The most significant passage in the New Testament concerning the present status and future of Israel, especially with regard to a Gentile appreciation of this topic, is Romans 9-11. The following expository notes were part of preparatory study in Romans that resulted in preaching through this magisterial epistle of Paul over several years.

Obviously some more technical matters are included here that would not be appropriate for pulpit ministry, though they do constitute a vital part of proper sermon preparation.

The author unapologetically is prosemitic in his presentation. Indeed, as these notes will repeatedly emphasize, it is believed that such a perspective is vital in understanding the teaching of converted Rabbi Paul.

Barry E. Horner
A more superficial assessment of Romans 9-11 might lead one to believe that this section is a distinct unit, especially since there appears to be little continuity with the exultant conclusion of chapter 8. Furthermore, it has been noted that some degree of continuity can be discerned, after the manner of Paul’s other writings where doctrine is followed by duty, if chapters 8 and 12 are read consecutively. Nevertheless there do seem to be substantial reasons why Paul makes this seemingly abrupt injection of the whole matter, concerning the righteousness of God in relation to Israel and the gospel, that in fact has deep connectedness.

First there needs to be recollection of 1:16 where the gospel is to be offered “to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” which principle the Lord Jesus revealed to Ananias, namely that Paul was to bear My [Christ’s] name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15). As a result Paul consistently witnessed to the Jews at every opportunity, even from the beginning at Damascus following his conversion (Acts 9:22). His first missionary journey saw initial synagogue witness at Salamis, Pisidian Antioch, and Iconium (Acts 13: 5, 14; 14:1). Note that Acts 13:46 reveals: “It was necessary that the Word of God be spoken to you [Jews at Pisidian Antioch] first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.” Nevertheless, at the next stop at Iconium, Paul first visits the synagogue. His second missionary journey finds him seeking the Jews first at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus (Acts 16:13; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19). Note that Acts 18:6 records, “Your blood [that of the Jews at Athens] be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” Nevertheless, at the next stop at Ephesus, Paul first visits the synagogue. His third missionary journey finds him returning to Ephesus, but first to the synagogue (Acts 19:8). Paul’s final journey, in which he is led captive to Rome for trial, commences in Jerusalem where he witnesses in the Temple (Acts 21:26), declares to the Jews that, “I am a Jew” (Acts 22:3), and three days following his arrival at Rome, he “called together those who were the leading men of the Jews,” and declared that, “I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:17, 20). It should be born in mind that Romans was received in Rome from Corinth approximately three years before this arrival in Rome just described. Thus the Apostle, although repeatedly scorned and assailed by the Jews, yet manifested an indefatigable and gracious persistence with those to whom he nevertheless felt so indebted (9:4-5). Paul was decidedly prosemitic, even when faced with the most stubborn unbelief and spiritual adultery (9:1-3; 10:1; 11:1, 11; cf. Hosea 11:8-9). Indeed he manifests a degree of ongoing Jewishness that, while used pragmatically (Acts 16:1-3; 21:26), yet is reflective of deep love for “my kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3). Hence, no Christian should be of any lesser attitude, though sad to say, some Christians have been anti-Semitic both racially and theologically.

Second, other references in Romans indicate an underlying interest in the destiny of God’s covenant people (2:9-10, 17-29; 3:3:1-2, 9, 29), and particularly the character of true Jewishness (2:28-29, cf. 9:6-8). It may well be that this emphasis, but especially as now considered in Romans 9-11, incorporates much of the repeated thrust of Paul’s frequent synagogue ministry. Thus this former Pharisee and student of Gamaliel was constantly sensitive to the ramifications of

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1 John Murray, Romans, II, p. xi.
2 Martin Luther is one case in point. Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand, pp. 296-8.
Christian gospel truth as either an apprehensive unbelieving Jew or a recently converted Jewish Christian might assess it (7:1). Consider how often Paul, on being rejected by the Jews in his journeyings, would have reflected upon the certain covenant promises given to national Israel and the overwhelming unbelief he encountered. Here his frequent ruminating on this matter finds detailed expression.

Third, the theme of God’s saving righteousness (1:16-17; 3:21-26; 5:17-21; 8:4) has highlighted the integrity of God in saving sinners, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul is dominated by this fundamental truth, so that in 3:3 God’s righteousness is not to be questioned even “if some [Jews] did not believe.” Hence it ought not surprise us if, in the light of Paul’s confessed Jewishness, this upholding of God’s character should arise again, in view of the covenant status of Israel, following such a complete vindication of the fullness and universality of the gospel. Therefore at this juncture there is good reason for maintaining that 9:6a is of crucial importance when it declares: “But it is not as though the word of God has failed.” Thus John Piper rightly argues that 9:6a declares, “the main point which Romans 9-11 was written to prove, in view of Israel’s unbelief and rejection. What is at stake ultimately in these chapters is not the fate of Israel; that is penultimate. Ultimately God’s own trustworthiness is at stake. And if God’s word of promise cannot be trusted to stand forever, then all our faith is in vain.”

Hence, the Word of God has not failed, and neither has its promised dealings with Israel.

Fourth, we should consider if Romans 9-11 contains any terminology that is reminiscent of Romans 1-8. Most significant is the use of “righteousness,” especially in 9:30 where the Gentiles “attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith,” and 10:4 where “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Again in 10:6, 9-10a, “the righteousness based on faith” is “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness.” Surely this is recapitulation of the gospel earlier described in Romans. The reference to “grace” in 11:5-6 is similarly drawing upon previous gospel doctrine where “grace” by its very nature is exclusive of “works,” as in 4:4-6, 13-16.

So this excursus of Paul is very much integral to Romans as a whole. Moo wells states the issue here:

Those who relegate chaps. 9-11 to the periphery of Romans have misunderstood the purpose of Romans 9-11, or of the letter, or of both. . . . Once we recognize the importance of this Jewish motif in Romans, we can give Romans 9-11 its appropriate place in the letter. In these chapters Paul is not simply using Israel to illustrate a theological point, such as predestination (according to Augustine, [and Luther]) or the righteousness of God. He is talking about Israel herself, as he wrestles with the implications of the gospel for God’s ‘chosen people’ of the Old Testament. . . . If Jewish rejection of the gospel creates the problem Paul grapples with in Romans 9-11, Gentile acceptance of that same gospel exacerbates it. It seems that Israel has not only been disinherit but replaced. Paul earlier categorically but briefly rejected the conclusion that his teaching implied the cancellation of all the Jews’ advantages (3:1-4). Now he elaborates. Of course, Paul could have cut the Gordian knot by simply claiming that the church had taken over Israel’s position and leaving it at that. But what, then, would become of the continuity between the Old Testament and the gospel? For the Jewish claim to

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3 John Piper, The Justification of God, p. 19.
4 In Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, pp. 25-6, he subtitles chapters 9-11 “Predestination or Election,” and fails to even mention Israel in this section.
5 In summary of this most vital point, refer to Murray, Romans, II, pp. xii-xv. However, more substantial support will be found in, Johannes Munck, Christ & Israel; Mark D. Nanos, The Mystery of Romans; Joseph Shulam with Hilary Le Cornu, A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Romans.
privileged status arises not from a self-generated nationalistic fervor; it is rooted in the Old Testament (Deut. 7:6b).\footnote{Douglas Moo, \textit{Romans}, pp. 548-50.}

A. THE APOSTOLIC APPRECIATION OF ISRAEL, VS. 1-5.

There is tremendous passion in this opening declaration of Paul’s heartfelt concern for national Israel. Doubtless he is reflective of his own past, the sheer bigotry of it all (Acts 26:5, 24; Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:5-6), and there is nothing like sensitivity to our own sin making us compassionate toward others who sin in a similar fashion (I Pet. 4:8). Notice that while Paul may have expressed anger with the Jews in past encounters (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 23:2-5), yet recall that following their attempt to kill him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30-32, 36) he nevertheless begged for permission to preach free grace that extended to the Gentiles before these violent accusers (Acts 21:39-40; 22:21-22).

1. Appreciation born of kinship, vs. 1-3.

This is a carnal kinship, yet Paul does not deny its existence or validity, as with 3:1-4. So the Christian today should have similar esteem, even if the Jews he witnesses to are scornful of the gospel. We ought to remember that we are saved by a Jewish Savior, have the gospel from the Jewish Scriptures, as well as mostly Jewish writers in the New Testament. Further, the first mother church at Jerusalem was Jewish, as were all of the twelve apostles, while Paul continued to call himself a Jew. A Christian, like Paul, ought to dearly love the Jews, in spite of their hardness of heart.


There is tremendous force of conviction in this oath-like declaration, cf. 1:9. If the composition of the church at Rome is comprised of more Gentiles than Jews, as the greetings offered in 16:1-23 could indicate, then Paul may be attempting to cover the charge that his more recent teaching, with its universal distinctions, has inferred that national Israel no longer has any place in the new church age (3:9, 22; cf. Gal. 3:28). So he immediately responds by indicating just how intensely his heart aches for national Israel. The reality of his yearning is akin to that of Christ (Matt. 23:37-39), for it is “in Christ,” that is in union with Christ, to which conviction of conscience the Holy Spirit bears witness. It is not unreasonable to propose that Paul, in his earlier instruction by Christ (I Cor. 7:6, 12, 40; 11:23; Gal. 1:12), learned much of what he now relates concerning the gospel and Jewish unbelief. Here is burning concern that has divine attestation.

b. Through heartfelt concern, v. 2.

In the light of Paul’s missionary travels, it is not difficult to contemplate the incessant anxiety of soul that has resulted from the incessant opposition he has faced from the Jews, at virtually every port of call and especially Jerusalem; his agonizing is suitably described here in the present tense. He certainly knew of a converted remnant; but the vast majority of Israel has continued in its militant
opposition to his gospel. Yet in the light of what is about to be revealed in 9:3-11:36, this soul unrest is more akin to birth-pangs, for the Apostle is well aware of the ultimate glorious destiny of Israel. In this regard, as Moo indicates, Paul laments after the manner of the Old Testament prophets; they likewise were grieved at Israel’s unbelief and prospective dispersion, yet at the same time anticipated Israel’s metamorphosis at the “last days” (Deut. 4:25-31; Hos. 3:4-5; Zech. 12:10-14; 14:8-11).

c. Through racial alliance, v. 3.

We expand in translation here: “For I was seriously contemplating [imperfect tense] the possibility of my submission to damnation [ἀναθήμα, anathema], that is consignment to hell from Christ, if by any means my fellow Jewish brethren, according to the flesh, might be united to Christ.” The Puritans were known to pose the question as to whether a Christian should be willing to be consigned to hell for the glory of God, most likely on account of this statement of Paul. Both situations are hypothetical since they propose an attitude that could only be generated in the heart of a child of God, and God does not send His own children to hell for His own glory; such an idea would be monstrous. This is not to deny that apart from what God would never do, yet the child of God may selflessly so love another that he postulates the impossible, by way of hyperbole, as Paul elsewhere suggests (II Cor. 12:15), after the manner of Moses (Ex. 32:31-32). Of course it could also be argued that Christ was certainly willing to enter the realm of the damned for the sake of the Father’s elect (I Pet. 3:18-20). However, the large truth here is the Apostle’s profound love for God’s prodigal people, the nation of Israel, which frustration can only be blissfully relieved at the saving of this same nation.

2. Appreciation born of the covenants, vs. 4-5.

Here Paul passionately identifies with his Jewish heritage by exalting in biblical Judaism that reaches its apex in Jesus Christ who is “God over all.” In the luster of this catalogue of blessings is the reason why Paul would, if it would help, offer up his soul for the saving of Israel. But as Moo well states, there is also a hint here, “why that sacrifice will not be necessary: God ‘has not rejected his people whom he foreknew’ (11:2).” Thus Paul’s brethren are “Israelites,” Ἰσραήλιται, Israelitai, the descendants of Jacob, and the following characteristics must be carefully born in mind in the light of greater clarification being made in vs. 6-13.

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7 Moo, *Romans*, p. 557. He cites the examples of Jeremiah 4:19; 14:17; Lamentations 1-5; Dan. 9:3.
9 Robert Haldane comments: “That anyone should desire to be eternally separated from Christ, and consequently punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, is impossible.” *Romans*, p. 450.
10 Moo, *Romans*, p. 560.
11 This first of eleven references to “Israel/Israelite” in Romans 9-11 clearly has a national connotation.
a. Old Testament covenant blessings, vs. 4-5a.

All of the following seven categories, each identified with the definite article, pertain to Old Testament benefits which, in 3:1-2, were but alluded to by the singular mention of “the oracles of God.” Here Paul accepts the legitimacy of such “boasting,” except that in 2:17-24 it was void of holy consistency.

(1) **The adoption.** In the light of Paul’s teaching in 8:15, 23; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5, the application of “the adoption,” “the son-placement” to unbelieving Israel as a present reality is significant, though consistent with the Old Testament (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1-2; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9-20; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 2:10). While Hodge and Murray reject any connection here, Piper is of the opposite and more convincing opinion.12

(2) **The glory.** The immediate thought must be the coming of God’s glory to Israel in visible presence, theophany (Ex. 3:2-6), tabernacle worship (Ex. 40:34), especially during the Exodus and wilderness wanderings (Ex. 16:10). This visitation was unique among the nations of the world (Deut. 14:2), the subject of boasting in spite of God declaring the reason for their election (Deut. 7:7). However the context in Romans also causes us to look forward to coming glory as the major thrust here (2:10; 9:23; 11:12, 15, 26-27). So Piper concludes: “It is precisely this destiny of Israel that makes the problem of Israel’s unbelief so intense!”13

(3) **The covenants.** The plural usage here, akin to “the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12), would include the Mosaic Covenant, but especially the Abrahamic Covenant as well as those ratifications given to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5), Jacob (Gen. 28:10-16), and David (II Sam. 7:8-17; 23:5) that reach toward fulfillment in the New Covenant (11:27).14 Implicit here is the understanding of the irrevocable nature and certain fulfillment that is at the heart of these “big promises” (Gen. 15:1-21; Deut. 7:7-9; Rom. 11:27-29).15

(4) **The law.** Literally we have ἡ νομοθεσία, or “the legislation,” that is the whole Mosaic legal system, moral, civil, and ceremonial, which in total was a divine revelation exclusively given by God to newly redeemed Israel. No other nation on earth was given this

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12 Lexical considerations are all in favor of construing the sonship of Rom. 9:4b with the fullest saving significance of Rom. 8:15, 23. What Murray seems to overlook is that the olive tree analogy in Rom. 11:17 implies that whatever blessings the Church enjoys, it does so because it has been engrafted into the cultivated tree to share in its rich root (11:17). It is the Jews who are the ‘natural branches’ (11:21) which, though now broken off (by a temporary hardening 11:7, 25), will be grafted in again (11:24): ‘all Israel will be saved’ (11:26). If the Church enjoys divine sonship, it must remember that it does so by participating in the people of God which is historical Israel ‘by nature’ (i.e. by a special act of sovereign election).” Justification of God, p. 32.

13 Piper, Justification of God, p. 34. Moo has preference for this view of eschatological glory, Romans, p. 563.

14 Here, as in all of Paul’s writings, there is not the slightest indication that he embraces an overarching, systematic “covenant of grace” under which the “covenants of promise” are administered.

15 Concerning Romans 11:29, Moo, Morris, and Murray agree that “the gifts and the calling of God [that] are irrevocable” refer to the listing here in vs. 4-5 of Israel’s national blessings.
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legal package (Ps. 147:19-20). Hence, in spite of its condemning characteristic, the law was a gift of the engraven, inscripturated, righteous will of God that none else had received except the race of Abraham. Thus “the law” was an exclusive and precious legacy.

(5) *The [temple] service.* This ἡ λατρεία, ἡ λατρεία, or “the service,” used in 12:1 to describe “spiritual service of worship,” is the whole sacrificial system, again a revelation from God that was unique to Judaism in a world full of paganism. While the law revealed the righteous will of God to redeemed Israel, and thus the sin of God’s people, the offerings maintained fellowship. Cranfield suggests that synagogue worship, piety in the home, prayer, recitation of the Shema (Deut. 6:4), etc., are likely to be included here.¹⁶

(6) *The promises.* Primarily they are the promises given to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (4:13-22; 15:8; Gal. 3:16-29; cf. Gen. 17:4-8; 26:3-5; 28:10-17), yet more broadly incorporate the promised blessings of right fellowship (II Cor. 6:16-7:1). They subsume under the larger covenantal promises, but particularly find their consummation in Messiah (Rom. 15:8; II Cor. 1:19-20; Gal. 3:16, 29). Yet again, these promises were only given to one, seemingly insignificant, chosen nation.

(7) *The fathers.* The expression, “whose are the father’s” has “Israelites” in v. 4 as its referent, not “the promises.”¹⁷ Thus it is the fathers who are the progenitors of the “Israelites;” it is the fathers who are the “rich root” of the olive tree (11:17-18) that has given rise to the “natural branches” (11:21, 24). But further, in spite of Israel’s unbelief and severance (11:17, 19-21), yet “God is able to graft them in again” (11:23). Why is this so? Because, “from the standpoint of the gospel they [unbelieving Israel] are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers [emphasis added]”(11:28), that is the certain covenantal promises.


