in no way fail (οὐ μὴ διαπέσῃ ῥῆμα ἐκ τῶν λόγων)'. Here Tobit employs a biblical idiom. The notion of *standing* or *erecting* a word (ἴστημι + λόγος/ῥῆμα) is used in biblical and early Jewish literature to refer to several concepts, including *confirmation* of a testimony by multiple witnesses (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1), *establishment* of a promise (Ruth 4:7; 2 Chr. 30:5; Ezek. 13:6), and, most relevant, *fulfilment* of a promise (2 Kgdms 23:3, 24 // 2 Chr. 35:19; Neh. 5:13; Jer. 42:14), especially God's keeping his covenant promises of blessings and curses (1 Kgdms 2:4; 8:20 // 2 Chr. 6:10; 1 Kgdms 12:15 // 2 Chr. 10:15; Neh. 9:8; Isa. 44:26; Jer. 35:6; Dan. 9:12 [Theod.]; Bar. 2:1, 24; 1 Esdr. 1:24).

Biblical texts also, though less frequently, refer to the *failing* or *failure* of a word (λόγος/ῥῆμα + πίπτω/διαπίπτω/ἐκπίπτω/διαφρονέω). Importantly, this concept, when it occurs in Scripture, is always *denied*, and thus serves as a negative and alternative way of speaking about how a promise has been or will be fulfilled. Furthermore, it almost exclusively refers to the fulfilment of *God's* promises (1 Kgdms 3:19; 4 Kgdms 10:10),²⁰ especially his covenant promises given through the

¹⁹ Bernd Biberger, 'Unbefriedigende Gegenwart und ideale Zukunft: Gesamtisraelistische Heilsperspektiven in den letzten Worten Tobits (Tob 14)', *Biblische Zeitschrift* 55 (2011), 265-80, esp. 270-71: 'Diese verstärkte Betonung lässt die Absicht des Verfassers durchscheinen. ... Er fordert seine Zeitgenossen auf, wie Tobit daran zu glauben, dass sich die noch offenen Verheißungen Gottes erfüllen werden.'

²⁰ Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996), 293. See, however, Judith 6:9, where the Assyrian commander Holofernes says to Achior the

prophets to Israel: receipt of the land (Josh. 21:45; 23:14); national prosperity (1 Kgdms 8:56); post-exilic restoration (Isa. 40:7-8 // 1 Pet. 1:24-25; Tob. 14:4; Rom. 9:6).

The manner in which God's word will be fulfilled comes more clearly into view as the speech progresses. Tobit explains that God intends to keep his promises about Israel's national restoration. This fulfilment, however, will occur in *three phases* (phase 1: Israel's exile; phase 2: Israel's partial restoration; phase 3: Israel's full restoration, along with the conversion of the nations/Gentiles).²¹ We will now look at each of these phases in turn.

3.2 Phase 1: Israel's Exile (14:4b)

The sequence of prophesied events alluded to by Tobit begins with Israel's exile. Tobit's speech reads:

And all our brothers who are dwelling in the land of Israel will be scattered and exiled (διασκορπισθήσονται καὶ αἰχμαλωτισθήσονται) from the good land. And the entire land of Israel will be a desert: both Samaria and Jerusalem will be a desert. And the house of God will also burn in grief for a time (14:4b).²²

To be sure, the book itself opens by rehearsing the exile of Israel's northern tribes (αἰχμαλωτεύω/αἰχμαλωσία, 1:1-3, 10), so by the time of Tobit's farewell he is already living in diaspora. According to the speech, however, Israel's exile encompasses the captivity of *both* the northern *and* southern kingdoms. Indeed, when Tobit instructs Tobias to flee because 'there will be more salvation in Media than among *the Assyrians and in Babylon*', he seems to understand the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles as two parts of a single event, the first part having already commenced. This is confirmed when Tobit explains that the nation's captivity will include 'the entire land of Israel (πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τοῦ Ἰσραηλ)', comprising 'both Samaria and Jerusalem (καὶ Σαμάρεια καὶ Ἱερουσαλημ)' (14:4b). In other words, the process of exile remains incomplete until Nineveh and Assyria are destroyed and the southern

Ephraimite, 'I have spoken, and none of my words shall fail to come true' (καὶ οὐδὲν διαπεσεῖται τῶν ῥημάτων μου).

²¹ Biberger observes four phases: Assyrian exile, Babylonian exile, Judah's restoration, and Israel's restoration ('Unbefriedigende Gegenwart und ideale Zukunft', 275).

²² The basis for exile is revealed in Tobit 13: the people are guilty of iniquities (ταῖς ἀδικίαις ὑμῶν, 13:5); therefore God scattered them among the nations (διασκορπισθήτε ἐν αὐτοῖς, 13:3).

tribes are taken captive as well (cf. 14:15). The captivity of Judah and the burning of the Jerusalem Temple (14:4b), then, are the first events recorded here in Tobit's eschatological storyline, though they serve as the climax of an exilic process that had its commencement at the beginning of the narrative (1:1-2, 10).

It is important, however, to recall that while the character Tobit had yet to witness Babylon's defeat of Assyria and Judah, those events had already transpired for the 2nd or 3rd century BC author and his audience. As Fitzmyer says, 'Tobit is depicted as living at the peak of Neo-Assyrian power in the 8th–7th century, but the author of the Tobit story, for whom the fall of Nineveh was a thing of the past, writes as an apocalypticist and casts history into a prophetic mold'.²³ Thus, the author is chronologically located not at the beginning of the sequence of events narrated in 14:3-7, but at phase 2 during the *post*-exilic period. Maintaining the distinction between the respective times and concerns of the author and his cast is important for our study, as will become clear below.²⁴

3.3 Phase 2: Israel's Partial Restoration (14:5a)

Tobit's explanation of the fulfilment of God's word (14:4a) continues from Israel's completed exile (14:4b) to Israel's restoration (14:5-7). But if Israel's restoration is described as a *single event* in Tobit 13 ('he will have mercy on *all of you* [πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐλεήσει], from all the nations wherever you have been scattered among them', 13:5), this is not the case in our passage. Tobit 14 likewise attributes Israel's restoration to God's mercy, but here it is said to occur in *two phases*: a *partial* restoration (14:5a) followed by a *full* restoration (14:5b-7).

The first phase of restoration involves Israel's (particularly Judah's) initial return to the land. Following his prediction of Israel's completed exile, the duration of which was to be only 'for a time' (μέχρι χρόνου, 14:4b), Tobit explains:

But again God will have mercy on them. God will return them to the land of Israel and again they will rebuild the house – but it will not be like the first one, until the time when the time of seasons is fulfilled. (14:5a)

²³ Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 327. Cf. Biberger, 'Unbefriedigende Gegenwart und ideale Zukunft', 268-69.

²⁴ Biberger, 'Unbefriedigende Gegenwart und ideale Zukunft', 269.

This phase is correlated to the fall of Babylon (14:4b) as well as the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the second temple. But the stature of the second temple, as Tobit predicts, would not be what it once was – ‘it will not be like the first one’ (οὐχ ὡς τὸν πρῶτον). The 2nd or 3rd century BC author probably knew first hand of the inglorious state of the second temple (Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:3); the character Tobit is made to predict as much (*ex eventu*), while anticipating the nation’s later, *full* restoration (14:5b).

3.4 Phase 3: Israel’s Full Restoration and the Conversion of the Gentiles (14:5b-7)

The remainder of 14:5 shows that Tobit hoped for a final, full restoration to follow Israel’s initial, partial restoration, one involving more Israelites and more rebuilding.²⁵ The temporal limitation (ἕως) attached to the second temple in 14:5a is important. The reconstructed, imperfect temple would only be provisional; according to 14:5a, the second temple will stand ‘until the time when the time of seasons is fulfilled’ (ἕως τοῦ χρόνου οὗ ἂν πληρωθῇ ὁ χρόνος τῶν καιρῶν).²⁶ But ‘after these things’ (μετὰ ταῦτα), Tobit explains, ‘*all* (πάντες; cf. 13:5) will return from their captivity (αιχμαλωσίας αὐτῶν) and will rebuild Jerusalem gloriously; and the house of God in it will be rebuilt just as the prophets of Israel said about it’ (14:5b). Significantly, Tobit refers to Israel’s full return as *salvation* (‘All the sons of Israel who are *saved* in those days [πάντες οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραηλ οἱ σφωζόμενοι ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις]’, 14:7a).²⁷ He also indicates that this salvation will coincide with the conversion of the Gentiles: ‘And all the nations in the entire earth, everybody will turn and truly fear God (καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ γῆ πάντες ἐπιστρέψουσιν καὶ φοβηθήσονται τὸν θεὸν ἀληθινῶς): everybody will abandon their idols which have falsely led

²⁵ Hicks-Keeton, ‘Already/Not Yet’, 114: ‘While one expectation the narrative develops had already been fulfilled in the author’s time (the restoration of Jerusalem), one had not yet come to completion (the full ingathering of the exiles).’

²⁶ Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 329: ‘God’s house will be rebuilt, but not so beautifully as was the First Temple constructed by Solomon [cf. 1 Kgs 6:14-38]. ... What would be constructed rather would have to serve until such time as those who returned from captivity could recover from the accursed situation in which they had been.’

²⁷ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 300: ‘[T]he “salvation” spoken of in the Jewish sources of this period has to do with rescue from the national enemies, restoration of the national symbols, and a state of *shalom* in which every man will sit under his vine or fig-tree. “Salvation” encapsulates the entire future hope.’

them astray and will bless the eternal God in righteousness' (14:6; cf. 13:11).²⁸ Once the remainder of the Israelites have returned to the land and the Gentiles have turned to the Lord, Israel's restoration process will be complete.²⁹

3.5 *Returning to Tobit's Thesis*

With this three-phase sequence in view, we return to Tobit's earlier assertion that 'the word from the prophecies will in no way fail'. As noted above, this is the climax of the repetitious thesis in 14:4a, which serves to underscore the importance of trusting God's promises concerning the fate of national Israel. It is necessary, however, to stress the significance of this statement for *both* the author *and* his audience, for the immediate relevance of God's promises differs for the exiled cast and those post-exilic Israelites contemporary with the author.