Here we transfer from the covenants and promises to their supreme fulfillment, and the smooth though radical transition leads us to the primary reason why neither Israel has been finally abandoned nor the Word of God has failed. Again, “from whom is the Christ” has the “Israelites” in v. 4 as its referent. Here is the supreme glory of the Jew, namely that he is the progenitor of the Savior of the World; further, the Savior of the World is a Jew.¹⁸ But Piper adds: “Paul is saying far more than that the Messiah is a Jew. He is stressing that, with the coming of


¹⁷ Piper makes it clear, with support from H. A. W. Meyer, that “whom” v. 4, “”whose” v. 5a, and “whom” v. 5b, all refer to “Israelites” in v. 4. *Justification of God*, p. 21.

¹⁸ Calvin adds: “For if he [Christ] honored all mankind, when he coupleth himself to us by communicating our nature, much more did he honor them [the Israelites] with whom he would have a nearer bond of conjunction.” *Romans*, p. 248.
Christ, the privileges of Israel have reached their decisive climax." However a danger arises in suggesting too comprehensively that Messiah has come from Israel. So Paul immediately qualifies his prior statement. He refers us to truth previously taught in 1:3-4, concerning Christ as the theanthropic person, except that now he makes his point even more forcefully.

(1) Christ according to the flesh. We expand in translation, that from the “Israelites” of v. 4, the blessed people of God, comes “the Christ, the one who is according to the [Israelite] flesh.” Or as 1:3 declares, this Christ, “was born of a descendant of David according to [the] flesh.”

(2) Christ the blessed God. A great debate has centered on the question of punctuating the following statement. If a period concludes, “who [Christ] is over all.” then what follows is simply a doxology: “God [the Father is] blessed forever. Amen.” which the NIV has as a marginal alternative. Thus here Christ is not explicitly declared to be God. But a comma after “all” leads to the translation, “who [Christ] is over all, [who is] God blessed forever. Amen.” which the KJV, NKJV, and NASB have without any marginal alternative. In this case Christ is explicitly declared to be God, and there are very good reasons for defending this translation. However, given this to be wondrously true, the point is that in the midst of a catalog of distinctive benefits that have graced the nation of Israel, the crowning blessing is that of it being the earthly incubator of the Son of God, Emmanuel (Isa. 7:14). Hence, the Apostle cherishes this whole incubation process; it is not to be denigrated, even though the rank unbelief of the Jews is a present grief. The Word of God has recorded all of this birthing process; but it has not failed because of where we are presently observing this Abrahamic saga. We need wide-angle lenses when we attempt to comprehend God’s dealings with Israel, and Paul in Romans 9-11 helps us to have this comprehensive focus.

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19 Ibid., p. 43.

20 The main objection to the punctuation that declares Christ to be God is the argument that nowhere else does Paul make such a claim in his writings, and that in spite of Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; II Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13. However, the evidence upholding the expression here of Christ’s deity is substantial. Most of the early church fathers were of this opinion. 2. The grammar is decidedly in favor of Christ being described as “God blessed forever.” The word order here does not follow the common expression of a doxology that would have been second nature to Paul, the highly trained Jew. Barrett comments. “[I]f Paul wished to say ‘Blessed be God’, he should have placed the word ‘blessed’ (εὐλογητός) first in the sentence, as he does not.” Romans, p. 179. Cranfield writes that, “the superiority of the case for taking v. 5b to refer to Christ is so overwhelming as to warrant the assertion that it is very nearly certain that it ought to be accepted.” Romans, II, p. 468. Nigel Turner supports the NEB marginal translation, that is “from them [the patriarchs] sprang the Messiah, supreme above all, God blessed for ever.” Grammatical Insights, p. 15. 3. The thrust of Paul’s reasoning strongly supports the reference to Christ’s humanity and deity in parallel with 1:3-4; the Israelites have given birth to Christ from their flesh, yet he is also divine. But simply to declare Christ’s human/Jewish roots and then proclaim the Father blessed, is to suddenly change course while leaving the doctrine of Christ in mid air, that is in terms of 1:3-4 and Paul’s doctrine of Christ described elsewhere.
B. THE MERCIFUL ELECTION OF ISRAEL, VS. 6-33.

Having given us a panoramic view of the blessings that accrue to Israelites, and the intimation that God is by no means finished with the tribe of Abraham, yet Paul well knows just how easy it is for Jewish Christians in particular, as well as Gentile Christians, to be confused in this matter, and especially with regard to, first, the essential characteristics of a Jew in the sight of God, second, the basis upon which the Jews came into being, and third, of course their ultimate destiny.

1. Distinguished as children through promise, vs. 6-13.

So Paul goes to four portions of the Jewish Scriptures, to deal with the first two of these problems at this stage, that most likely the congregation at Rome has already pondered. This sacred corpus especially embodies the much vaunted blessings just enumerated. At the same time the gospel he has so passionately and carefully expounded in chapters 1-8, as well as fruitfully proclaimed to the Gentiles, is closely related to this concern. Does national Israel in its present unbelief indicate that the gospel, while clearly being effective amongst the Gentiles, is yet a failure amongst the Jews, inscripturated blessings notwithstanding? Therefore, has this comprehensive “word of God,” this grand plan of redemption failed?


Because of the glory of the aforementioned blessings that attach to an Israelite, a conflict has arisen. On the one hand, Paul has expressed profound sorrow at the present state of Israel with regard to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, who has been spurned by the nation that gave him birth. On the other hand, he has just listed the glorious benefits of being an Israelite. So is the integrity of God’s Word brought into question at this point? If the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are so wonderful, how come they do not find present fulfillment in national Israel as a whole with regard to its Messiah? Is the Word of God, the revelation of God’s sure covenant promises, at fault here so that there is in fact no certain destiny for national Israel in the light of the expansion of the Christian gospel amongst Gentiles? In no way, although clarification is now needed.

Basic to the problem is a misunderstanding as to the definition of an “Israelite.” Hence, “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel,” or, “they who are of the totality of [present national] Israel are not [all true] descendants of Israel [Jacob].” From the outset, let us clear away a common misunderstanding. Paul is not here, by implication, indicating that a real Jew at heart now has no national connection with the previously listed blessings; further, he is not here teaching that there are, along with believing Gentiles, only “spiritual” Jews in that they are descendants of Abraham by faith alone. Paul is not here saying there is a more broad, encompassing understanding of what it is to be a Jew. The Gentiles are not

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21 Piper, Justification of God, pp. 48-50.
22 Here the second and third instances of “Israel” in Romans 9-11 both refer to national Israel, though with a distinction. “[T]hey are not all Israel” refers to the present inclusive nation; those “who are descended from Israel” comprise the remnant about to be described, 9:27; 11:5, as part of the eventual “fulfillment” or “all Israel” of 11:12, 26.
in mind here; they are not mentioned until v. 24 where Paul writes of, “us [the Roman congregation as a whole], whom He [God] also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.” Quite the opposite, the Apostle is saying there is a more narrow, restrictive focus that finds, as John Murray puts it, “an ‘Israel’ within ethnic Israel.” Carefully consider the context of the following vs. 7-13. The Jews boasted that they were of the descendants of Abraham (Matt. 3:9; John 8:39) while Paul makes it disturbingly clear that you may be born of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob and not be an Israelite! Indeed the forthcoming Moslem claims to be a descendant of Abraham as well! A real Jew must be defined in sharper terms with regard to “the fathers,” cf. v. 5! Moo explains: “Paul is not saying ‘it is not only those who are Israel that are Israel,’ but ‘it is not all those who are of Israel that are Israel.’”

b. Isaac as a distinctive child of Abraham, vs. 7-9.

Keeping in mind Paul’s loving anxiety for unbelieving Israel, he upholds the Word’s integrity by expounding the unfailing hope that it offers even to a nation presently hardened. His argument in this vein will continue till the exultant doxology at 11:33-36. Thus he resorts to “the father” of the “fathers,” that is Abraham, and, in parallel with v. 6b, points out that not all of his physical descendants or “seed” are in fact his “children.”

(1) Isaac received the promise, not Ishmael, v. 7.

It is explicitly stated that, “through Isaac your descendants will be named” (Gen. 21:12) while it is implicitly indicated that Ishmael has not been chosen to be a vehicle of the covenant promise (Gen. 17:18-21), even though the firstborn was circumcised (Gen. 17:23-26), blessed (Gen. 17:20), and promised national prominence (Gen. 36:1-43). Rather Isaac is to be the means by which the promise made to Abraham would be passed on to its climactic fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). Yet not even all of the seed of Isaac are to be regarded as true children of Abraham. So what is

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23 Phillip Mauro is mistaken in writing: “This Scripture [Romans 9:6-8] gives us, in addition to the important truth that not all Israelites are included in the ‘Israel’ of God’s prophetic purposes, the closely allied truth that ‘the children of God,’ that is, those who are saved by the gospel, are "the children of the promise" (definite article in the original); and that they are ‘counted for the seed’ (of Abraham).” The Hope of Israel: What Is It? p. 204. Grover Gunn is likewise incorrect when he makes the same inclusive generalization: “The spiritual seed of Abraham are all those who truly share Abraham’s faith (Rom. 4:11-12), and these alone are the seed of Abraham in the most fundamental sense of the term (John 8:39; Rom. 9:6-7; 2:28. Only these will inherit the promises of the covenant in terms of real spiritual rest and an eternal inheritance.” Dispensationalism, Today, Yesterday, And Tomorrow, p. 234.


25 Moo, Romans, p. 574. Also Fred Zaspel notes that the previously listed Jewish blessings are not expounded here by Paul as being “now realized in the church; . . . they belong to Israel; . . . they have not become ineffectual for them; they offer no less a real hope today than ever.” Jews, Gentiles and the Goal of Redemptive History, pp. 12-13.
it that distinguishes the lineage of the godly seed, that passes from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob? The answer is in the fact that Abraham was “called” (Gen. 12:1; 15:7; Acts 7:3; Heb. 11:8), and became a child of “promise” (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:5-6; Gal. 3:16-19; Heb. 6:13-15), even as did Isaac and Jacob. Paul will make further explanation concerning this point. Suffice to say here that for the Apostle, as we have already seen, “calling” (4:17; 8:28, 30) and “promise” (1:1-2; 4:13-21), are wholly of elective, works excluding, sovereign grace.

(1) Isaac hoped in the promise, not the flesh, v. 8.

For all of his earthly blessings, yet Ishmael is designated as belonging to “the children of the flesh” (8:5) even as his life was void of the faith of his father. He was to be, “a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him, and he will live to the east of his brothers” (Gen. 16:12). Thus his descendants became known as Arabians as well as the troublesome Edomites. The essential distinguishing feature between the half-brothers was “promise,” which in Pauline terms means that Isaac was chosen, according to pure grace, to be an heir of the promise given to his father, in spite of Abraham’s initial preference for Ishmael (Gen. 17:18-19). Thus those children of Abraham who inherit “the promise” are “regarded [reckoned, λογιζομαι, logizomai, cf. 4:3; 8:18, 36] as [true spiritual] descendants,” as true Israelites. By an act of divine will, not intrinsic human merit, the promise is given with particularity, such as to Isaac but not Ishmael.

Luther comments: “Therefore it inexorably follows that the flesh does not make sons of God and the heirs of promise, but only the gracious election of God. . . . Therefore, why does man take pride in his merits and works, which in no way are pleasing to God? For they are good, or meritorious, works, but only because they have been chosen by God from eternity that they please Him.”

(2) Isaac was born of Sarah, not Hagar, v. 9.

The fact of Isaac being a child of promise, born in spite of all natural expectations to Sarah, is proved from Genesis 18:10. Here also is implicit contrast with the rejection of Ishmael, the child of Hagar according to human design (Gen. 16:1-4). Isaac is designated by divine sovereign will, not the advice of Abraham (Genesis 17:18-19), to be the true spiritual descendant according to the promise, the Abrahamic Covenant. Sarah was a free woman who gave birth “through the promise” while Hagar was an Egyptian maid who gave birth “according to the flesh” (Gal. 4:23). Thus, in spite of the “Ishmaels” and carnal seed of Abraham throughout Hebrew history, the promise originally given has not been invalidated, “the word of God has not failed,” v. 6a, for the seed of Isaac remains even to this day, and shall remain because “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable”

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26 Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, Lectures on Romans,25, p. 385.
(11:29). This concern then for “the justification of God” is the dominant matter that Paul is careful to maintain.  

a. Jacob as a distinctive child of Isaac, vs. 10-13.

The generation succeeding Isaac provides an even greater representation of the sovereign will of God that continues to work within the seed of Abraham in general. Whereas Isaac and Ishmael, as descendants of Abraham, were born separately to different mothers with contrasting status, in the case of Jacob and Esau, as descendants of Abraham, they were born as twins from the same mother. Consequently, the divine purpose, according to sovereign calling and promise, is alone the cause of the constituency of the true spiritual Israel, not the external forms and especially circumcision, cf. vs. 3-5, though for the Jewish Christian they may have significance. This principle applies to the constituency of the Christian church, even though the ordinances have significant legitimacy (Eph. 1:3-6).

(1) Jacob was born with his brother Esau, v. 10.

While Isaac represented the distinction of promise as opposed to flesh within the general seed of Abraham, now we have the same distinction made within the general seed of Isaac. This distinction within the ongoing lineage of the children of God only reinforces the mystery of God’s elective purposes that defy human contribution and allow God to populate heaven as He sees fit. Even the traditional seniority, which would normally accrue to Esau in his coming first from Rebekah’s womb, is turned on its head (Gen. 25:21-34; 27:1-38; 28:10-17; 32:24-32).

(2) Jacob was chosen as distinct from Esau, v. 11.

However, the distinction that God makes between Jacob and Esau must be appreciated in the most absolute sense of excluding human cooperation, and that preceding their earthly struggles and conflicts that commenced as Jacob clung to Esau’s heel at their birth (Gen. 25:26). Prior to their birth they had not “practiced [πράσσω, prassô, aorist, as active habit, cf. 2:3] anything good or bad.” Hence, God had a particular “elective purpose [cf. 8:28]” that distinguished between the two, before “they,” obviously “the twins,” had done, through personal action, “anything good or bad [foul].” The divine intent here was that God’s individual election of Jacob be upheld, human works be excluded, and His “[effectual] calling” be acknowledged in all of its humbling, pristine sovereignty!

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27 It is fitting that Piper’s study of Romans 9 is titled, The Justification of God.

28 Shedd comments: “St. Paul does not exclude sin altogether, so as to imply innocence, because one of these individuals was elected to salvation, and salvation presupposes sin and condemnation.” Commentary on Romans, p. 284. Of course the Pelagian would claim innocence at birth with sin originating from personal choice. However 5:12, 19 declares that sin is inherited, and inheritance certainly precedes birth.
(3) Jacob was favored over Esau, vs. 12-13.

Paul’s argument is humbling to the proud human condition, that boastful spirit of autonomy and self-determination, and especially the Jew who trusts in physical lineage with Abraham. Challenge can be expected. Hence proof must be forthcoming from Scripture. Two quotations follow.

(a) In the area of employment, v. 12.

Genesis 25:23. To Rebekah the Lord declared that, “the older [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob],” though this subjection is not evident during their lifetimes. However, as Paul writes he and others in Rome would be aware of the conflict and subjugation of Esau’s seed, the Edomites, by David, Amaziah, Uzziah, and finally the Maccabees. Such a reversal of the custom of privileged inheritance for the firstborn is solely according to divine prerogative. Thus promise overrides not only a patriarchal norm, but preeminently works, also faith, and even foreseen merit since “doing good [following birth]” is excluded, v. 11. Therefore this calling and covenantal promise, rooted in Abraham, is according to pure grace and mercy.

(b) In the area of esteem, v. 13.

Malachi 1:2-5. The prophet writes, “Jacob I loved [aorist], but Esau I hated [aorist],” suggesting prior determination. The Hebrew word here is נֶשְׁכָה, neschah, which usually means “intense detestation” and “loathing,” especially with regard to evil (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 6:16-19; Amos 5:15), idolatry (Jer. 44:3-4), divorce (Mal. 2:16), even hatred of those who hate God (Ps. 139:21-22); yet there is a weaker sense of “alienation” which the synonymous parallelism of Ezekiel 23:28 indicates. So here as well there are distinct reasons for the idea of “rejection” or “spurning” rather than “hatred” as emotional despite. Of course this interpretation in no way detracts from the absolute and particular choice of God. In the same vein Calvin declares of God at this point, “I have chosen him [Jacob] and refused this [Esau]. . . . I have rejected the Edomites, the progeny of Esau.”

It should be remembered that while Esau and his descendants led profane and sinful lives (Gen. 26:34-35; 27:41; Obad. 10-14), and Jacob lacked integrity, the elective/reprobate distinction made before

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29 Ibid., p. 286.
31 So Cranfield and Moo. Haldane similarly remarks: “It is evident that the quotation from the Old Testament of these words, ‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,’ is here made by the Apostle with the design of illustrating the great truth which he is laboring through the whole of this chapter to substantiate; namely, that in the rejection of the great body of the Jewish nation, as being ‘vessels of wrath,’ while He reserved for Himself a remnant among them as ‘vessels of mercy,’ verses 22-23, neither the purpose nor the promises of God had failed.” Romans, p. 469.
their birth was not based upon intrinsic or prospective “good or bad.” Hence the “hatred” or “rejection” here, not being based upon moral focus, means that the choice was within the inscrutable, sovereign counsel of God. Of course this thought of “rejection” appears here to be more than “preterition,” or the mere passing by of Esau. There was both a choice of Jacob in grace, and the abandonment of Esau to reprobation. However, the main point is that it was wholly God’s decision and as such exclusive of human merit or contribution. Therefore, the covenant, saving plan of God channeled through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is certain to be accomplished; thus “the Word of God has not and will not fail”!