The immediate concern of the *cast* is the coming destruction of Nineveh and Assyria, as prophesied by Nahum and the other prophets. This much is apparent from Tobit's instructions to Tobias and Tobias's children: they are to flee to Media in order to escape the impending

²⁸ It is clear from the speech that Tobit does not expect every person (even every Israelite) to participate in Israel's restoration. God requires that his people 'turn to him with all [their] heart and with all [their] soul to do what is true before him' (13:6), such that only those who are 'truly mindful of God will be gathered together, go to Jerusalem, and dwell eternally in the land of Abraham with safety' (14:7b). Similarly, Gentiles are required to 'abandon their idols' and to 'turn and truly fear God' (14:6; cf. 13:11). Thus, while 'those who truly love God will rejoice', 'those who do sin and injustice will depart from all the earth' (14:7b).

²⁹ N. T. Wright (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013], 1:155), however, rejects the notion that 14:5a refers to the inauguration of Israel's restoration and 14:5b to its completion: 'Yes, there had been a "return from exile" – of sorts; but it had not been the real thing. The promises of Isaiah and the others (about the nations being converted, and the wonderful splendour of Jerusalem) had obviously not yet happened. Tobit is clear: we are living as it were between the times, having experienced a kind of "return", but still awaiting the *true* "return", which will come about when "the time of times is fulfilled"'. Wright, however, misjudges the degree to which the author of Tobit regarded the events surrounding the building of the second temple as a partial *though no less 'true'* restoration. As Mark Seifrid explains, 'To characterise Tobit 14:5-7 as reflecting the idea of a continuing exile is slightly gratuitous. The text affirms that by God's mercy some will return from exile to the Land, to be joined by all at the "times of fulfilment". For the original audience, the first stage had been accomplished already' ('Blind Alleys in the Controversy over the Paul of History', *TynBul* 45 [1994], 73-95, esp. 88). Indeed, the author's reference to the initial return to and rebuilding of Jerusalem as the result of divine 'mercy' (ἐλεῆω, 14:5a) – which is precisely how he characterises Israel's *single* restoration in 13:5 – shows that he does not view the initial return (14:5a) as 'false' and the later one 'true'; rather, they are simply two parts of the single restorative project envisioned in Tobit 13.

devastation of Assyria (14:3-4; cf. 14:15). Since at the time of the speech – and from the perspective of the characters – the fall of Nineveh, the Babylonian exile, and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple had yet to occur (14:4; cf. 14:15), the ensuing prophecies about the fall of Babylon and the rebuilding of Jerusalem (14:5) remained only distant hopes for Tobit and his family. Still, the author casts the righteous Tobit as believing these remote promises in order to model confidence in God’s word.

The author and his post-exilic audience, on the other hand, would have been concerned entirely with the fulfilment of phase 3. From the author’s perspective, God had already destroyed Assyria and initiated Israel’s restoration by returning Judah to the land and rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, albeit unimpressively. And it is because God had been faithful in fulfilling phases 1 and 2 that the author remains confident that God will fulfil phase 3.³⁰ This is the reason that the fall of Nineveh is soon after mentioned in the narrative (14:15). As Bauckham explains: ‘The point is not just that God judged Nineveh for its oppression, but that the fulfilment of this prediction of the prophets guarantees the fulfilment of the rest of their predictions, including Israel’s restoration to the land, along with the glorified Jerusalem to which all Israel will adhere.’³¹ Thus, the author himself points his readership to God’s previously fulfilled promises in phases 1 and 2 as a means of assuring them that God will indeed be faithful in fulfilling phase 3 (Israel’s full restoration). As Hicks-Keeton explains:

The book of Tobit’s answer to the apparent problem that the prophets’ hopes have not been realized is that these expectations have already begun to be fulfilled. The theological innovation of the book of Tobit, then, is this hortatory message grounded in eschatological tension: be faithful to the covenant even in Dispersion, for God is even now fulfilling the promises in our midst. The ‘already/not yet’ tension that the narrative builds serves to encourage Jews in the Diaspora to live in a way that both expects God’s ingathering (the ‘not yet’) and that affirms

³⁰ Biberger, ‘Unbefriedigende Gegenwart und ideale Zukunft’, 271: ‘Die 612 v. Chr. erfolgte Zerstörung Ninives durch die Babylonier sowie die Ankündigungen der zweiten und dritten Etappe [phases 1 and 2 in our scheme], die aus der Sicht der Erzählfigur Tobit noch bevorstehen, die aber aus der Perspektive des Verfassers und seiner Adressaten schon Vergangenheit sind, sind Beleg dafür, dass sich Gottes Worte erfüllen werden.’

³¹ Bauckham, ‘Tobit as a Parable’, 448.

that God's saving activities are in play in the present (the 'already'). Tobit/Israel's God *will be* faithful; Tobit/Israel's God *is* faithful.³²

When the character Tobit asserts that 'the word from the prophecies will in no way fail' (14:4a), the author himself, though employing the future tense (ἔσται), both *recalls* what God had already accomplished in phases 1 and 2 and *assures* his audience (in light of those previously fulfilled promises) that God will bring to fruition Israel's final restorative stage. To rework the language of Hicks-Keeton above, the word of God *will* not fail, because the word of God *has* not failed. The fulfilment (or non-failure) of God's word, as seen in Tobit, then, should be understood as an implied call for perseverance among those Israelites living in an inaugurated though unconsummated eschatological state. And as we shall see, Tobit's deployment and development of the notion of the fulfilment (or non-failure) of God's word finds a striking parallel in Romans 9–11, where a nearly identical expression is used for the same purposes.

4. God's Faithfulness and Salvation in Romans 9–11

Much like Tobit 14, Romans 9–11 appears toward the end of a larger work on theodicy (cf. δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ/αὐτοῦ, Rom. 1:17; 3:5; 3:21-26; 10:3).³³ Moreover, there are numerous points of verbal and theological contact between the two passages. As noted earlier, Romans 9–11, like Tobit 14, is heavily influenced by Deuteronomy 28–32 and concerned with the fate of Israel. Paul's remarks on behalf of his fellow Jews could hardly be more emotive: 'I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh' (9:2-3). These kinsmen 'are Israelites, to whom belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the legislation, the worship, and the promises' (9:4). And yet many of these Israelites have failed to believe the gospel and thereby participate in God's saving righteousness.

'But', Paul asserts, 'it is not as if the word of God has failed (οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ)' (9:6a). The apostle then

³² Hicks-Keeton, 'Already/Not Yet', 117.

³³ Nils Alstrup Dahl, 'The Future of Israel', in *Studies in Paul: Theology for the early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 137-58, esp. 142; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 38-40; Byrne, *Romans*, 289.

proceeds to demonstrate, by pointing to Scripture itself, how God has remained faithful to his word and will continue to be so. Throughout the discourse the apostle alludes to a sequence of redemptive-historical phases quite similar to those observed in Tobit 14:3-7, including (1) Israel's exile; (2) Israel's partial restoration; and (3) Israel's full restoration.³⁴ Although Paul's rhetorical proofs (9:6b-29; 9:30-10:21; 11:1-32) themselves do not progress precisely in step with the content of Tobit 14:3-7, the verbal, theological, and contextual similarities between the two texts (see Figure 2) suggest that Paul, like the author of Tobit, has in view the eventual, climactic affirmation of the salvation of all Israel (Rom. 11:26; cf. Tob. 14:7) even from the beginning of the discourse when he denies the failure of God's word (Rom. 9:6a; cf., Tob. 14:4a). We will now unpack this storyline in detail.

Figure 2: Points of Contact

Tobit 14:3-7

'all our brothers (οἱ ἀδελφοὶ ἡμῶν) who are dwelling in the land of Israel' (14:4)

'the word from the prophecies will in no way fail (οὐ μὴ διαπέσῃ ῥῆμα ἐκ τῶν λόγων)' (14:4)

'But again God will have mercy (ἐλεήσει) on them' (14:5; cf. 13:5)

'[the temple] will not be like the first one, until (ἕως) the time when the time of seasons is fulfilled' (14:5)

'All the sons of Israel who are saved in those days (πάντες οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ οἱ σωζόμενοι ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις)' (14:6)

'all will return from their captivity (ἐπιστρέψουσιν ἐκ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας

Romans 9-11

'my brothers (τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου), my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites' (9:3-4)

'But it is not as if the word of God has failed (οὐχ οἷον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ)' (9:6)

'they also have now been disobedient in order that by your mercy (ἐλέει) they might also be shown mercy (ἐλεηθῶσιν)' (11:31; cf. 11:30, 32)

'A partial hardening has come upon Israel until (ἄχρι οὗ) the fullness of the Gentiles comes in' (11:25).

'and in this way all Israel will be saved (καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται)' (11:26)

(see 11:26 above)

³⁴ For a two-phase restoration of Israel in Romans, see James M. Scott, "'And then all Israel will be saved'" (Rom 11:26), in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. J. M. Scott, SJSJ 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 489-527, esp. 494-95; Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 357.