Hence, God’s love for Jacob was grace in election and promise, and it was both corporate and particular. The partial quotation of Genesis 25:23 in v. 12 follows the Lord’s statement to Rebekah that, “two nations are in your womb.” The broader context of Malachi 1:1-5 certainly indicates a corporate meaning with regard to not only Israel, but also God’s rejection of Esau who incorporates his descendants, the nation of Edom. Nevertheless the fact of particular election/reprobation is in no way excluded here, as some would hope to accomplish. Surely corporate election is but the outworking of particular election, even as the corporate “remnant” (11:5) is comprised of individual, elect Jewish Christians. Further, the following reference to Pharaoh (v. 17) is most particular. Moo responds with three main arguments for the primacy of individual election at this juncture that are summarized as follows. First, Paul describes Jacob and Esau as individuals with regard to their conception, birth, and “works.” Second, Paul uses familiar, individualistic salvation words such as “election” and “calling” that are difficult to apply to a nation. Third, to assert the choice of Israel over Edom does not fit with his former argument regarding a “physical” and “spiritual” discrimination being made within Israel.

2. Distinguished as children through mercy, vs. 14-18.

The objection of v. 6a has been answered. However, knowing human nature, especially the jealous claim of autonomy, of self-determination, of human initiative, Paul is quick to anticipate another major objection that challenges the justice of God concerning the aforementioned election/reprobation and finds expression in three questions (vs. 14, 19). First, in v. 14, “Is not election/reprobation in conflict with human moral accountability and thus an indictment of God’s justice?” In other words, how can man

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33 This positive act of reprobation ought not to be pursued, especially by means of logical scrutiny, further than does Scripture, otherwise we may find our finiteness coming to a precipice that leads to being dashed to pieces by wrong conclusions. Probably the intricacies of lapsarianism fall into this category. Refer to L Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 118-125.

34 This is probably the most popular attempt used by many to avoid any thought of particularism at this point, such as with R. Shank, *Elect In The Son*. Refer to Murray’s detailed response to this concept, *Romans*, II, pp. 15-21.

35 Moo, *Romans*, p. 585.
be judged by God for his moral stance before God if it has been predetermined by God’s arbitrary decree?


Paul’s rhetorical question (cf. 3:5; 6:1; 7:7) is surely drawn from past experience, even as the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty has never ceased to stimulate the defensive human reaction of “Yes God is sovereign, but man is not a robot,” or “man has free-will.” The question, “There is no injustice with God, is there?” expects a negative answer, along with the emphatic, “May it never be!” In the light of v. 6a, the Apostle’s emphatic denial here cannot be overstated, especially as the term “injustice,” ἀδικία, adikia, is literally translated in the KJV as “unrighteousness.” To charge God with a crime is a very serious matter indeed; it has an unholy audaciousness, an impudence about it which is hardly fitting for the finite creature to bring as a charge against the infinite God. But man in sin has never lacked insolence before the Almighty!

b. The principle of election through mercy upheld, vs. 15-16.

It is significant that as Paul raises a contentious issue, even as Romans 9 is probably the most contentious chapter in all of Romans, in response he provides more separate Scripture quotations, eleven in all, to uphold his overall case, than in any other comparable section in this Epistle. The Apostle appears to logically deal with the ramifications of God’s election of Jacob first with reference to Moses, vs. 15-16, then the reprobation of Esau second with reference to Pharaoh, vs. 17-18.

(1) This sovereign mercy is according to Scripture, v. 15.

Here the quotation of Exodus 33:19 is based upon Moses’ ongoing desire for the saving, reassuring presence of the LOR D so that, “I and Your people [already backslidden, cf. ch. 32] be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth,” v. 16. So the LOR D favorably responds declaring that Moses, as Israel’s representative, will witness the glory of His name, signifying that, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious [Israel], and will show compassion to whom I will show compassion,” in spite of the Golden Calf incident. Here the covenant given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was maintained, in spite of offending sin, solely on account of sovereign “mercy” and “compassion.” Both terms are distinguishable as relieving love and pitiable love, yet the parallelism here simply suggests “grace” (11:5-6). Hence, the election of Jacob according to v. 13 was based solely upon the same divine prerogative described here. The parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16) is illustrative of the selective mercy described here, when Christ declares, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?” v. 15. Thus Stephen Charnock declares:

The apostle joins mercy and this sovereignty of his will together (Rom. 9:15), . . . He is so absolute a sovereign that he will give no account of these matters but his own good pleasure. Why he renews man is merely voluntary; why he
saves renewed man is just; why he justifies those that believe is justice to Christ and mercy to them; but why he bestows faith on any is merely the good pleasure of his will. . . . [O]ur Savior himself renders this only as a reason of his distinguishing mercy, wherein himself doth, and therefore we must, acquiesce (Matt. 11:27), ‘Even so, Father, for so it pleased thee.’

(2) This sovereign mercy is exclusive of human capacity, v. 16.

From the divine declaration there is derived the divine principle. “Therefore, it surely follows that [it is] not of the one willing or the one who is running, but of the God of Abraham showing mercy.” However, the implied subject “it” must first be identified, and the preceding context suggests God’s “mercy” and “compassion,” directed toward the seed of promise flowing from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In more simple and timeless terms, the contrast is made between man and God. In more broad terms, with man in his unholy predicament on earth and God in his holy glory in heaven, the question arises as to how man may be reconciled with the offended God.

One alternative is for man to attempt “willing” and “running,” the present tenses reflecting persistent effort; here he offers self-determination and self-exertion, and both are excluded, though not absolutely. For as Luther comments:

This is not to be understood in the sense that this is a matter only of God’s showing mercy, as if it were not necessary for a person to will or exert himself, but rather the fact that a man does will or exert himself is not of his own power but of the mercy of God, who has given this power of willing and doing, without which man of himself can neither will or make exertion.

Thus faith is not excluded here, except it be regarded as a work of autonomous man, as the free-will response of man, even as vs. 30-33 indicate. However, in contemporary evangelicalism there is much evangelism that is a vain display of “willing” and “running,” of decisionism, rationalism, ritualism, abstract believism, etc.

The other alternative is with regard to God “who has mercy.” Here this mercy is not simply on offer, but active in a most particular and effectual sense. In other words, “Salvation is from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9), and the self-renouncing, works-renouncing faith that truly lays hold of this gospel principle is that which wholly trusts in the mercy of God. Indeed such faith may well not be too much aware of the profound distinctions being made by Paul at this point concerning election and reprobation. Luther warns against the unconverted becoming engrossed in such matters, as does J. C. Ryle.

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38 “I am issuing the warning that no man whose mind has not been purged should rush into these speculations, lest he fall into the abyss of horror and hopelessness; but first let him purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Jesus Christ. For I myself would not even read these things if the order of the lection and necessity did not compel me to do so. For this is very strong wine and the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect, that is, the most excellent theology, of which the apostle says: ‘Among the mature we do impart wisdom’ (I Cor. 2:6). But I am a baby who needs milk, not solid food (cf. I Cor.
But simply mention the rich and free mercy of God to such a newly saved sinner and he will affirm it with the greatest enthusiasm. Then follows enlarged understanding.

I sought the Lord and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of Thee.

c. The principle of reprobation through hardening, vs. 17-18.

Here the antithesis of sovereign “mercy”, as reflected in God’s love of Jacob, is declared to be sovereign “hardening” as reflected in God’s rejection, even reprobation of Esau. The sober nature of this aspect of God’s dealings with fallen man is reflected in Calvin’s notable comment that, “[t]he decree [of reprobation] is dreadful indeed [decretum horribile], I confess.”

(1) This sovereign hardening is according to Scripture, v. 17.

The specific reference here is to Exodus 9:16, where, following the fifth plague of cattle disease, the sixth plague of boils has struck Pharaoh and all the Egyptians. In vs. 14 God declares that the plagues have been designed so that, “you [Pharaoh] may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.” He could have rightly judged and crushed Pharaoh in an instant, v. 15; however, “I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth,” v. 16, cf. 10:1. Hence, God’s intention is that by means of his saving and judging power manifest toward Israel and Egypt, Jacob and Esau, His unique glory might be displayed. Thus the God who has decisively spoken and given mercy to Moses, v. 15, is the same God who has decisively spoken and given hardness to Pharaoh, v. 17, all according to His just and inscrutable will. Haldane declares that, “the birth, the life, and the situation of Pharaoh were all of Divine appointment.”

Pharaoh was particularly “raised up” in no different sense than were Judas (John 6:70), and “Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your [God’s] hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28; cf. 2:23). Yet none of these who were reprobate would have claimed to be under divine duress. Herein lies the
transcendent truth of antinomy, the particularity of God’s dealings with man, even as the potter forms the clay according to his design, vs. 20-21. God is totally sovereign over man who is at the same time fully responsible for his actions under this sovereignty. As Loraine Boettner has written: “Predestination and free agency [thus accountability] are twin pillars of a great temple, and they meet above the clouds where the human gaze cannot penetrate.” Hence, humble caution is required here. Haldane warns that while the “truth respecting Pharaoh is what the Scriptures declare; . . . we ought never to pretend to go further into the deep things of God than they go before us, but submissively to bow to every Divine declaration.”

(2) This sovereign hardening is exclusive of demerit, v. 18.

Again, from the divine declaration there is derived the divine principle. “Therefore it follows that He, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, shows mercy [present tense] to whoever He desires, and likewise He hardens [present tense] whoever He desires.” For Paul this hardening, σκληρύνω, sklērunō, appears to be an ongoing process, rather than a past appointment, that is associated with “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,” v. 22. Such a process is consistent with the repeated description of this hardening action by God (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8), so that Pharaoh’s heart becomes increasingly unyielding. However, as Edwards well points out, the method of God’s hardening activity here is not to be construed as direct so as to make God the indictable author of sin. Rather, God introduces circumstances that will aggravate Pharaoh’s recalcitrant heart. These circumstances are God’s irritant that, like the law (7:7-13), aggravate the sinner to the point where, without the grace of the Spirit, the soul is increasingly hardened. However, Boice rightly warns us: “God’s raising Pharaoh to this position [of dominion] does not mean that he made him sin. Pharaoh sinned because he chose to sin, and he resisted God and hardened

42 By “antinomy” is not meant “contradiction” or “paradox,” but the fact of two undoubted truths that, while appearing to be in conflict, yet are both acknowledged to be true in spite of man’s inability to comprehend reconciliation. Consider the question of whether light is wave and/or particle.

43 Loraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, p. 222.

44 Haldane, Romans, p. 479.

45 “When God is here spoken of as hardening some of the children of men, it is not to be understood that God by any positive efficiency hardens any man’s heart. There is no positive act in God, as though he put forth any power to harden the heart. To suppose any such thing would be to make God the immediate author of sin. God is said to harden men in two ways: by withholding the powerful influences of his Spirit, without which their hearts will remain hardened, and grow harder and harder; in this sense he hardens them, as he leaves them to hardness. And again, by ordering those things in his providence which, through the abuse of their corruption, become the occasion of their hardening. Thus God sends his word and ordinances to men which, by their abuse, prove an occasion of their hardening. So the apostle said, that he was unto some ‘a savor of death unto death’ [II Cor. 2:15-16]. So God is represented as sending Isaiah on this errand, to make the hearts of the people fat, and to make their ears heavy, and to shut their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed’ (Isa. 6:10). Isaiah’s preaching was, in itself, of a contrary tendency, to make them better. But their abuse of it rendered it an occasion of their hardening. As God is here said to harden men, so is he said to put a lying spirit in the mouth of the false prophets (II Chron. 18:22). That is, he suffered a lying spirit to enter into them.” Jonathan Edwards, Works, II, p. 849. Similarly Shedd, Romans, pp. 291-3.
his heart because it is the nature of sin to harden hearts.”

Even so, it is the supremacy of the divine will dominant in this verse that, like v. 16, is the humbling principle with regard to the constituency of the true and spiritual seed of Abraham.

Some have suggested that God hardens the heart of Pharaoh, to begin with in 9:12, only after Pharaoh himself first hardened his own heart in 8:15, 32. However, this overlooks the prophecy of 4:21; 7:3 and, as Moo points out, the lack of such an explanation in response to the objection of v. 19. According to the process Edwards annunciates, God may justly harden, any sinner that He chooses.

3. Distinguished as children through sovereignty, vs. 19-29.

Surely Paul responds here just as he has on countless occasions in witnessing to Jews who have wrestled with the question of the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. Conservative “Pharisees held that all was not predestined and that though divine providence governed all things, man still had freedom of choice. . . . [Liberal] Saducees denied predestination and any [specific] divine influence on men’s doings, good or bad.” Hence the preceding instruction would be regarded as “predestinarian,” to use Jewish terminology, and definitely unorthodox.

a. Man’s objection to sovereign mercy/reprobation, v. 19.

The essential complaint is that God appears to be unfair if He determines individual human destiny while at the same time holding the individual to be accountable for his belief or unbelief. How can God judge or “find fault” with faithless Esau and Pharaoh if He also determined the bent of their choosing? Surely they were unable to “resist His will”? While a polarized situation is envisaged here with regard to the relationship between man and God, it is obvious that the objector, representative of the natural man, is far more concerned with the cause of man than of God.


Paul’s response commences with a more jealous regard for God rather than for man, even as this priority is always an indication of true Christian conversion (Gal. 4:9). Yet he weaves his fervent response in such a way that we are soon returned to the sovereignty of God’s calling of not only the righteous remnant at the present within national Israel, but also the Gentiles.

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46 James Montgomery Boice, Romans, III, pp. 1094-5.
47 So Lenski, Morris, Stott. C. H. Dodd, representative of liberal opinion which tends to impose a human perspective, comments that here Paul’s “thought declines from its highest level. . . . He pushes what we must describe as an unethical determinism.” Romans, p. 158.
48 Moo, Romans, pp. 598-9.
49 Abraham Weinfeld, Basic Jewish Ethics and Freedom of Will, p. 7. Josephus makes the same assessment, though he adds that the Essenes were strict predestinarians. Antiquities, XIII, V, 9.
He has full rights over the creature, vs. 20-21.

Does man have the “right”, assumed to be allowed by God, to question the purposes of God? Does the creature have the “right” to question the ways of the Creator? Of course the answer here can only be determined when the origin of these “rights” is discovered. Surely God alone establishes the “right,” not man. Sinful, rebellious man may claim “rights,” while they may not have connection with the “righteousness of God.” So here, Paul responds to an objection that suggests necessary “rights,” especially autonomy, that are in fact “wrongs” that emanate from the aspirations of fallen man.

C. H. Dodd makes pompous and consistently liberal comments at this point, not unlike the objector that Paul responds to:

Has the potter no right over the clay? It is a well-worn illustration. But the trouble is that a man is not a pot; he will ask, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ and he will not be bludgeoned into silence. It is the weakest point in the whole epistle... [Paul] has just represented [God] as a non-moral despot... [When Paul, normally a clear thinker, becomes obscure, it usually means that he is embarrassed by the position he has taken up.]

We will respond to this as the argument further unfolds.

(a) Who is man that he questions God’s design?, v. 20a.

Paul does not give a direct reply to v. 19 since the question is born of proud impertinence. God is not answerable to man, though man is answerable to God even as Job discovered (Job 38:1-40:2); yet without an explanation for his troubles he was humbled to the point where he confessed: “I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth” (Job 40:4-5). Again, without an explanation concerning Job’s troubles, yet submission to, rather than understanding of, the sovereignty of God resulted in rest and greater blessing. So Jonathan Edwards writes:

Let us, therefore, labor to submit to the sovereignty of God. God insists, that his sovereignty be acknowledged by us, and that even in this great matter which so nearly and infinitely concerns us, as our own eternal salvation. This is the stumbling-block on which thousands fall and perish; and if we go on contending with God about his sovereignty [as Paul’s objector and Dodd do], it will be our eternal ruin. It is absolutely necessary that we should submit to God, as our absolute sovereign, and the sovereign over our souls; as one who may have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will.

Certainly vs. 22-23 further expand upon the purpose of God rejecting Esau/Pharaoh and loving Jacob/Moses; but Paul regards it as unnecessary that he reply to the charge of divine injustice. As Morris

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50 Dodd, Romans, p. 159.
52 Moo comments: “Paul never offers here—or anywhere else—a ‘logical’ solution to the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility that he creates. . . . Paul is content to hold the truths of God’s absolute
adds: “Paul is not saying there is no answer to the question; he is saying that the question is illegitimate.” Once again, the infinite God does not have to explain everything to finite man; on the other hand, finite man ought to acknowledge his finiteness and submit (Deut. 29:29).