αὐτῶν πάντες)’(14:5)

‘And all the nations in the entire earth ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles (τὸ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ γῆ), πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν) comes in’ everybody will turn and truly fear (11:25)
God’ (14:6)

4.1 Phase 1: Israel’s Exile

Characterising the status of unbelieving Israel in Romans as *exile* has been proposed and popularised by numerous scholars, including N. T. Wright, Richard Hays, J. Ross Wagner, and others.³⁵ Although Mark Seifrid is probably correct to assert, against Wright, that Paul’s notion of Israel’s ongoing exile ‘is derived from the cross, and does not represent a continuation of a preconversion belief’,³⁶ Paul’s use of Scripture throughout Romans shows nonetheless that he understands Israel’s predicament as a form of exile. In these texts, however, Paul does not consider Israel’s exile primarily in a *geographical* sense (deportation from the land), but in a *metaphorical* sense (separation from God).³⁷ Thus, while Paul in Romans 9–11 describes unbelieving Israel’s status in various ways (e.g. ‘disobedient’, 10:21; 11:30-32; ‘hardened’, 11:7, 25; ‘transgression’, 11:11-12; ‘broken off’, 11:17-22), he does so without explicit mention of temple or territory.

The concept of Israel’s ongoing exile appears in Romans as early as Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 52:5 in Romans 2:24 (‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you’), where Paul draws on the prophet’s words to illuminate the consequences of Israel’s hypocrisy. As Hays says, ‘The quotation of Isa. 52:5 works metaphorically in Paul’s argument only if the reader castigated by the text imaginatively takes on the role of Israel in exile’.³⁸ Similar exilic resonances are observable in Romans 7:14-25, where Paul describes the condition of the speaker (ἐγώ) – a representative of Israel – as ‘sold under sin’ (7:14) and ‘captive (αἰχμαλωτίζοντά) to the law of sin’

³⁵ For a recent explanation of the concept of *continuing exile* in Second Temple Judaism and Romans 9–11, see Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1:139-66. Cf. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 46; Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 29-33.

³⁶ Seifrid, ‘Blind Alleys’, 90n53. He elaborates, ‘For Paul, the advent of the Messiah did not bring an end to Israel’s continuing exile, but began it anew’ (91).

³⁷ For the OT precedent of such figurative notions of exile, see Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metaphorization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible*, VTSup 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

³⁸ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 46.

(7:23); both statements probably allude to Isa. 49:24–50:2 and portray the speaker in a state of imprisonment under a foreign power (sin).³⁹ Concerning Romans 9–11, Wagner convincingly shows that Paul’s copious use of Isaianic texts focusing on Israel’s exile and eventual restoration supplies the narrative substructure for Paul’s discussion of Israel. Wagner explains: ‘With reference to the majority of his kinspeople, Paul draws on passages from Isaiah whose wider contexts portray Israel as idolatrous and unfaithful, suffering under God’s discipline in the form of oppression or exile.’⁴⁰

But perhaps the best example of Paul evoking the concept of exile in Romans 9–11 surfaces through his repeated appeal to Deuteronomy 32. Paul explains that though Israel has heard and understood the gospel (10:18-19), they have not all obeyed it (10:16), having ignored the righteousness made available through faith in Jesus Christ (9:32; 10:3). Moreover, Paul’s use of the jealousy motif in Romans 10:19, 11:11 and 14, originating as it does from Deuteronomy 32:21, suggests that he understands Israel’s unbelieving condition to be analogous to Israel’s exilic state as forecasted in the Song of Moses. Wagner explains: ‘Like Deuteronomy 29–30, the Song of Moses treats Israel’s idolatrous rebellion against God and their subsequent experience of the curses of the Law, including exile, as a *fait accompli*.’⁴¹ Thus, ‘Paul’s citation [of Deut. 32] figuratively identifies contemporary Israel with God’s rebellious people of old. Paul’s use of scripture in these chapters projects a world in which Israel stands estranged from God, suffering the curses pronounced by the covenant, in dire need of deliverance.’⁴² In other words, Israel’s metaphorical exile, though begun long ago, extends into the present.

4.2 Phase 2: Israel’s Partial Restoration and the Conversion of the Gentiles

While Paul, on the one hand, describes Israel as having started in a state of rebellion and exile, he proceeds to show that some within Israel

³⁹ John K. Goodrich, ‘Sold under Sin: Echoes of Exile in Romans 7.14-25’, *NTS* 59 (2013), 476-95.

⁴⁰ Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 353. Cf. Isa. 29:16 and 45:9 (Rom. 9:20), Isa. 10:22-23 (Rom. 9:27-28), Isa. 1:9 (Rom. 9:29), Isa. 8:14 and 28:16 (Rom. 9:33), Isa. 65:2 (Rom. 10:21), Isa. 29:10 and 6:9-10 (Rom. 11:8), and Isa. 59:20-21 and 27:9 (Rom. 11:26-27).

⁴¹ Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 192-93.

⁴² Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 196.

have, through their belief in the Messiah, begun to participate in God's redemption of the nation. Like Tobit, Paul's use of salvation language evokes Israel's restoration (σώζω, Rom. 10:9, 13; 11:14, 26). This is demonstrated especially in Romans 9:27 where Paul cites Isaiah 10:22 ('Though the number of the sons of Israel were like the sand of the sea, *only a remnant will be saved* [τὸ ὑπόλειμμα σωθήσεται]'). Here, as well as elsewhere, the term σώζω implies that the salvation of the remnant inaugurated through the Christ event corresponds to the initial phase of Israel's long-awaited restoration.

The initial, partial redemption of Israel is explicated further in Rom. 11:1-10. Israel's restoration, Paul demonstrates, has indeed begun to be fulfilled, for Paul himself is an Israelite – a descendent of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin – and yet he has believed the gospel (11:1). Just as God kept for himself seven thousand men who had not worshiped Baal, so too in the present time there remains a 'remnant' of Israelites chosen by grace (11:2-5; cf. λείμμα, 11:5; ὑπόλειμμα, 9:27; κατάλειμμα, Tob. 13:17).⁴³

But while Israel's remnant enjoys salvation, 'the rest were hardened' (11:7) and remain in a state of metaphorical exile. This temporary hardening of Israel, according to Paul, was to create an opportunity for the Gentiles to be saved: 'I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about this mystery: a partial hardening has come upon Israel *until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in*' (Rom. 11:25; cf. 11:1-15). Israel's restoration, then, is interrupted by the conversion of the nations, an event that Tobit expected to coincide with the final restoration of Israel, but that Paul understands to be concurrent with the hardening of most Jews. These Gentiles previously unknown and unloved by God (Rom. 9:25-26) are, in the present, not pursuing righteousness through the law and yet obtaining righteousness due to their faith in the Messiah (9:30).

4.3 Phase 3: Israel's Full Restoration

Despite the majority of Jews having rejected the gospel, Paul is assured that God will finish the restorative project he began with Israel. And even though not every descendent of Abraham will enjoy God's promised salvation (9:6b-7), Paul expects the conversion of a large

⁴³ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2:1464: '[F]or Paul the [covenant] renewal spoken of in Deuteronomy 30 has already happened through the Messiah. This is precisely what gives Romans 9–11 the combined sense of celebration and tragedy: Deuteronomy 30 has happened, but Deuteronomy 32 is still true of unbelieving Israel.'

number of Israelites following the entrance of the fullness of the Gentiles. The hardening that fell upon those Israelites who do not belong to the remnant will endure only ‘until [ἄχρι οὗ] the fullness of the Gentiles comes in’ (11:25).⁴⁴ Their hardening, then, is only provisional, for once the full number of Gentiles joins God’s people, ‘all Israel will be saved’ (11:26). Whether the phrase καὶ οὕτως in 11:26 is temporal (‘and then’) or modal (‘and in this way’),⁴⁵ and whether Paul here understands ‘all Israel’ in a collective sense (a large number of Israelites) or a comprehensive sense (every member of the Jewish people at a given moment), the salvation he anticipates will be a future conversion at or just prior to the return of the Messiah (11:26-27)⁴⁶ – a conversion, like that of all followers of Christ, predicated on faith. For Israel will be saved, he says, but only ‘if they do not continue in unbelief’ (11:23; cf. 10:9-13). And this faith will be triggered by their ‘jealousy’ of the Gentiles’ inclusion in the people of God (11:11, 14; cf. Deut. 32:21). Importantly, it is mainly with respect to the timing and role of the Gentiles’ conversion vis-à-vis Israel where Tobit and Paul part ways: whereas Tobit expects Israel’s full restoration to precede and (probably) trigger the conversion of the Gentiles, Paul envisions the entrance of the fullness of the Gentiles preceding and triggering the salvation of all Israel. Thus, while the similarities between Tobit’s and Paul’s respective salvation-historical

⁴⁴ Otfried Hofius, “‘All Israel Will Be Saved’: Divine Salvation and Israel’s Deliverance in Romans 9–11”, *PSB* 11, Supplementary Issue 1 (1990), 33: ‘The hardening of the majority of Israel is only *preliminary* and thus *temporally limited*, as Paul indicates with diverse expressions from Rom. 11:12 on.’

⁴⁵ For a temporal meaning, see Pieter W. van der Horst, “‘Only then will all Israel be saved’: A Short Note on the Meaning of καὶ οὕτως in Romans 11:26”, *JBL* 119 (2000), 521-25; Scott, “‘And then all Israel will be saved’ (Rom 11:26)”, 490-96. Even if the more likely and commonly supported modal interpretation is correct, the phrase refers to the interdependent and *sequential* relationship involving the Gentile mission and Israel’s salvation expressed throughout chapter 11, and especially in 11:25; cf. J. R. Daniel Kirk, ‘Why Does the Deliverer Come ἐκ Σιὼν (Romans 11.26)?’, *JSNT* 33 (2010), 81-99. Thus, a temporal reference is implied in either case.