(b) Does the molder have to answer to the thing molded? v. 20b.

The illustration concerning clay manufacture might be freely translated here: “Shall the plastic and formable substance [πλάσμα, plasma] say to the plastic fabricator and substance former [πλάσσω, plassō, cf. LXX Gen. 2:7; I Tim. 2:13], ‘Why did you make or fabricate me according to this particular design?’” Paul draws upon Isaiah 29:16; 45:9, which indicate that the divine Potter in question does not act capriciously, but always righteously. However, this does not deny Him the right to fashion both premium items for “honorable use” and standard items for “common use, v. 21.

(c) Does the potter have to answer to the clay? v. 21.

The same basic illustration draws upon familiar Old Testament imagery (Isa. 29:15-16; 45:9; 64:8-9; Jer. 18:1-10), and probably from the Apocrypha (Wisd. 15:7). Further, from v. 20 where πλάσσω, plassō, means to form or manufacture with existing substance or clay, not to create, so here the potter takes a common lump of preexisting clay, such as from the womb of Rebecca by “one man, our father Isaac” v. 10, and makes “one vessel for honorable use and another for common [dishonorable] use” (cf. II Tim. 2:20). Paul is not saying that God creates men as sinners, but rather that he takes the common lump of sinners and deals with them individually, not merely as a sinful nation as the context of Isaiah 29:15-16; 45:9; 64:8-9; Jer. 18:1-10, suggests, according to His purposes of election and reprobation. So Hodge comments: “It is not the right of God to create sinful beings in order to punish them, but his right to deal with sinful beings according to his good pleasure. . . . He pardons or punishes as he sees fit.”

sovereignty— in both election and in hardening— and of full responsibility without reconciling them. We would do well to emulate his approach.” Romans, p. 601.

55 Morris, Romans, p. 364.

54 “For when a potter kneads the soft earth and laboriously molds each vessel for our service, he fashions out of the same clay both the vessels that serve clean uses and those for contrary uses, making all in like manner; but which shall be the use of each of these the worker in clay decides.” Wisdom of Solomon, 15:7. Refer to Piper’s study of this passage, Justification of God, pp. 195-6.

55 Charles Hodge, Romans, p. 319. So Boice, Haldane, Murray, Piper, Shedd. Luther quotes Augustine: “For grace alone distinguishes the redeemed from the condemned, all having been mingled in one mass of perdition by the common cause of their common origin.” Works, 25, pp. 388-9. Logic may lead to a conclusion that God has predestined and created sinners. However, such a logical conclusion also leads to the indictment of God as being complicit in sinful origination. Such an inference has a very obnoxious and unholy ring about it. Further, Scripture nowhere explicitly declares God to be the creator of sinners; the wicked angels and man are solely represented as being responsible for their sin.
With regard to Dodd at this point, his protest that in relation to the Potter, “man is nor a pot,” has the inference that “man is more than a pot, man is something, man was made in the image of God.” But Paul here is not dealing with relative status, rather origination. So that whether we consider a pot, a petunia, a pussycat, or a person, all are creatures and all equally have their existence at God’s sole discretion. Dodd’s protest is tinged with the arrogance of vaunted autonomy. This is further indicated when he writes that man, “will ask, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” On the contrary, man in innocence would not have so complained. Sinful man certainly would have done so. On the other hand authentic Christians are to “entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (I Pet. 4:19).

(2) He has full rights in showing mercy/reprobation, vs. 22-29.

Paul’s rhetorical method often includes the rejoinder of a series of questions concerning which he does not give direct explanation since, by their very nature the answers are all too obvious. This was God’s way of dealing with Job (Job 38-39), even as Paul uses the same method in 2:21-23; 3:5-8; 11:33-35; Gal. 3:1-5, and here. While God is not obliged to answer the implied charge of injustice in v. 19, Paul is anxious to reveal a divine purpose in God’s dealings with men that the objector has not considered, but ought to understand. The Potter’s ways are not capricious, but glorious in their outworking, even as they incorporate both Jew and Gentile; it is the perspective of the Potter that Paul is anxious to uphold.

(a) Enduring vessels prepared for ruin, v. 22.

“Suppose,” says Paul indicating reality rather theory, “that God, while being immediately desirous to bring his wrath and power upon vessels prepared for destruction, after the manner of Pharaoh’s heart being hardened, yet had good reason to be exceedingly patient for a time [cf. 2:4] so as to delay his judgment? Have you thought of such a possibility? because it is in fact the case!” So Hodge expounds:

The preparation intended is that illustrated in the case of Pharaoh. God did not make him wicked and obdurate; but as a punishment for his sin, he so dealt with him that the evil of his nature revealed itself in a form, and under circumstances, which made him a fit object of the punitive [hardening?] justice of God. The dealings of God as a sovereign are often, by the Jewish writers, spoken of in the same terms as those here used.”

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56 Haldane comments that, “they are vessels of wrath, and by their sins they are fitted for destruction.” Romans, p. 493; likewise Stott. However, while the agent of this “preparation for destruction” is not explicitly stated, the most likely identification is God, after the manner of the potter who makes some vessels for “common [dishonorable]” use, v. 21. Literally, these vessels, “having been prepared [perfect passive participle of καταρτίζω, katartizo¯, not aorist] for destruction,” are involved in a hardening process, cf. vs. 18-19, as 1:24, 26, 28 reflect, that comes to a climax of judgment (Phil. 1:28; 3:18-19). Refer to Cranfield, Romans, II, pp. 495-6.

57 Hodge, Romans, pp. 321-2.
(b) Honoring vessels prepared for glory, v. 23.

The supposition of v. 22 is now asserted as truth, except that the focus now turns to the reason for the divine forbearance. God purposely delayed judgment so that the “vessels of mercy . . . prepared beforehand" might display the “riches of His glory.” This delay was when God “overlooked the times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30), when “in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed” (Rom. 3:25). This temporary tolerance was exemplified in God’s dealing with Pharaoh. The major divine intent is the proclamation of the radiant glory of God’s sovereign grace by means of redemptive glory being given to particular, chosen vessels, in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4). This was the result of God’s patience with Pharaoh that ended with the display of God’s glory through the glorious redemption of Israel from Egypt. This contrast in God’s dealing with both the reprobate and elect only heightens the glory of God’s ways. As Piper comments: “It behooves every great artist to demonstrate in the variety of his work the full range of his skill and power.” Thus these “honorable vessels” reflect or refund glory back to its source. Such recipients were “chosen in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4; cf. Rom. 8:29-30). So, “He [God the Father] predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:5-6). Thus Isaac Watts sums up this whole truth:

What if, to make his terrors known,
He lets his patience long endure,
Suff’ring vile rebels to go on,
And seal their own destruction sure?

What if He means to show his grace,
And his electing love employs
To mark out some of mortal race,
And form them fit for heav’nly joys?

But, O my soul! If truths so bright
Should dazzle and confound thy sight,
Yet still his written will obey,
And wait the great decisive day.

(c) Calling vessels as a holy remnant, v. 24-29.

However the expression “vessels of mercy” in v. 23 requires qualification. Bearing in mind that the church at Rome is probably

58 In contrast with the perfect tense used to describe the vessels of wrath “having been prepared” for destruction in v. 22, here the aorist is used to describe the vessels of mercy “prepared beforehand” for glory. Here we also have the use of προετοιμάζω, proetoimazo that has more the idea of preordination, rather than κατατεχω, katartizo, in v. 22. Cranfield emphasizes this distinction, Romans, II, p. 497.

59 Piper, Justification of God, p. 187.
comprised of more Gentiles than Jews, an explanation is warranted here since the preceding focus could easily be misunderstood, as if the elect was solely comprised of the Jewish remnant enumerated in 9:6-13. While such a conclusion ought to be easily dismissed in the light of Paul’s ministry, yet a biblical explanation is called for, and is now forthcoming. His earlier canvas becomes refined and inclusive of greater detail, specifically the additional incorporation, equally effectual, of the Gentiles within God’s “vessels of mercy,” and thus to prove that, “in you [Abraham] all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:6-9). The “us” then of v. 24 is inclusive of all the saints at Rome, yet as they are distinguished as “called Gentiles” and “called Jews.”

1) A Gentile remnant according to Hosea, vs. 24-26.

Hosea was a prophet to the ten apostate northern tribes distinguished, from the southern kingdom of Judah, as the kingdom of Israel. His ministry was during the last 25 years of that decaying nation, prior to Assyrian exile in 722 BC.

a) God’s distinguishing mercy, v. 24.

Notice that not all Jews or Gentiles are “called.” Paul reverts to a favorite grace term, that is sovereign “calling,” cf. 8:28, 30; 9:11, so that we are reminded once again of God’s selective dealings in pure mercy, though now with broader focus on the nations of the world.

b) God’s distinguishing calling of Gentiles (Hos. 2:23b), v. 25.

This free quotation from the LXX, similar to the usage of Peter (I Pet. 2:10), refers to Israel as “not being God’s people” on account of spiritual and material adultery. Yet through the sheer mercy of God, He “will call them My people.” Further, “I will have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion” (Hos. 2:23a). But could not Paul have chosen more explicit proof of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God? (Ps. 22:27; 86:9; Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 56:6-7; Jer. 3:17; Mic. 4:1-2; Zech. 2:11). Probably the language of contrast is helpful to Paul’s argument. However Keil explains that this is not mere application: “Through its apostasy from God, Israel had become like the Gentiles, and had fallen from the covenant of grace with the Lord. Consequently, the re-adoption of the Israelites as children of God was a practical proof that God had also adopted the Gentile world as His children.”

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60 Keil, The Minor Prophets, pp. 49-50. Also Hodge, Shedd: “[A]s they [the tribes of Israel] had been excluded from the theocracy, and so were virtually heathen, the apostle regards them as the type of the Gentiles
c) God’s distinguishing calling of Gentiles (Hos. 1:10), v. 26.

In full from Hosea this quotation reads: “Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured and numbered; and in the place [of exile?] where it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ it will be said to them, “You are the sons of the living God.” Paul renders the last statement, “There they shall be called sons of the living God.” This is the main point, namely that the Gentiles shall be engrafted into the people of God according to purest sovereign mercy (11:17).

2) A Jewish remnant according to Isaiah, vs. 27-29.

Isaiah was a prophet, contemporary with Hosea, who ministered during c. 740-690 B.C. to the two southern tribes known as the kingdom of Judah. Both quotations concern apostasy that preceded the Babylonian captivity which was followed by the return of a remnant to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah. Paul’s immediate concern is with regard to the present state of the nation of Israel, that is its pervasive unbelief that is yet not total.

a) God’s distinguishing call of Jews (Isa. 10:22-3), vs. 27-28.

Isaiah’s impassioned “cry” is onomatopoeic, krêzw, krazô, being an intense shout, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sands of the sea, it is a remnant that will be saved,” that is only about 55,000 in the first three contingents. “For the LORD will execute His word on the earth thoroughly and swiftly,” that is, His judgment of exile as well as the preservation of a remnant. However for Paul, the big point is the maintenance of this remnant until the present time, and thus the fulfillment of God’s covenant, not its negation. Thus God’s calling to the Jews remains, Q.E.D, v. 6.

b) God’s distinguishing call of Jews (Isa. 1:9), v. 29.

This is prophetic confirmation of the preceding truth, namely that only God’s covenant mercy in His calling and preservation of the remnant, but here designated as a “seed” and likewise in v. 8 as “the children of promise,” distinguishes Israel from such dregs as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, the distinctive characteristic of this remnant is not even faith or intrinsic righteousness, but “God who has mercy,” v. 16 (cf. Mal. 3:6; Rom. 11:28-29).

universally.” Romans, p. 301. See W. Edward Glenny in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, pp. 176-9, also S. Lewis Johnson in The Coming Millennial Kingdom, pp. 203-6.
Thus Haldane comments: “Had it not been for this election, through which God had before prepared vessels of mercy unto glory, neither Jew nor Gentile would have escaped, but all would have remained vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.”

4. Distinguished as children through the righteousness of faith, vs. 30-33.

It is significant that the role of faith has not been referred to in this chapter up to this point, though it will now be mentioned three times, and especially the key expression, “the righteousness which is by faith. This leads us to conclude that Paul, while having emphasized the significance of faith, especially in chs. 3-4, now reverts to its non-meritorious characteristic, its pivotal importance following the establishment of God’s absolute sovereignty in the saving of sinners.

In a similar vein, it is also significant that the terms “faith” and “righteousness,” so dominant in Romans 3-8, not having been mentioned in 9:1-29, are now once again given familiar prominence. It would seem that while divine sovereignty and particular election are of fundamental importance, especially as they relate to the saving of the remnant Jew up to the present, yet the particulars of the gospel are not to be disregarded now that we have just been reminded of the incorporation of the Gentile in vs. 24-26. This reclaimed thrust will continue into 10:1-21 where “faith” and “righteousness” remain as prominent terms, though still with particular application to Israel as a nation.

a. Faith righteousness that the Gentiles attained, v. 30.

“What shall we say then?” is a rallying call that redirects focus from God’s sovereign dealing with the Jew and Gentile to a paradox that relates to the present status of the Jew and Gentile in terms of the gospel of justification by faith. Presently, we have the condition of “Gentiles who did not pursue [were not running as an athlete, hunting, pressing for as a passionate pursuit, present tense of διώκω, diókō] righteousness.” There they were in the “streets and lanes” of this world minding their own defiling business and pagan religion, without a thought for Moses and his distinct righteous claims, when suddenly they found themselves invited to a divine banquet. Without any pretension, while aware of their poverty and unworthiness, as with the centurion who confessed, “Lord, . . . I am not worthy for You to come under my roof” (Luke 7:6), they accepted, they “attained” or “seized” at the point of faith [aorist καταλαμβάνω, katalambanō] the free grace that confronted them. They believed the offer of grace and were accepted! They were “the poor and crippled and blind and lame” who were invited to God’s “big dinner” (Luke 14:16-24).

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61 Haldane, Romans, p. 501.
62 Refer to the helpful exposition of R. C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of our Lord, pp. 127-31 in which he not only distinguishes this parable from that of the Marriage of the King’s Son in Matt. 22:1-14, but points out that the slave represents those initial “preachers, evangelists, [and] apostles” who were spurned by Israel in general and subsequent “ambassadors of Christ” who urge the Gentiles to partake of this feast of grace.
The result is that Gentiles obtained “righteousness,” but more specifically “the righteousness of [solely obtained through] faith,” as distinct from righteousness derived from “the law of works” (3:27). As the following context indicates, this righteousness is wholly disassociated from the law of Moses, and obviously is that righteousness which is perfectly embodied in Jesus Christ’s atonement and imputed through faith alone. Such *sola fide* is that of Abraham, “who believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (6:3). Hence, this is a righteousness of legal standing; the idea of a progressive righteousness, which in fact they were not pursuing, is untenable in the light of the ungodly status of Gentiles here described. This is the righteousness that justifies through faith alone (1:16; 3:21-22, 28, 30; 4:3-5, 9-12), the gift of righteousness (5:17).

b. Faith righteousness that Israel squandered, vs. 31-33.

But what of Israel, that is the nation as a whole? To begin with, by way of contrast, it had a “law of righteousness” set before it; but what was that “law”? Contrast with the lack of Gentile pursuit would suggest the distinctive law of Moses, the law that elicits the “practice of righteousness” (10:5), rather than law as a general principle.

(1) Striving, they did not achieve, v. 31.

It was “hunting, pressing for, as a passionate pursuit [present tense of διέκκοψα, διὸκα], righteousness,” which legal standard of required perfection it did not arrive at or attain (Gal. 3:10; 5:3). This was “a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (10:2), as embodied in Saul before he became Paul (Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14). However, Israel did not achieve that which it sought, and implicit here is human inability in this regard (8:3-4), as well as a misunderstanding concerning the true purpose of the law (Gal. 3:19, 21).

(2) Working, they did not believe, v. 32a.

But why did not Israel achieve God-pleasing conformity to that “Mosaic law of righteousness” which it so zealously pursued? To begin with, Paul does not answer that Israel’s failure here was due to the fact that the “Potter” created an insufficient number of “vessels of mercy” (cf. vs. 21-23)! Here he is simply concerned with accountability. In a sense the nation became seemingly so near and yet in reality so far from a saving knowledge of God. While having privileged status, yet the Jews were void of the true characteristics of that status. So how could Israel be such a contradiction?

(a) *Israel did not pursue God by faith.* As a people already redeemed, it misused the law by attributing to it saving rather than sanctifying power. As the children of God through the grace of redemption from Egypt, their redeemed status was perverted. The Jews did not deny faith,
but rather believed in synergistic, bilateral religion, whereby faith and works unite to consummate salvation. Redemption out of Egypt was certainly all of grace; the only response required was faith in the passover lamb (Ex. 12:13) and God's saving power (Ex. 14:13). However, following this deliverance of God, the place of the law for an already redeemed people was misapplied. In other words, Israel bought into Galatianism (Gal. 3:1-3).