⁴⁶ See Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9–11* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967): 131-38; Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 572-79; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38b (Dallas: Word, 1988), 677-84; Scott, “‘And then all Israel will be saved’ (Rom 11:26)”, 496-519; Richard H. Bell, *The Irrevocable Call of God: An Inquiry into Paul’s Theology of Israel*, WUNT 184 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 256-70; John K. Goodrich, ‘Until the Fullness of the Gentiles Comes In: A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship on the Salvation of “All Israel” (Romans 11:26)’, *JSPL* (forthcoming).

storylines are undeniable, this particular departure between them must be sufficiently appreciated.

4.4 *Romans 9:6a as the Thesis of Romans 9–11*

Having sketched Israel's three-phase plotline in Romans 9–11, we are now in a position to enquire about Paul's objectives in these chapters and how he uses the statement 'But it is not as if the word of God has failed' (9:6a) within his argument. Paul clearly seeks here to address the status and future of Israel as well as to remove the arrogance of Gentile believers (cf. 11:17-22). Beyond this, however, there remains much more at stake. For Paul, Israel's present condition raises concerns about God's credibility; indeed, Israel's unsaved status seems to have caused many in the early church to question God's faithfulness to his covenant people. Thus, Paul's foremost objective in Romans 9–11 is to defend God's integrity and to exonerate him from any charge of unrighteousness (cf. 9:14; 11:33-36).

Given these purposes, as well as the location of 9:6a at the head of Paul's argument, it is quite probable that Romans 9:6a, like Tobit 14:4a, functions as the thesis/theme statement for the entire discourse. To be sure, many scholars have already observed the programmatic function of Romans 9:6a.⁴⁷ Thomas Schreiner, for example, maintains, '9:6a constitutes the theme of all of 9:6b–11:32, reaching its climax ... in 11:26-29, where the covenantal promise effects the eschatological salvation of Israel. The unbelief of Israel does not nullify God's

⁴⁷ See Dahl, 'The Future of Israel', 143; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* EKK 6/3 (Zürich: Benziger, 1980), 2:191; Otfried Hofius, 'Das Evangelium und Israel: Erwägungen zu Römer 9–11', *ZTK* 83 (1986), 297-324, esp. 300; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 539; Johann D. Kim, *God, Israel, and the Gentiles: Rhetoric and Situation in Romans 9–11*, SBLDS 176 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 123-24; Eduard Lohse, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 15. Aufl., KEK 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 270; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 574; Filippo Belli, *Argumentation and Use of Scripture in Romans 9–11*, AnBib 183 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2010), 26; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 364; Klaus Haacker, 'Das Thema von Römer 9–11 als Problem der Auslegungsgeschichte', in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11*, ed. F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner, WUNT 257 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 55-72, esp. 63-64; Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, "'Nicht alle aus Israel sind Israel" (Röm 9,6b): Römer 9–11 als Zeugnis paulinischer Anthropologie', in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11*, ed. F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner, WUNT 257 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 433-62, esp. 433.

promises, because nothing can thwart his word; what he has promised will certainly come to pass.⁴⁸

This opinion, however, is not universally shared. For example, Douglas Moo cautions that ‘those who view each of the main units of Rom. 9–11 as parallel defenses of this statement may be guilty of imposing a neat “outline” format on Paul that he never intended’.⁴⁹ Going further, Jean-Noël Aletti, utilising the resources of ancient rhetoric, argues that ‘the word of God has not failed’ is an unsuitable ‘title’ (*le titre*) for Rom. 9:6–10:21 (and thus all of 9–11), since it ‘can in no way encompass Romans 10, where the perspective is no longer theological’.⁵⁰ In fact, ‘no one’, Aletti protests, ‘has ever stated why [that title] is to be preferred over others’.⁵¹ Accordingly, Romans 9–11 is the only section in the letter

that does not begin with a *propositio* governing the overall argumentation and thus from the outset expresses the Apostle’s position. None of the diverse *propositiones* that propel the development of the thought in Rom. 9–11 [9:6a; 10:4; 11:1a, on Aletti’s outline] encompass one another: wanting only to arrive at the journey’s end with the revelation of the “mystery” (11:25-26a), the Apostle guards against indicating at the beginning of the section (from 9:6) the elements of the answer that are so astonishing!⁵²

Although it is possible, as Aletti observes, that Romans 9–11 is the only portion of the letter without an overarching thesis statement, it could also be that Aletti has simply dismissed the most suitable verse for that role. In fact, considering the literary and rhetorical features of Romans 9–11, there remain several reasons for believing that 9:6a serves such a programmatic function.

⁴⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 491.

⁴⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 554.

⁵⁰ Jean-Noël Aletti, *God’s Justice in Romans: Keys for Interpreting [sic] the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. P. M. Meyer, Subsidia Biblica 37 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2010): 165. For the original French, see Jean-Noël Aletti, *Comment Dieu est-il juste? Clefs pour interpréter l’épître aux Romains* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 141. Aletti here criticises the work of François Refoulé, ‘...Et ainsi tout Israël sera sauvé’: *Romains 11:25-32*, LD 117 (Paris: Cerf, 1984).

⁵¹ Aletti, *God’s Justice in Romans*, 165.