(b) **Israel did pursue God by works.** Again, the Jews did **not** seek salvation by works alone. Their attitude is best reflected by the Pharisee who prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this [contemptible] tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get” (Luke 18:11-12). Of course the gratitude for grace was merely patronage, while the declaration of works was proud publicity. Faith here was for infused grace, not faith in the sole saving power of God! The result was failure in several realms. First the Jews did not achieve the standard they aspired to. Second they did not gain justification with God, but rather condemnation. Third, they degenerated into proud hypocrisy. Fourth, they ended up crucifying their Messiah who had become “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense,” v. 33.

(3) Pursuing, they stumbled, v. 32b-33.

It may well be that here Paul further alludes to a favorite athletic representation of spiritual pilgrimage. “Pursuing” in vs. 30-31, present tense of διέκοψα, διοίκω, and by inference in v. 32a, is qualified by the tragedy of a “fall” with regard to the Jews. They “stumbled over [aorist of προσκόπτω, proskopto] the stumbling stone [πρόσκομμα proskomma],” that is in their strenuous pursuit of works righteousness, a “stone” of pure redeeming grace appeared in their way that caused them to be confounded and fall.

(a) The “stone” is Christ, cf. v. 33b; 10:11, a “living stone,” ordained to be “the very corner stone” of “a spiritual house” ( I Pet. 2:4-7), “a holy temple in the Lord, . . . a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22), who gets in the way of attempted salvation through works righteousness; he is a sore irritant to all legalism. Thus he becomes a disturbing interruption, an “offense” or “stumbling block,” σκάνδαλον, skandalon (I Cor. 1:23; cf. Gal. 5:11). One option is to attempt to run over and crush that which gets in the way of human works religion (John 11:47-50), v. 32b.

(b) The “stone” of Christ’s righteousness conflicts with legal works. The quotation of Isaiah 28:16; 8:14 declares that God set such a disturbing stone in the center of Judaism or “Zion,” again, so as to build “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). Contrary to militant efforts to eliminate such humiliating intrusion, this same “stone” of Christ’s atonement, his righteous person and redemptive work, elicits solitary faith that repudiates self-righteousness and wholly
believes in this propitiatory, substitutionary righteousness. Further, concerning the opponents of this “stone” (God the Son) which God the Father has firmly set in Jerusalem, “the stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; . . . and he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust” (Matt. 21:42, 44), v. 33.

(c) Just as the Gentiles attained “the righteousness which is “by faith,”” v. 30, and Israel did not pursue this same acceptable righteousness “by faith,” v. 32, so sola fide is the vital principle of v. 33. In context, the point here is that, “he [the Jew] who exclusively believes [is believing, present participle] in Him [Jesus Christ as the lamb of God] will not be disappointed [put to shame at the day of reckoning, cf. ‘be disturbed,’ Is. 28:16].” Why is this so? The hymn writer pens the divine response:

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, tho’ all hell should endeavour to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.
JUDEO-CENTRIC PREMILLENNIALISM

ROMANS 10:1-21
THE GOSPEL AND ISRAEL’S DEFECTION

THE conclusion of 9:30-33, having focused on the significance of absent sola fide with regard to unbelieving Israel in contrast with the Gentiles, now leads to ongoing concern about this lack of saving faith in the nation as a whole. Such heartfelt anxiety is introduced with restated passion being reminiscent of 9:1-5. While Paul acknowledges that “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel,” v. 6, and that presently there is “a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (11:5; cf. 9:27), yet we notice that a wider national hope is here envisaged that finds climactic exposition in 11:1-36.

A. Israel needs salvation from self-righteousness, vs. 1-13.

Not unlike the flow of ch. 9 where the particular concern of God for “vessels of mercy” within Israel as distinct from “vessels of wrath,” vs. 22-23, gives way to the universal principle of “the righteousness which is by faith,” vs. 30 concerning “he who believes in Him,” v. 33, so here Paul’s particular concern for unbelieving Israel, vs. 1-3, again gives way to that same universal principle with regard to “everyone who believes,” v. 4. “the word of faith,” v. 8, “whoever believes in Him,” v. 11, and “whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be saved,” v. 13.

1. Salvation by God’s righteousness, vs. 1-3.

The key term here which identifies the essential void in religious Israel is also that which is the key term for the gospel in Romans, namely “the righteousness of God,” v. 3, (cf. 1:17; 3:5, 21-22), which is also closely related to “the righteousness which is by faith,” (3:22; 9:30; 10:6; Phil. 3:9).

a. From divine alienation, v. 1.

“Brethren [in Christ in Rome], the goodwill [ευδοκία, eudokia] of my heart, in entreating [δομαί, deomai] God on behalf of them [national Israel], is for their salvation.” Clearly Paul is concerned here for the larger unbelieving segment within Israel rather than the believing remnant. Further, at this point he does not believe that God has given up on the nation as a whole otherwise his prayer would be senseless. Bengel makes a frequently cited comment: “Paul would not have prayed if they [Israel] had been absolutely reprobate.” Lenski makes the startling comment that this prayer was not in vain since it “won the forty years of grace for Israel, and many were saved.” Assuming he is referring to the destruction of

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65 Quoted by A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, IV, p. 387. Bengel was a highly esteemed Lutheran scholar of the eighteenth century whose exegesis of the New Testament, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, remains a classic. Shedd, though accepting a national conversion in 11:26, attempts to explain here that, “the Apostle’s prayer would have been natural and proper, even though it were a fact in the divine mind that the subjects of the prayer were reprobated.” Romans, p. 311. Given that this is so, it still makes Paul’s inspired prayer to have been a vain exercise.

Jerusalem in 70 AD, and Romans was written c. 55 AD, then in fact this period of grace would only be for 15 years, according to the perspective of Paul! However, this comment illustrates the poverty of such a suggestion that Israel’s existence forever ceased at 70 AD. To begin with, there is simply no statement in Scripture that following this second major destruction of the temple, the church would become the permanent replacement for Israel. After Christ wept over the bankrupt leadership of Jerusalem, he declared, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” However he continues: “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matt. 23:38-39). Even the promise, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43) follows the quotation of Ps. 118:22 where v. 26 declares, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (cf. Matt. 23:38-39). Further consider Luke 21:24, “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,” also the compelling argument of 11:1-32.

Again we encounter an attitude toward unbelieving Jews, still retaining a covenant relationship with God while dispersed in unbelief (Hos. 3:4-5), that ought to be a model for all Christians, in much the same way as we ought to lovingly act toward unbelieving relatives.

b. From ignorant zeal, v. 2.

Zeal is the dynamic of sincerity, yet both characteristics lead to running adrift amidst dangerous shoals of error when there is no direction by means of the rudder of substantial knowledge (Prov. 19:2). So from personal experience Paul testifies, “I bear witness about them [national Israel] that they are ceaselessly zealous for the God of Abraham; however such enthusiasm is void of direction by means of comprehensive knowledge about this gospel of the righteousness by faith which I desire for them.” “Zeal” itself is neutral, so that it is a quality of the Lord Jesus (John 2:17), the pagan populace of Ephesus (Acts 19:34), and particularly unconverted Paul (Acts 22:3; 26:5, 9; Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:6). Here he describes that religious mania which lacks discrimination. As John Stott writes: “The proper word for zeal without knowledge, commitment without reflection, or enthusiasm without understanding, is fanaticism. And fanaticism is a horrid and dangerous state to be in.” In fact it is a close cousin of bigotry!

Rather the validation of zeal is “knowledge” or ἐπιγνώσις, epignōsis, an intensive form of γνώσις, gnōsis, meaning a more mature, profound comprehension of the saving grace of God rather than that which is merely superficial and basic (cf. 1:28; 3:20). The absence of such spiritual discernment results in “learning” while “never [being] able to come to the knowledge [ἐπιγνώσις, epignōsis] of the truth” (II Tim. 3:7). Naked zeal in religious pursuits will be counterproductive; the only zeal that counts is the zeal of faith and the zeal that faith produces. As Toplady has written:

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67 According to Barrett, Morris, though 57-58 A.D. is commonly held.

68 John Stott, Romans, p. 280.
JUDEO-CENTRIC Premillennialism

Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

c. From human righteousness, v. 3.

“For not knowing [ἐγνοέω, agnoeo] about God’s [saving, faith] righteousness” while retaining comprehensive Bible knowledge, v. 2, means that Israel was willfully “agnostic” due to a monumental misconception in the light of revealed, inscripturated truth. Certainly the Jews were aware of God’s essential moral righteousness, but they had blinded themselves to “the righteousness of faith,” 9:31-32; 10:6, the faith of Abraham and David, 4:3-8. As a consequence, Israel set about “to establish [lay a foundation of] their own [righteousness],” a whole system whereby faith and works were amalgamated, and the sacrifice of Christ rendered unnecessary. Thus, when confronted with “the [saving/faith] righteousness of God,” or when “faith [righteousness] has come, . . . when the fulness of time came, [and] God sent forth His son” (Gal. 3:25; 4:4), then “they [Israel] did not subject themselves [aorist of ὀπτάσσω, hupotasso, “to rank under,”] to the righteousness of God.” That is, they would not “submit themselves [with the obedience of faith]” to their saving Messiah. Rather, in “stumbling over a rock of offense,” 9:32-33, the Jews repudiated Christ (Luke 19:14; John 19:15), God’s incarnate revelation of pure saving grace, and clung to their own man-centered scheme of religion, the error of Galatianism, a broken reed that would pierce them through with many a sorrow (Is. 36:6-7).

2. Salvation by Christ’s righteousness, vs. 4-5.

The conclusion of v. 3 injects the historic fact of “the righteousness of God,” an event preceded by a dispensation whereby “we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed” (Gal. 3:23). However, now that Christ has come, “the righteousness of God [faith] has been revealed,” 1:17, that is, “now that faith [the righteousness of faith] has come, we are no longer under a tutor [the law]” (Gal. 3:25). Therefore, and this is the point now to be emphasized, in the course of God’s salvation plan in history, Moses has come to a point of concluding fulfillment whereby, to allude to John the Baptist’s humble confession, “He [Christ] must increase, but I [as representative of the passing Old Testament economy] must decrease” (John 3:30).

a. Culmination in Christ’s fulfilling righteousness through faith alone, v. 4.

We expand in translation this definitive statement concerning Christ and the law as follows: “For Christ is the culminating end [τέλος, telos, of the law administration of Moses, that is for those who in believing embrace the gospel

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69 Cranfield describes it as “clearly one of the fundamental theses of Pauline theology as a whole, since, in whatever way it is taken, it is obviously a decisive statement concerning the relation of Christ and the law.” Romans, II, p. 515. Likewise Moo.
administration of the righteousness of faith alone in Christ.” An alternative expanded translation would be: “For Christ is the culminating end of the corrupt abuse of the law by the Jews that more correctly leads to justification, that is for those who in believing embrace the righteousness that is solely through faith and as a result continue to submit to the moral administration and law of Moses.” The significant difference here concerns whether the law of Moses has ongoing usefulness in the sanctification of the Christian. There are three key issues to be considered here.

The meaning of “law,” which for most commentators is the law of Moses, is more specifically the Mosaic administration or institution that includes the moral law or ten commandments, as the context of 9:31, 10:5 seems to plainly indicate. The meaning of “end” or τέλος, telos, in an emphatic position, could be, (i) “termination/end in time” (I Cor. 15:24) being most predominant, or (ii) “goal/end completion” (I Tim. 1:5), or (iii) “fulfillment/result” (Rom. 6:21), and in combination. Hence, most likely Christ’s coming has brought about the end of the Mosaic administration, both its right and wrong use, yet not in a detached sense since the Son of God has instituted a new era for which Moses was both preparatory and a stimulus (Gal. 3:23-26). So Moo well states: “Paul is implying that Christ is the ‘end’ of the law (he brings its era to a close) and its ‘goal’ (he is what the law anticipated and pointed toward). The English word ‘end’ perfectly captures the nuance; but if it is thought that it implies too temporal a meaning, we might also use the words ‘culmination,’ ‘consummation,’ or ‘climax.’” So Matthew 5:17 closely parallels this understanding of “the end of the law”: which in 7:12 is described as “holy and righteous and good.” Christ did not come “to abolish [the law] but to fulfill,” not “to disannul but to bring full realization through the supplanting of “the ministry of death and condemnation” by means of the transcendently more glorious “ministry of the Spirit and righteousness” (II Cor. 3:7-9).

Thus the new administration has become inaugurated through “the righteousness of faith” superseding circumcision through which entrance was made into the whole of the old administration of Moses (Acts 15:5, 11). However, we hasten to be reminded that the “righteousness” which faith looks to is exclusively that of

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70 For detailed grammatical support of this rendering, refer to Moo who translates, “Christ is the telos of the law, with the result that there is (or with the purpose that there might be) righteousness for everyone who believes,” rather than as the NASB, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Romans, 636-8, also Cranfield.

71 This is the language of Calvin, Romans, pp. 284-5. However, Murray comments here: “Paul is speaking of ‘law’ as commandment, not of the Mosaic law in any specific sense but of law as demanding obedience, and therefore in the most general sense of law-righteousness as opposed to faith-righteousness.” Romans, II, p. 51.

72 As Walter Chantry describes this point of view, “the New Testament binds the Ten Commandments upon Christian consciences.” God’s Righteous Kingdom, p. 114, being directly contradicted by John Bunyan who writes, “I may not, will not, cannot, dare not make it [the law of God] my savior and judge, nor suffer it to set up its government in my conscience; for by so doing I fall from grace, and Christ Jesus doth profit me nothing (Gal. 5:1-5).” Works, II, p. 388.

73 Moo, Romans, p. 641.

Christ. This must be kept in mind as “faith” predominates through to v. 13. While righteousness has ever been the requirement of God for His personal creation, it has ever been provided only through faith. It was available to the pre-Israel generation through faith alone (4:9-11; Heb. 11:4-7), likewise to Israel throughout its history even though it added a works principle to faith, and beyond to the Gentiles who more readily grasped the principle (9:30-31). The principle of “righteousness by faith” or free grace nullifies the supposed instrumentality of law in the transformation of the unholy to the holy, yet the law according to its most comprehensive meaning, retains its rightful place. “[T]he Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane” (I Tim. 1:8-9). For this reason, the Law “was added because of transgressions” (Gal. 3:19).

To sum up, Moo explains that,

Paul is picturing the Mosaic law as the center of an epoch in God’s dealings with human beings that has now come to an end. The believer’s relationship to God is mediated in and through Christ, and the Mosaic law is no longer basic to that relationship. But Paul is not saying that Christ has ended all ‘law’; the believer remains bound to God’s law as it now is mediated in and through Christ (Gal. 6:2; I Cor. 9:19-21). Nor is he saying that the Mosaic law is no longer part of God’s revelation or of no more use to the believer. The Mosaic law, like all of Scripture, is ‘profitable’ for the believer (II Tim. 3:16) and must continue to be read, pondered, and responded to by the faithful believer.

b. Exclusion of Moses’ righteousness requiring legal obedience, v. 5.

Here is explanation of v. 4, and specifically how “Christ is the end of the law.” The free quotation of Leviticus 18:5 is intended to describe the modus operandi of the Mosaic administration that Christ has supplanted. That is, under the Law, “you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD” (Lev. 18:5). While Murray declares this to be, “an adequate and watertight definition of the principle of legalism,” nevertheless he then proceeds to assert that these words, “do not find their place in a legalistic framework but in that of the grace which the [Mosaic] covenant bespoke.” This understanding rests heavily on a strict understanding of Leviticus 18:5. However the apparent sense is akin to the contrast of 9:30-31; 10:3, while the use again of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12 seems to conclusively indicate that Paul is describing a legal as distinct from a faith proposition. The key here is the expression concerning the man who, “practices [aorist of ποιεῖν, poieo¯] the righteousness which is based on law,” which is so obviously antithetical to Paul’s

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75 Moo, Romans, p. 642.

76 Cranfield succinctly states that, “without much fear of contradiction: (i) the γάρ indicates that either v. 5 by itself or the whole of vv. 5-8 is thought of as being in some way explanatory of v. 4; (ii) there is a contrast between v. 5 and vv. 6-8 (hence the δὲ in v. 6); (iii) the verse contains a quotation from Leviticus 18:5.

77 Murray, Romans, II, p. 51-52. Refer to his Appendix B, pp. 249-51 for an extended defense of this interpretation, which upholds the concept of “grace in law.” Barth and Cranfield have a similar perspective. Morris sits on the fence, while Calvin, Lenski, Luther, Moo, Stott, assert that Paul describes a legal rather than a faith righteousness.
repeated emphasis on “the righteousness based on faith,” v. 6. Such zeal for legal living through which the righteousness of God might be attained, by means of bold human initiative, will be described with the use of hyperbole in vs. 6-7.

Here again, Paul is contrasting the administration of Christ, v. 4, with that of Moses, v. 5. So in vs. 6-7, the zealous faith and works administration will be contrasted with that of faith alone righteousness in vs. 8-13. Here we are faced with two opposing world views, not merely a slight gospel variation. Luther comments:

Nothing but faith can accomplish this [salvation], for it puts out the eyes of all wisdom of the flesh, causing men to know nothing, to be prepared to be taught and led and to hear promptly and to give in. For God does not require a magnitude of good works but the mortification of the old man. And he is not mortified except through faith, which humbles our own feeling of self-importance and makes a person subject to that of another. For the whole life of the old man is concentrated in the feelings, mind, or wisdom and prudence of the flesh, just as the life of a serpent is in its head. And so when the head is crushed, the entire old man is dead. As I have said, what causes this is faith in the Word of God.  


The forgoing understanding of v. 5 accentuates the dominant thrust of vs. 6-13, namely justification by faith alone, “for all those who believe, for there is no distinction” (3:22). The contrast between “the one who works” and “the one who does not work, but believes” (4:4-5) receives further prominence While Paul’s concern for faithless Israel will be regathered at v. 14, for the moment his passion for the essence of gospel purity finds yet another carefully reasoned eruption. The repeated emphasis here on “faith” all the more nullifies the error of both Galatianism and Roman Catholicism.

a. It is accessible to all, vs. 6-10.

While for Paul “faith” presupposes its glorious saving object because he is so intent on upholding the unalloyed character of saving grace, there are periodic reminders of the specific focus of faith in Christ. Here we are exposed to the wondrous truth that a man does not have to labor to reach out to God, wherever He may be; rather “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Matt. 19:10), with the result that “He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). Therefore, human exertion in a religious quest, the scaling of heaven or searching of the depths, is not necessary; the sole requirement is faith in the “publicly portrayed” Christ (Gal. 3:1), “the Man whom He [God] has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 18:31).

(1) As negatively illustrated by Moses, vs. 6-7.

There is an intended contrast here between “Moses” who “writes” in v. 5 and “faith” who “speaks” in v. 6. Here are two opposite revelations, the former concerning human salvation activity that is feverish and zealous, the latter concerning salvation rest through faith in the accomplished activity of

78 Luther, Romans, 25, p. 407.
the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole analogy of “ascent” and “descent” is reminiscent of Ephesians 4:7-10; it is also possible that Paul may have in mind Moses’ ascent and descent on Mt. Sinai when he received from God the tables of the law covenant.

(a) Not by ascending to heaven, v. 6.

An expanded translation reads: “But the righteousness of God that proceeds from and is grounded solely upon faith in Christ speaks quite differently from the tenor of Moses as represented by the allusion to Leviticus 18:5 just quoted. Therefore, according to the grace orientation of Deuteronomy 9:4-6, do not respond in your heart toward salvation with the works/activist orientation reflected in Deuteronomy 30:12 where Moses describes the difficulty of ascending to heaven (cf. Prov. 30:3-4; Isa. 14:12-13). That is, don’t think of salvation as a task that you have to initiate by scaling heaven so as to bring Christ down upon earth to die for you!” Such human endeavor is not only impossible, but also unnecessary since God declared to Israel, “But the word is very near you” (Deut. 30:14); so now the revelation of the gospel of Christ is likewise accessible to Jew and Gentile without the contribution of human righteousness. When man contemplates, “What must I do, what effort must I expend to be saved?” he needs to hear God’s gospel message, “I have already done it all. Believe and be saved.”

(b) Not by descending to the abyss, v. 7.

Further in expanded translation, “Do not respond in your heart toward salvation with the works/activist orientation reflected in Deuteronomy 30:13 where Moses describes the difficulty of crossing the ocean, which is analogous to descending into the abyss of death. That is, don’t think of salvation as a task that you have to initiate by personal descent through the portals of death so that you might call upon Christ to rise from the dead so as to save you?” Why? Because Christ has already risen from the dead. Again, sovereign and gracious initiative has accomplished a complete saving work. In vs. 6-7 we have the natural man’s religious efforts exemplified. He must not only seek God, wherever He may be found, but also be energetic in his religious efforts to a spectacular degree; his quest for God must be impressive. Whereas God declares: “Listen to Me, you stubborn-minded, who are far from righteousness. I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off” (Isa. 46:13).

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Moo rightly draws attention to the fragment of Deuteronomy 9:4, “Do not say in your heart,” cf. 8:17, which, in the larger context of vs. 4-6, describes God’s gracious covenant faithfulness, and supports the contrasting legal righteousness view of Romans 10:5. Romans, pp. 630-31.
(2) As positively applied from Moses, vs. 8-10.

In each of these three verses “mouth” and “heart” are prominent due to the stimulation of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:14. The “heart” is the vital organ, representing a man’s personal/mental/moral core, where salvation is rooted, while the “mouth” is the expressive instrument of the converted “heart.” It is significant that the state of the heart must inevitably express itself. If every action has an equal and opposite reaction, then every truly converted child of God will manifestly respond when the heart is renewed, even as ignition leads to radiation, as germination leads to the sprouting forth of shoots, buds and flowers. As Paul writes in II Corinthians 4:14, quoting Psalm 116:10, “But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore we also speak.”

(a) The *preached* word of faith is near for mouth and heart, v. 8.

The personification of “the righteousness of faith” is identical with v. 6, and again in contrast with v. 5. The quotation here of Deuteronomy 30:14 follows on from vs. 12-13 just cited, concerning which v. 11 has declared, “this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.” Hence Paul concludes with the same point here, namely that right now “the word” τὸ ῥῆμα, to réma, which more specifically is “the word of the faith,” τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως, to réma tès pisteōs, is readily accessible and plain. As the Word from God via Moses had been taught to the Hebrews at Sinai and consequently had lodged in their souls, so Paul infers that the saints at Rome, both Jew and Gentile, have likewise received the preached word. “Word” or ῥῆμα, réma, here, also vs. 17-18, is infrequently used by Paul, and it is distinguished from λόγος, logos, or “the objective record,” as “the proclaimed gospel message.” Such preaching, that Paul and his companions have been occupied with in Rome, is of “the word that calls for faith.”

Israel longed for life in the carnality of Egypt, whereas life from God was immediately available through faith; the prodigal son sought life in the far country, whereas life from his father was immediately available through faith. Barrett adds: “Faith, as a divine possibility, is an immediate possibility. That which man might seek in heaven or hell in vain is at his side. Faith alone is what God seeks, and that he himself provides.”

(b) The *offered* word of faith is near for mouth and heart, v. 9.

The assumption is, according to v. 8, that faithful preaching has resulted in the truth of the gospel lodging in the soul; yet there has been no embrace of faith. For some this received message is “foolishness” (I Cor. 2:14), while for others it is “the power of God for salvation to everyone

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80 Ibid. p. 657.
81 Barrett, *Romans*, p. 199.
who believes” (Rom. 1:16). The conditional offer here is, according to A. T. Robertson, third class, or “undetermined, but with the prospect of determination.”

The order concerns confession that results from the renewed heart, whereas v. 10 deals with the renewed heart that results in confession. To “confess,” ὑμὸλογεῖν, homologeō, means to say the same thing, that is to express agreement with, to declare, avow, (cf. I Tim. 6:12-13; I John 1:9). Specifically, the voiced agreement from the heart is that “Jesus [is] LORD,” that is deity (I Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:9-11), as opposed to saying that “Caesar is LORD.” Such confession results, at the same time, in submission to the sovereign authority that this understanding of Christ’s deity demands. However, implicit here is the body of doctrine that leads to this conclusion that “Jesus [is] LORD,” namely the whole gospel whereby Jesus Christ, “was delivered over [to death] because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification,” 4:25. Paul is not describing a two-tier mode of conversion, but rather the expectation that faith in the heart will bloom; faith incognito is not a soft option. Haldane comments: “Confession of Christ is as necessary as faith in Him, but necessary for a different purpose. Faith is necessary to obtain the gift of righteousness. Confession is necessary to prove that this gift is received. If a man does not confess Christ at the hazard of life, character, property, liberty, and everything dear to him, he has not the faith of Christ.”

The operative word of faith is near for heart and mouth, v. 10.

Whereas in v. 9 the witness to the word lodged in the heart is emphasized, here the process that incorporates faith and confession is explained. As if to offer clarification, Paul returns to the fundamental centrality of faith alone (present tense) that results in righteousness, 4:13; 5:17; 9:30; 10:6. Again, the resultant effect of faith is confession (present tense) that results in future, fulfilled salvation. Thus faith, in all of its focused simplicity, in all of its renunciation of self and works of any kind, in all of its singular apprehension of Christ’s substitutionary righteousness, in all of its acknowledgment that salvation is wholly of the Lord, yet must be distinguished from the counterfeit and validated by its fruit (Jas. 2:26). Again, true faith will inevitably manifest itself.

b. It is universal to all, vs. 11-13.

From v.6 on, in contrast with a legal righteousness, faith alone in the accessible, imminent word of the gospel results in free justifying righteousness. But whereas faith alone is the sole operative principle for the guilty sinner, that is all that he has to do, there is at the same time an inherent universal principle that excludes human distinctions. If faith alone justifies, then all who have the faculty for faith are accountable for it alone being solicited. The issue here is not personal ability,
or the reception of the gift of faith, or identification of vessels fitted either for mercy or destruction. The sole concern of Paul is the ready availability of the gospel for mankind without distinction. Therefore a universal solicitation of faith from all of mankind is plainly implicit, though as vs. 14-15 indicate, this call to believe presupposes the preaching of the gospel to begin with.

(1) The Scripture invites whoever believes, vs. 11.

Isaiah 28:16 was more fully quoted in 9:33, whereas here a partial quote assumes the object of faith to be “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” The emphatic thrust concerns, “whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” The addition by Paul of “whoever” or “everyone” πᾶς, pas, is legitimate extrapolation, supported by Joel 2:32 quoted in v. 13, that prepares the way for v. 12. Barrett adds: “In the back of his [Paul’s] mind, the dominant question is still, Why have the Jews been rejected? And a major part of the answer to this question is (see ch. 11), In order that the gospel may be preached to all, Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul proceeds to emphasize this.” The Apostle’s heritage of narrow, bigoted Judaism must have heightened his subsequent wonder at the universality of the gospel.

(2) The Lord is rich toward Jew and Greek, v. 12.

“For there is no distinction” positively refers to both Jew and Gentile being equally recipients of the riches of grace through Christ, that is according to the sole requirement of earnest faith. Romans 3:22b uses the identical expression except that negatively both Jew and Gentile are equally sinners in the sight of God. Thus God is the one God of both Jews and Gentiles, “who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (3:29-30). Here the operative term is “faith,” or “calling on the Name of the Lord,” where ἐπικαλέω, epikaleo, means “calling on the Name of the Lord,” as v. 13 confirms. This is the exclusive name of Jehovah/Yahweh which is here identified with Jesus. Implicit here is the readiness of God, specifically God the Son who in v. 9 is designated as Lord, to mercifully heed the cry of either Jewish sinners or Gentile sinners. Such willingness is amply demonstrated in Jesus Christ’s kind reception of the Roman Centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), the Syrophoenician woman (Matt. 15:21-28), as well as his appreciation of the mercy that the widow of Zarephath and Naman the Syrian received (Luke 4:25-27). Here the wealth of divine compassion is demonstrated in terms of depth, not simply universal breadth.

(3) The Scripture invites whoever calls, v. 13.

The quotation here of Joel 2:32 recalls Peter’s use of this same text at Pentecost when he addressed “men of Israel” (Acts 2:21-22). Of course Joel’s exhortation to “call on the name of the LORD” was with reference to Jehovah/Yahweh, while here, as with Acts 2:21-22, it clearly means to “call [believe] on the name of the Lord [Jesus Christ]” (cf. Acts 4:12) who is, as

God the Son, that same LORD. Here is universal availability that brings
universal accountability without the assumption of universal ability. The
“whoever” or “anyone/any person” relates to the “all” of v. 12. The
particularity of 9:16, 18 ought not to cloud the universal offer that is plainly
indicated here.

So Spurgeon, fully convinced of particular election and redemption, preached
concerning this verse:

Do you say, ‘I am excluded. Surely, you cannot mean that he would save
me?’ Hark you; it says, ‘Whosoever’ — ‘whosoever’ is a great wide door,
and lets in big sinners. Oh, surely, if it says, ‘whosoever,’ you are not
excluded if you call — there is the point. . . . Oh! I would to God I might
know that some soul could lay hold on this promise! Where are you? Are
you standing away among the crowd there, or sitting here in the body of
the hall or in the topmost gallery? Are you feeling your sins? Do you shed
tears in secret on account of them? Do you lament your iniquities? Oh!
take his promise — ‘Whosoever (sweet whosoever!) — whosoever calleth
upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ Say thus. The devil says it is of
no use for you to call; you have been a drunkard. Tell him it says,
‘Whosoever,’ ‘Nay,’ says the evil spirit, ‘it is of no use for you, you have
never been to hear a sermon, or been in the house of God these last ten
years.’ Tell him it says, ‘Whosoever.’ ‘No,’ says Satan, ‘remember the sins
of last night, and how you have come up to the MUSIC HALL stained with
lust.’ Tell the devil it says. ‘Whosoever,’ and that it is a foul falsehood of
his, that you can call on God and yet be lost. 85

B. Israel needs salvation from obstinacy, vs. 14-21.

In line with vs. 2-3, 16, 19, “they” brings the focus back to national Israel. The accessibility
of the word being “near you, in your heart and mouth,” and thus this availability for
“calling on the name of the Lord,” vs. 11-13, has brought accountability. However, a
further aspect of the nearness of the gospel message concerning “the word of faith” is that it
requires “preaching” v. 8, even as Paul’s ministry epitomized. Indeed in the history of Israel
the inscripturated word was to be proclaimed, whether by parent in the home (Deut. 6:6-7),
or prophet and priest in the temple and synagogue. The context of Deuteronomy 30:11-14
previously considered is that of Moses making proclamation to the Israelites as distinct from
mere recommended reading. In other words, God reveals that mere literary availability is
not enough. There must be preaching, as Paul now makes clear. Dare we suggest then that,
in these more recent centuries of the abounding printed page, and with ready
acknowledgment of the great blessings that literature distribution has brought through
missionary outreach, yet preaching of that printed word must have the greater prominence.

1. Israel has need of the preached gospel, vs. 14-15.

The logical sequence here of four questions is not what might be expected; an
evangelistic perspective would suggest that sending leads to preaching, then hearing,
then faith, then calling on the Lord. Instead Paul provides the opposite order so that
the focus is upon the sent preacher.


From the assertion of v. 13 comes the necessity of faith, which probably means agreement with propositional, biblical, gospel truth. In other words, there must be genuine agreement with the truth that Jesus Christ is the Savior, that there is an invitation for the sinner to call on this Savior for salvation. But more than believing this, there must be the smitten lamb’s cry or call for mercy to the Good Shepherd. There is a vast distinction between knowledge of the gospel and casting your soul upon it, even as there is a difference between going to hell or heaven.


However, before faith lays hold of the truth with agreement, it must first be heard with understanding. There must be the broadcast of gospel truth on the same waveband as the receiver. There must be distinct communication in a “known tongue [language]” since “if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for the battle?” (I Cor. 14:8-9). There will be recognition and reception of a coherent message about biblical reality.

c. The necessity of preaching, v. 14c.

However hearing is vain if there is nothing to hear. Hence there must be “heralding,” κηρύσσω, kērusso¯, that is proclamation, preaching, but specifically the message of Christ that is preached. In Paul’s day there were few books, no video, audio media; personal declaration was everything. But is the personal element so vital today? History would indicate that there has been no revival without the primacy of personal preaching. Other means are useful, but all have a degree of remoteness about them. Whereas the preacher is an ambassador speaking on behalf of his King, not simply a truth mediator.

d. The necessity of sending, v. 15.

Here is what distinguishes the authentic Christian preacher from the false (Jer. 14:14; 23:21; 27:15), that is his authoritative commissioning, his being sent by divine appointment, ἀποστέλλω, apostellô, cf. 1:1, 5. Lloyd-Jones explains that, preaching is never something that a man decides to do. What happens rather is that he becomes conscious of a ‘call.’” He goes on to give five elements of this “call” being, 1. a consciousness within the human spirit, 2. encouragement from others, 3. a concern for others, 4. a constraint or compulsion, 5. a sense of unworthiness. He further adds: “[A] man who feels he is competent, that he can do this easily, . . . has never been ‘called.’ . . . The man who is called by God . . . so realizes the awfulness of the task that he shrinks from it.86

So Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 as support for the preaching office. With an a fortiori sense, as captive Judah in Babylon was to rejoice at the messengers announcing the good news of deliverance, so New Testament gospel messengers are even more delightful. Thus allusion may also be made to Paul and his associates as preachers,

v. 8, for the word of the gospel is not only near, but also preached to the Jew as was always his custom in a new region, as well as the Gentile. However, he was all too aware of the rejection in general that he experienced, and so he responds in vs. 16-21.

2. Israel has shunned the preaching of Isaiah, vs. 16-17.

Remember that Paul the preacher, v. 8, in upholding the primacy of preaching, is very much recalling his own experience of being called to proclaim (Acts 9:15). At the same time, like every faithful herald, he appreciates the divide that separates him from his congregation which only Spirit wrought faith can bridge. How often he would pour out his heart to the Jews with an expectant passion only to receive a scornful rejection. Many a time he pondered, with a sorrowing and incredulous heart, the riddle of such stark unbelief that God’s covenant people so resolutely maintained; such contemplation inevitably led him to the recollection of Israel’s scandalous past according to Scripture.

a. Faith then was to be in the preacher’s report, v. 16.