⁵² Aletti, *God’s Justice in Romans*, 173 (cf. Aletti, *Comment Dieu est-il juste?*, 148). Aletti’s rhetorical-critical approach to Romans 9–11 has been expanded extensively by his student, Pablo T. Gadenz, *Called from the Jews and from the Gentiles: Pauline Ecclesiology in Romans 9–11*, WUNT 2/267 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 88. Gadenz’s silence on the significance of 9:6a for the rest of chapters 9–11 may suggest that he is in agreement with his mentor regarding its limited thematic function.

First, given that 9:6a is the undisputed thesis for 9:6b-29, and that 9:6-29 and 11:1-32 are parallel arguments sharing numerous key terms and themes (as even Aletti observes),⁵³ it would seem that 9:6a could just as easily serve as the heading for 11:1-32. Indeed, Paul's denial that God has rejected his people (11:1) could hardly be more conceptually similar to denying that God's word has failed (9:6a).⁵⁴ It is quite reasonable, then, to understand 9:6a as anticipating 11:1-32.

Secondly, if 9:6a fails to summarise the content of 9:30–10:21, it could be, as some suggest, that 9:30–10:21 is an excursus, falling within the argumentative structure governed by 9:6a, yet deviating thematically from its surrounding sections (9:6-29; 11:1-32).⁵⁵ If such were true, then 9:6a could still be regarded as the thesis statement of Romans 9–11 as a whole.

Thirdly, it is actually quite plausible that 9:6a summarises Paul's main point even in the disputed section of 9:30–10:21.⁵⁶ It makes little sense to say with Aletti that 10:4 ('For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes') is the *propositio* of 9:30–10:21. Although 10:4 provides the salvation-historical basis for Paul's argument in 10:1-4, it seems to have a supportive rather than programmatic function in both its immediate and larger literary contexts, since nowhere in the verse does Paul mention Israel's plight, which is a central concern throughout the remainder of 9:30–10:21. The more likely candidate for the *propositio* of this section, therefore, is 9:30-32. These verses not only introduce the passage, as do the other two *propositiones* (9:6b; 11:1a) in their respective sections, they also identify Israel's current plight (unrighteousness) and diagnose its cause (preoccupation with works). Paul, then – as he does following 9:6b and 11:1a – grounds the *propositio* with scriptural support (Rom. 9:33 // Isa. 28:16), thereby showing that 'God's word' (9:6a) actually

⁵³ Aletti, *God's Justice in Romans*, 166-69. See also Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2:1183.

⁵⁴ See Dahl, 'The Future of Israel', 155; Hofius, "'All Israel Will Be Saved'", 19-39, esp. 29; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 501-502; Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 314.

⁵⁵ Munck, *Christ and Israel*, 90; Dahl, 'The Future of Israel', 148; Moo, *Romans*, 618.

⁵⁶ Cf. Kim, *God, Israel, and the Church*, 134-35.

anticipated Israel's stumbling.⁵⁷ The remainder of Paul's argumentative strategy in 9:30–10:21 also coheres with the sense of 9:6a. God's promises have not failed because – as his citations of Psalm 19:4, Deuteronomy 32:21, and Isaiah 65:1-2 in Romans 10:18-21 show – Israel's hearing, understanding, and disobeying the gospel actually fulfil God's word. In sum, Paul's extensive use of Scripture shows that Israel's rebellious and unbelieving state was promised long ago; God's word, therefore, has not failed, but is currently being fulfilled.⁵⁸

5. Conclusion

Together, these observations help to establish 9:6a as the thesis statement for Romans 9–11, a thesis that reaches all the way to 11:26 and thus anticipates the salvation of all Israel.⁵⁹ If this is so, then Paul and Tobit not only share similar eschatological perspectives on Israel's current salvation-historical location and future redemption, but also deploy and develop the idiom of the non-failure of God's word in nearly identical ways. Through this assertion, both authors seek to defend God's faithfulness with respect to his covenant promises to Israel while assuring their readers living in an inaugurated though unconsummated eschatological state that God's promises about Israel's full restoration will indeed come to pass. Observing these similarities helps us to appreciate the proximity of Paul's discourse to contemporary Jewish modes of thought and argumentation, as well as further cements Romans 9-11 as an insider's perspective on a variety of critical early Jewish themes.

⁵⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 620: 'This paragraph [9:30-33] bears an importance out of proportion to its length. It announces the themes that Paul will develop in the rest of chap. 10.' Cf. Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 504-505; Jewett, *Romans*, 607.

⁵⁸ Hultgren, *Romans*, 364: 'In constructing a careful and credible argument, Paul reviews the record of what God has said. All this serves to show that God's word has not failed. On the contrary, God's word has been vindicated.'

⁵⁹ Some scholars suggest that Rom. 9:6a echoes Isa. 40:7-8. See Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 46-47 (esp. n10); Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans', 635; Belli, *Argumentation*, 38-39. If so, then Paul is evoking an important passage that in its own context forecasts Israel's restoration.