There is a strong contrast here with the significant role of the preacher described in v. 15. “However, Israel as a whole did not respond with obedient faith [ὑπακοῶν, ἡπακουό, cf. 1:5; 16:26] in the preached gospel,” even though a remnant did. There has been preaching and hearing, even as Isaiah rhetorically lamented, literally, “who has believed that which is to be heard” (Isa. 53:1); but there has been no faith, and thus no revelation of the saving arm of the Lord (John 12:36-38). Thus the course of Israel’s history has been marked with unbelief until Pentecost. Even then the response was relatively small when compared with the overall population.

b. Faith today is to be in the word of Christ, v. 17.

So the missing yet vital element is faith, and Paul is anxious to analyze the question of responsibility in this regard. Hence, in parallel with v. 14, faith is predicated upon hearing, while hearing is predicated upon exposure to “the word of Christ [ῥήματος Χριστοῦ, ῥήματος Χριστοῦ],” which is the content of the preaching of v. 14. Therefore, in the light of Israel’s entrenched unbelief, the implied question might be put colloquially, “Did Israel really hear what God was proclaiming? Their endemic unbelief might lead one to believe otherwise.”

3. Israel has heard the word and is accountable, v. 18.

Like v. 16, Paul uses another strong adversative; his question using a double negative is in fact an emphatic denial: “But surely, in no way could it possibly be said that they [Israel] did not hear [the word of Christ]?” Such a thought is emphatically rejected. Proof of Israel’s accountability is the use of Psalm 19:4 by way of logical extension rather than exact interpretation. This verse, being representative of vs. 1-6, describes

87 Calvin and Haldane believe that the Gentiles are described here, especially in view of the quotation of Psalm 19:4, though the broad context as well as most commentators, including Alford, Barrett, Cranfield, Lenski, Moo, Morris, Murray, Stott, would seem to be against this.
the universal testimony of natural revelation to the glory of God, specifically the extensive “loud” witness of the “silent” heavens. Therefore the witness of the gospel is similarly universal. That is, Israel has heard the gospel since “their voice,” that is of preachers, “has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” Murray writes: “Since the gospel proclamation is now to all without distinction, it is proper to see the parallel between the universality of general revelation and the universalism of the gospel.”

Even by the time of c. 55-8 AD as Paul writes, the gospel has spread throughout the universe of Judaism (Acts 1:8; 2:8-11; 19:10).

4. Israel has known the word and is accountable, vs. 19-21.

As with v. 18, a similarly structured question is asked that, using a double negative, indicates an emphatic denial. Thus, by way of expansion, “Although Israel heard the facts of the word of Christ, that is the gospel inclusive of both Jew and Gentile, did they actually know [comprehend] about that which their ears received?” Again, this suggestion is definitely rejected, and proof follows from the words of Moses and Isaiah that focus on the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s saving purposes. Thus Israel is fully accountable for its strident opposition to the saving righteousness of God which is through faith alone for Jew or Gentile, cf. vs. 12-13.

a. The Law revealed God’s provocation of Israel to jealousy, v. 19.

The quotation of Deuteronomy 32:21 draws upon the preceding context of vs. 15-20 where Israel “forsook God who made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation. . . . [Israel] neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth. . . . [Israel] provoked Me to anger with their idols.” Consequently, God incorporates the Gentiles, “which is not a nation” alluding to Hosea quoted in 9:25-26, in His gospel intentions so as to provoke Israel to jealousy, cf. 11:11, 14. This provision of grace to the Gentiles that stimulates a jealous response from the Jews is well illustrated in the parables of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Such riling of the Jew nevertheless has his salvation as God’s ultimate intent, 11:28-31. The point is that Israel is not ignorant of the gospel of free grace; it is accountable for its blatant unbelief.


The quotation of Isaiah 65:1 is said to be “very bold,” that is forthright in its declaration of God’s graciousness toward the Gentiles when compared with the stubborn rebellion of His covenant people described in v. 2. The thought is similar to 9:30 where the Gentiles “who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness.” So here the Gentiles who “did not seek Me, . . . did not ask for Me,” yet were confronted with God freely presenting Himself to them. Stott rightly describes this as “dramatic imagery for grace, God taking the initiative to

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88 Murray, Romans, II, p. 61.
89 Clearly Paul contrasts the Gentiles in Isaiah 65:1 with the Jews in v. 2. However, many scholars, including Delitzsch, consider Isaiah 65:1, in context with ch. 64, as a reference to Israel, which Moo describes as the majority view. Contra are Alford, Lenski, Stier, Young.
make himself known.”

To recall the thought of vs. 6-8, God does not have to be sought either in the heights of heaven or the depths of hell; rather He is “near” because He has determined to make Himself near, to “come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

c. The Prophets revealed God’s endurance of recalcitrant Israel, v. 21.

Here, as with v. 19, “Israel” clearly means the nation as a whole, but particularly that greater unbelieving proportion. There is intentional contrast with the preceding thought, namely that “the word of Christ,” so graciously presented to unclean and relatively responsive Gentiles, yet is so vigorously rejected by “kosher” Jews. The quotation of Isaiah 65:2 portrays an exceedingly forbearing God with arms outstretched, and, from a human perspective, intolerable contempt from the redeemed of the Lord. Having “heard” and “known” concerning the extensive grace of God, the Jews are utterly without excuse. Thus in terms of failure, Israel’s qualification is total. Murray adds: “The perversity of Israel, on the one hand, and the constancy and intensity of God’s lovingkindness, on the other, are accentuated by the fact that the one derives its character from the other. It is to a disobedient and contradicting people that the outstretched hands of entreaty are extended. The gravity of the sin springs from the contradiction offered to the overtures of mercy.”

So the vital question now concerns God’s ultimate response. Does He break or keep covenant with Israel? If God saves a people, is it possible for them to be finally lost? Romans 11 provides an unequivocal answer.

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90 Stott, Romans, p. 289.
91 Murray, Romans, II, p. 63.
ROMANS II:1-36
THE GOSPEL AND ISRAEL’S SALVATION

In the history of human kind, there is one race that stands out above all others with regard to resilience in the face of persecution and unstoppable existence; it is plainly the Jew, whose very name is synonymous with the most malicious slander and persistent vilification that any group of people has ever experienced. We have already maintained that Paul was decidedly pro-Semitic in spite of the intense persecution which he, “a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom. 11:1), “a Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5), frequently faced from his fellow co-patriots; at times he was not beyond responding with intense indignation (I Thess. 2:14-16), yet love for his “brethren according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3) proved to be unquenchable. If ever an opportunity presented itself for Paul to renounce unbelieving Israel once and for all it would be at this juncture where the argument of chapter 10 has so conclusively demonstrated the accountability of the Jew for his blatant rebellion against the light of the gospel. A similar situation presented itself in 2:28-29 where we were told that, “he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.” Surely at that point the extinction of national Judaism could have here been affirmed once and for all. But we immediately read: “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect.” So here at the commencement of Romans 11 we find another passionate endorsement for the national descendents of Abraham that has aroused intense investigation in challenging anti-Semitism and a-Semitism, both racial and theological, at their roots.

During the Nuremberg Trial of the Nazi war criminals in 1945, one of the most despicable of all of these unsavory defendants was Julius Streicher, a man obsessed with hatred for the Jews. In the course of his defense he audaciously quoted the rancorous, anti-Semitic writings of Martin Luther, concerning which the Luther scholar, Jaroslav Pelikan, has called for frank acknowledgment that this animosity was simply beyond defense. However, we ought not to think that the German Reformer’s attitude was distinctive. Another important Luther Scholar, Heiko Obermann, also concluded that “all of the great figures of the [Reformation] age, as diverse as they were on almost every other issue, stood united as anti-Jew” thus providing “a point of continuity from medieval to modern society.” Hence the Reformers were but participants in ongoing antipathy, toward conceding any God-acknowledged status for the Jew, that had originated in the early church and been fostered, especially since Constantine, on through the Medieval centuries. Thus Calvin Theological Seminary Professor, David E. Holwerda writes:

From the early days of the Church the opinion that the Jews had been disinheritied as a result of their unbelief was widely held. Many believed that the Jews’ role in the history of redemption had come to an end. Already in the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr, in his famous Dialogue with Trypho, argued that Christians, not Jews, were the children of Abraham, those who formed the new nation that would inhabit the Holy Land during the millennial reign of Christ. God’s covenant with

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92 Clark M. Williamson, Has God Rejected His People? p. 101. “Luther’s last sermon, preached a few days before his death, importunately appealed that all Jews be driven from Germany,” p. 102.

Abraham was in effect established with Gentile Christians, not with Jews. The Jews had been excluded from the purposes of God. This expressed view became dominant for centuries in the Church, and the Reformation did not significantly change it.  

Certainly the most notorious example of such early anti-Semitic acrimony comes from the fourth century “golden-mouthed” expositor and Bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom. From a series of sermons entitled, “Eight Orations Against The Jews,” Catholic scholar Edward Flannery provides the following quotations:

How can Christians dare ‘have the slightest converse’ with Jews, ‘most miserable of all men’ (Homily 4:1), men who are ‘... lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits.’ Are they not ‘inveterate murderers, destroyers, men possessed by the devil’ whom ‘debauchery and drunkenness has given them the manners of the pig and the lusty goat.’ ... ‘[T]hey have surpassed the ferocity of wild beasts, for they murder their offspring and immolate them to the devil’ (1:6). ... Indeed Jews worship the devil; their rites are ‘criminal and impure’; their religion is ‘a disease’ (3:1). Their synagogue, again, is ‘an assembly of criminals ... a den of thieves ... a cavern of devils, an abyss of perdition’ (1:2, 6:6).

Not surprisingly, Chrysostom understood, concerning Romans 9-11, that “[T]he event of Christ and the New Covenant for the Gentiles have divested the Jews as a people of any special standing before God.” In a similar manner, for Augustine, “Judaism is simply relegated to the latter [non-elect] category, and its status in salvation-history assigned to the pre-Christian past.” So we better appreciate the similar estimate of the sixteenth century Augustinian monk of Wittenberg born of a shameful legacy within the Catholic church.

However, while we might ponder the course of western history had their been a different estimate concerning the future of Israel according to Scripture, and thus a more respectful attitude toward the Jew, nevertheless there has been a lineage of Christians that has evidenced a more considerate, indeed Pauline appreciation of the Hebrew people. While acknowledging the hard-heartedness of the Jew to this day and the jeopardy of his soul on account of unbelief, yet they have maintained an appreciation for the legacy that the Christian has nevertheless inherited from this people, and that chiefly being salvation by a Jew according to a Book that is largely Jewish. Because of love for this Jewish inheritance, an inevitable result has been interest in Jewish evangelism, as originated in Scotland during the last century that resulted in the conversion of such Hebrew Christians as Alfred Edersheim, David Baron, and Adolph Saphir. Horatius Bonar, in being associated with this movement and at the same time convinced of a national future for Israel according to Romans 11, wrote the following verses based on v. 1.

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94 David E. Holwerda, Jesus & Israel, One Covenant or Two? p. 2. He draws upon Jeffrey S. Siker’s significant book, Disinheriting The Jews, which documents the gradual change that overtook the early church whereby the inclusion of the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11:17) was supplanted by the concept of the exclusion of the Jews.


96 Peter Gorday, Principles Of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine, p.129.

97 Ibid., p. 333.

98 This thrust sprung from the interest of Robert Haldane and Thomas Chalmers in the Jews, and included the involvement of Robert Candlish, Robert Murray M.Cheyne, and Andrew and Horatius Bonar. During that period the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Jews, founded in 1809, was flourish- ing and received the support of C. H. Spurgeon. David L. Larsen, Jews Gentiles, & The Church, pp. 128-9.
Forgotten; no that cannot be;
All other names may pass away,
But thine, MY ISRAEL, shall remain
In everlasting memory.

Forgotten! No, that cannot be;
Inscribed upon My palms thou art,
The name I gave in days of old
Is graven still upon My heart.

Forgotten! No, that cannot be;
Beloved of thy God art thou
His crown forever on thy head,
His name forever on thy brow.

Forgotten! No, that cannot be:
Sun, moon, and stars may cease to shine,
But thou shalt be remembered still,
For thou art His and He is thine.  

It is important to note that the last stanza of this hymn makes reference to Jeremiah 31:31-37 in which God makes a new covenant with “the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” in which “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people,” vs. 32-34. This promise is certified to be as sure as the fixity of the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, vs. 35-37, and it would seem that Paul has this same conviction regarding the certainty of national Israel’s restoration and regeneration since, “they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28-29). Ultimately the issue here is one of God’s covenant faithfulness in fulfilling His promises, and that without redefining the term “Israel.” Thus Haldane, in commenting on v. 27, concludes:

Israel, then, shall be restored to their own land, which God gave for an everlasting possession. God hath said that He will make a full end of all the nations whither He had driven them, but He will not make a full end of them (Jer. 46:28; Ezek. 37: 21, 25). ‘And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God’ (Amos 9:15).

However, even amongst Christians of this twentieth century, who are indebted to the Reformation for the recovery of the gospel of the free grace of God, there has been vigorous disagreement with regard to the future destiny of Israel. And this writer has no hesitation in declaring, from the outset, his strong commitment to God’s promise of a regenerated nation of Israel in Palestine under its acknowledged Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is believed that a prima facie reading of Romans 9-11 will readily lead to this conclusion; it is only when a preconceived system of doctrine becomes dominant, such as in the magisterium or teaching authority of the Catholic Church, or entrenched covenant theology, or denominational/creedal loyalty, that an alternative interpretation is desperately sought. Nevertheless, this being asserted, let one practical test be put to this whole contentious situation, and that is the question as to how one looks today upon Jews in general, and consider how it measures up to Paul’s indomitable love that was sorely tested yet never diminished. In meeting a confessing Jew, does one secretly regard that individual as a non-person, as self-deceived, as nationally beyond hope in the sight of

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99 Horatius Bonar, in *Knight’s Master Book Of New Illustrations*, p. 337.
100 Robert Haldane, *Romans*, p. 552.
God, as wholly deluded in terms of claiming to be a biblical Jew, as having carnal Zionist hopes, while one outwardly gives token and polite acknowledgment to that person being a Jew? Or does one yet regard this person as an exile, an unbelieving family member, “a kinsman [through Christ] according to the flesh” (9:3)? Surely this latter response is closer to the Apostle’s attitude and that which caused him to so vehemently respond: “Perish the thought; let it be unthinkable to suggest that God has rejected His people.” Cranfield is right to designate Paul’s dogmatic exclamation here as being not only reflective of national Israel, but also the theme of this chapter.  

A. Israel’s rejection by God is denied, vs. 1-10.

In vs. 1-10 we have an introductory unit in terms of Paul’s climactic purpose expressed in vs. 11-36. It establishes the fact that within Israel as a whole, only a remnant is presently saved, yet this in itself proves that God has not forsaken His people, even in an anticipated inclusive sense.

1. The proof of a remnant in Israel, vs. 1-6.

Paul probably expects his readers to recall earlier remnants in the history of Israel, such as that which returned from the Babylonian captivity (Jer. 50:20) as well as that which in the future will be regathered after being scattered abroad (Jer. 23:3). This fact of Israel’s continuance in the past, in spite of considerable defection from the faith with resulting divine discipline, is good reason for confidence in Israel’s future.

a. Paul is an Israelite, v. 1.

An expanded translation reads: “Therefore I raise a critical question in the light of such abject unbelief [10:21]. God has not rejected His people, the present unbelieving nation of Israel, has He? Surely not! No, a thousand times, no! For I myself am presently an Israelite, that is a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe and land allocation designated as Benjamin.” This denial is most emphatic, though the reason for such certainty is connected with the term for Israel as “His people,” those belonging to God through covenant and purchased by God through redemption (Deut. 31:6; I Sam. 2:22; I Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14). The point is that God will not cast aside, in a final sense, those who belong to Him since His integrity would be at stake. In the light of the preceding context, Paul has more in mind than the present remnant, and that is the salvation of the larger national body, his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3; cf. 10:1).

We believe that Paul is not speaking here of himself as an “Israelite” in the present tense as replacement theology might postulate, that is by claiming to be a secular Israelite without believing in any divine, covenantal, national recognition. Therefore we must conclude that here is a declaration that supports the relevant comment of John McRay that, “the book of Romans in its first century context, . . . will demonstrate that Paul was not a 16th century Protestant Reformer but a first century Jewish Rabbi who accepted Jesus as his savior.” Hence while Paul

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101 Cranfield, Romans, II, p. 542, 574=77.

102 Cited by Joseph Shulam with Hillary Lecornu, A Commentary on The Jewish Roots of Romans, p. vi. McRay is Professor of New Testament and Archaeology at Wheaton College Graduate School.
includes himself with the remnant, yet at the same time he identifies with the nation of Israel “according to the flesh” presently comprised of “Israelites, to whom belongs [present tense] the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises” (9:3-4). In boasting of being a Benjamite, as were Saul, and Jeremiah, Paul identifies with a distinct people whose strategic territory included Jerusalem.

There are those who in reality deny Paul’s affirmation here while using language that is ambiguous. Some like Lenski and Pieters agree with Paul simply because the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus had not yet taken place; however, after 70 AD they would affirm that God has finally finished with Israel and the Jews. Others such as Calvin support Paul by using “Israel” inclusively of believing Jews and Gentiles in the church, though again national identity has been lost. Still others such as Hendriksen believe that Paul only has in mind a remnant to the end that does not have any national standing in the sight of God. All of these views refuse to let the meaning of “Israelite/Israel” have its contextual national sense as do Cranfield, Haldane, Moo, Morris, Murray, and undoubtedly associated with this perspective is a dominant, regrettable Reformation legacy concerning the Jews that lacks any passionate Pauline regard (9:3).

b. Israel was foreknown, v. 2a.

Paul returns to the thought of election when he exclaims: “God has not rejected [spurned/permanently pushed aside] His people who in eternity past He foreknew [foreordained] according to pure forelove.” Here the meaning of προγνωσκέω, proginosko, describes God’s love in eternity past for His people themselves, and not simply things about them according to prescience. This word is used to describe Christ being “foreknown” (foreordained, KJV) in I Peter 1:20, presumably by the Father. Jeremiah was similarly “foreknown/foreloved” even before he was born (Jer. 1:5). So here Paul has the same thought concerning the Father’s love for Israel which Amos 3:2 describes: “You only have I chosen [known] among all the families of the earth.” Further, such “foreknowledge” is

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103 To suggest, as some do such as Bruce, Stott, that the New Testament and Paul in particular are silent with regard to the land is to ignore the common Hebrew appreciation of “the covenants [and] . . . the promises” (9:4), the legacy of “the fathers . . .[and] the gifts and the calling of God” (11:28-29) as well as here being a “Benjamite” that would never dream of making such a disassociation. Refer to Walter Kaiser, “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6-12),” Israel, The Land And The People, ed. H. Wayne House, pp. 209-27. Johannes Munck, in his classic work Christ & Israel, p. 12, notes that, “There,” ἐκεῖ [ekei], in 9:26 is “a natural designation for Palestine, in order to imply that the Gentile nations will gather in Jerusalem and the Messianic kingdom will be established there (cf. 11:26).”

104 Consider Albertus Pieters who in his The Seed Of Abraham, pp. 132-4, as a professor of Dutch Reformed convictions, writes that following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the subsequent Jewish lineage was comprised of illegitimate usurpers. Thus, “their program [turned out to be] the exact opposite of Christ, and in this unholy endeavor they were only too successful, with the result that untold calamities were brought down upon themselves and upon the whole world. Ignorant that their separateness from the rest of the world was in the divine purpose temporary, they strove to render it permanent. Thus that which had been in itself good and holy became through their error a source of poison in the life of the world; and ‘The Jew’ became the great persistent international problem.” Thus replacement theology has its unpleasant consequences, whereas, in general, those who see a divine future for national Israel, especially premillennialists, have been respectful and kindly toward the Jew even in his unbelief. For proof of this assertion refer to David Rausch, Fundamentalist Evangelicals And Anti-Semitism, pp. 206-8.
surely intended to prompt recollection of that particular first link which attached to the “golden chain” of God’s predestinating purpose in 8:28-30. In the light of this, Israel’s participation in such a course determines that rejection, as proposed here, be regarded as quite impossible.

However, is this “foreknowledge” concerning “His people” with respect to the nation as a whole or the elect remnant within the nation? “His people” here is a restatement of this expression in v. 1 where the context is surely with reference to “a disobedient and obstinate people” described in 10:21. Thus Murray comments that, “Israel had been elected and peculiarly loved and thus distinguished from all other nations.” There is no twist of meaning from the nation to the elect. What follows with regard to evidence of a past and present remnant is offered as proof concerning the divine perpetuity and future of the nation. God, in eternity past, loved a nation comprised of twelve tribes having a destiny guaranteed by covenant (Gen. 13:1-3; Ezek. 37:21-22). It is the fixity of the Abrahamic covenant that guarantees a present and future existence for Israel as a nation, even as vs. 28-29 affirm.

b. Elijah represents a past remnant, vs. 2b-4.

Following the victorious contest with the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, and immediate drought relief, Elijah flees from the fury of Jezebel in Jezreel to a cave at Mt. Sinai (I Kgs. 19:8-9). He had earlier felt alone (I Kgs. 18:22), received divine relief from hunger and depression (I Kgs. 19:4-8), and yet again becomes depressed feeling solitary in the prophetic ministry. All of Israel seems lost; divine intervention has not resulted in significant repentance.

(1) He is blind to God’s remnant, vs. 2b-3.

In despair, Elijah pleads with God “against Israel,” because of seeming total spiritual bankruptcy (I Kgs. 18:21), which contrasts with the Gentile kindness of the widow of Zarephath (I Kgs. 17:8-16), so that he seeks divine judgment. The quotation of I Kings 19:14 may suggest the belief of Elijah that the day of final rejection has come. Jewish tradition indicates that:

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105 Morris explains that “Paul is referring to ‘the people he foreknew’, not ‘those of his people whom he foreknew.’” Romans, p. 399. Likewise Moo, Murray.

106 Murray, Romans, II, p. 68.

107 It is astonishing therefore, to note that a number of Calvinist writers and commentators, while strenuously upholding the unconditional nature of the New Covenant, that is the security of its participants according to particular electing grace even though subject to sober warnings, yet are reluctant to grant the same characteristic to the Abrahamic Covenant with regard to Israel’s early participation that also included sober warnings, and especially the unconditionality so plainly revealed in Genesis 15:1-21. William Cox writes that, “In Genesis 15:6 we read that Abraham ‘believed God’ and that it (Abraham’s belief) was counted unto him for righteousness. Belief here was a condition (understood). . . . the Old Testament promises to Israel were conditional and . . . Israel failed to observe these conditions.” Biblical Studies In Final Things, pp. 50-55. Yet this author’s Calvinism would certainly confess the conditionality of faith in the New Testament to ultimately subsume under the biblical truth that saving faith is a sovereign bestowal. Also refer to Crenshaw and Gunn, Dispensationalism, Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow, where Appendix Three, “Conditional and Unconditional Covenants,” pp. 321-25, does not so much as mention Genesis 15, let alone consider the vital ramifications of the sovereignty of God here.
The misdeeds of the people had swelled to such number that they could no longer reckon upon ‘the merits of the fathers’ to intercede for them; they had overdrawn their account. When they sank to the point of degradation at which they gave up the sign of the covenant, Elijah could control his wrath no longer, and he accused Israel before God.\(^{108}\)

(2) He is informed of God’s remnant, v. 4.

So Paul reasons: “But what is the divine authoritative response [χρηματισμός, chrēmatismos, oracle]? ‘I have kept for myself seven thousand men [households?] who have not bowed the knee to Baal’ [I Kgs. 19:18].” Within the comprehensive nation of Israel in the flesh God had preserved, according to His gracious working, a remnant, even larger when women and young people are included, comprised of Jews in flesh and Spirit. Elijah had a vision that was too exclusive since in those days God had neither forsaken Israel nor abandoned the Abrahamic covenant. Hence there is implicit hope here for Israel in the present and future.

So in times of declension, we may be like Paul at Corinth who appears to have been so depressed and fearful that the Lord found it necessary to visit him and declare, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10)

c. Paul describes a present remnant, v. 5-6.

“In the same manner\(^ {109}\) there has also come to be, at the present [now time], a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.” The word λείμμα, leimma, means “that which is left over,” such as II Kings 19:4 where the besieged Jerusalem is a “remnant” when compared with the nation as a whole, the northern kingdom having already gone into captivity.

(1) It is according to gracious election, v. 5.

The point here is not the meager size of the present believing Jewish population, but the very sovereign origination and maintenance of this small Christian community. Now, as in Elijah’s time, the remnant’s divine existence is attributed solely to the grace of God. This being so, and with support from the vehement denial of v. 1, then implicit is the certain future of national Israel since it is ultimately dependent upon this same elective will. Hence the divine purpose, according to unconditional covenant promise, is bound to triumph over those who are “a disobedient and obstinate people,” 11:21. Such an accomplishment is described by Ezekiel as follows: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, . . . I will give you a new heart, . . . I will put


\(^{109}\) The use of οὕτως, houtos meaning “in the same manner” or “even so” should be noted in view of its disputed meaning in v. 26. Here there is an obvious temporal association concerning the past era of Elijah and the “now time.”
My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, . . . I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life” (Ezek. 36:25-27; 37:5).

(2) It is exclusive of law works, v. 6.

Here, with regard to the past and present remnant, conditionality is not a factor, and therefore it will not be a factor when the “transgressing” multitude comes to “fulfillment” v. 12. As Haldane comments, “It was an unconditional choice, resulting from the sovereign free favor of God." Faith here is not eliminated, nor is it elevated, but rather subordinated to the pure grace of God. And the pure grace of God must eliminate works of any sort, but especially the thought of a little worthiness or gratitude from unbelieving Israel.

From a broader perspective, it is abundantly plain that for Paul both Jew and Gentile, individually and collectively, are saved according to God’s gracious election that will not admit of human works in the most absolute terms. Grace, which for Paul becomes here a synonymous term for election, and works are mutually exclusive. Again, means of grace are not eliminated, but neither are they elevated to a point where man retains the initiative over God. Here we are faced with the question as to whether the dominion of grace, the reign of grace will rise above the paralysis of sin that is so embodied in the nation of Israel as a whole. Such recalcitrance is further described in vs. 7-10 that raises the inevitable question of v. 11.

2. The proof of hardening in Israel, vs. 7-10.

These verses appear to recall the teaching of 9:18-24 that expounded upon God’s hardening of Israel on account of its obdurate heart; the purpose of this reemphasis concerns the need of maintaining a focus on God as being in full control of Israel's ultimate destiny. Further, such a reminder, in conjunction with the ensuing prospect of national salvation, will only enhance the purity of grace that v. 6 has delineated.

a. The hardened nation of Israel according to Paul, v. 7.

We expand in translation: “Then what is the meaning of national Israel’s ongoing state of unbelief in the light of the present remnant that exists solely on the basis of grace? Certainly in Israel’s present zealous seeking of the law-principle of righteousness [9:31; 10:2-3] it has not attained that which it aspired to achieve. However the elect remnant did attain to the faith-principle of righteousness while the rest of the nation became hardened according to God’s just intervention.” Here Paul, from personal experience, clearly distinguishes between the nation of Israel as a whole and its components that comprise the elect remnant and the hardened remainder. And it is this larger part that he now emphatically describes as presently abandoned by God; yet the stage is at the same time being set for explaining the ultimate triumph of sovereign grace over “the rest,” as well as “the remnant,” when God “will remove ungodliness from Jacob,” v. 26. How often Paul must have reflected upon, in his volatile Jewish opponents, that

110 Haldane, Romans, p. 534.
hardness of heart which he formerly manifested. But then he would also have mused that if sovereign grace could save him, the chief of sinners, then there was similar hope for the nation of Israel as a general whole.

b. The hardened nation of Israel according to the Old Testament, vs. 8-10.

This montage of Scripture quotations incorporates the three major divisions of the Old Testament, the law, the prophets, and the writings, and thus establishes the punishment of divine hardening with comprehensive authority.

(1) The testimony of the law, Deuteronomy 29:4; v. 8a.

Emphasis on the divine imposition of hardening upon Israel is indicated by Paul’s turning of the negative, “the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear,” into the positive, “God gave them . . . eyes to see not and ears to hear not.” Even just prior to crossing the Jordan into the promised land, there is recollection of Israel’s continuing dullness.

(2) The testimony of the prophets, Isaiah 29:10; v. 8b.

Here the words “a spirit of deep sleep” are injected into Deuteronomy 29:4 and become “a spirit of stupor.” Again, it is God who has appointed this comprehensive spiritual coma that includes the prophets; in particular there will be a national blindness to the Word of God (Isa. 29:10-12). However what God imposes in judgment is a result of accountable sinfulness so that the preceding v. 9 declares, “Blind yourselves and be blind.”

(3) The testimony of the writings, Psalm 69:22-23; vs. 9-10.

In this psalm as a whole, quoted in the N.T. with reference to Christ’s sufferings, David is deeply distressed on account of the assaults of his enemies. The fact that David laments, “I have become estranged from my brothers and an alien to my mother’s sons. . . . Those who sit in the gate talk about me, and I am the son of the drunkards,” vs. 8, 12, indicates that his opposition is from “the rest” of the nation in general while he identifies with the faithful “remnant.” Thus for Paul this prayer to God was answered in that the requested judgment became a fact of history. Note that these verses, describing, as Paul puts it: “Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever,” v. 10, immediately follow the Messianic reference of Ps. 69:20-27, cf. Matt. 27:34, 38. Thus the imagery of a “table becoming a snare,” of “eyes being darkened,” of “backs being bent,” strongly suggests a divine subjection to suffering and humiliation that history has all to clearly demonstrated. Consequently we are poised at a most crucial point since this terrible divine consignment raises the inevitable question that was earlier raised in 9:6: “But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.” Of course there the point was that a godly remnant remained within national Israel. But now we are

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111 Moo, Romans, p. 681.
concerned about the unbelieving “rest” of the nation. Has God abandoned the larger part of the nation forever? Romans 11:11-32 addresses this point.

B. Israel’s stumbling at Christ is temporary, vs. 11-24.

The preceding stark definition of Israel’s blindness, even as the church at Rome could so plainly observe, might lead to the belief that the nation as a whole had been finally abandoned by God. Further it would then be assumed that the saved Gentiles now constituted the new spiritual nation comprised of all races, including a Jewish remnant. Sadly the early Christian church, in embracing replacement theology, did eventually come to this conclusion, and with tragic consequences for the Jew.112 Hence Paul most adamantly rejects such a denial of the promises given to the “fathers,” 9:4-5; 11:28-29. What follows reveals how the dark night of Israel’s present sojourn will give way to the bright day dawning when, “the Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob,” v. 26.

1. God will bless the Gentiles to bless the Jews, vs. 11-15.

Here is a fourfold portrayal of a basic gospel theme, namely that national Israel, presently bound in unbelief, shall achieve salvation through their being prompted to jealousy by the saving of the Gentiles and ultimately through the resurrection power of God, vs. 11, 12, 13-14, 15. For Paul, while his own distinctive Gentile ministry is significant in this divine saga, yet his ultimate vision concerns the saving of Israel, “their fulfillment,” and “life from the dead.”

a. Portrayal one - Israel’s jealousy through Gentile salvation, v. 11.

An expanded translation reads: “Therefore I raise a further critical question in the light of such ongoing abject unbelief [10:21]. National Israel did not trip/stumble and yet recover in its earthly pilgrimage so that a fatal, irrevocable fall eventually resulted, did it? Surely not! No, a thousand times, no! Bur rather through their transgression/unbelief salvation has come to the Gentiles for the purpose that the Jews be made jealous [10:19].” Simply put, while Israel’s rejection has not been total, v. 1, now we understand that it has not been final. Thus when Jesus Christ declared, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [the nation of Israel] and given to a people, producing the fruit of it [the Gentiles]” (Matt. 21:43), it is eisegesis to suggest that this abandonment is permanent. Israel’s “stumbling” v. 11, is “transgression” v. 11, is “failure” v. 12, is “rejection” v. 15, is “branches broken off, . . . the rich root of the olive tree” v. 17, which is on account of “unbelief” v. 20, which must surely be with regard to the rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Lord’s Messiah, 9:32-33.

112 While the first century was dominated by the Jewish mother church at Jerusalem that acknowledged the inclusion of the Gentiles into the blessings of Abraham, during the second to the fourth centuries a change evolved so that by the time of Constantine the Jews were believed to have forever forfeited the blessings of Abraham that had now been inherited by the Gentiles. Refer to H. Wayne House, “The Church’s Appropriation Of Israel’s Blessings,” Israel, The Land and the People, ed. H. Wayne House, pp. 77-110; Walter Kaiser Jr., “An Assessment Of ‘Replacement Theology,’” Mishkan 21, (February 1994), pp. 9-20; Ray Pritz, “Replacing The Jews In Early Christian Theology,” Mishkan 21, (February 1994), pp. 21-27; Jeffrey S. Siker, Disinheriting The Jews, 296 pp.
However, “salvation has come to the Gentiles” v. 11, which is “riches for the world” v. 12, which is “the reconciliation of the world” v. 15, which is “wild olive branches, . . . grafted into the rich root of the olive tree” vs. 17, 24, which is according to “God’s kindness” v. 22, which is “to make them [the Jews] jealous” v. 11. In God’s plan, the Gentile church does not supercede national Israel, but rather is instrumental in the restoration of the Jewish people to God. Notice the importance of the purpose clause here, “to make them jealous.” But why? Obviously unbelieving national Israel is in mind, yet if this people has no future, this is meaningless, even worse, since it suggests a divine teasing of those who have been abandoned!

But specifically, how are the Gentiles intended to provoke jealousy amongst the Jews? The intensive παραζηλόω, parazêloō, cf. Deut. 32:21; Rom. 10:19, means jealous desire on account of acknowledged personal poverty, so that, “I will make them [Jews of the synagogue of Satan] come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you [Philadelphia Gentiles]” (Rev. 3:9). Clearly Paul feels a compulsion to contribute toward this process, v. 13-14; he must proclaim and demonstrate that with “a [foolish] nation without understanding will I anger you,” 10:19, in a way similar to that of the elder brother becoming jealous at the rich grace being poured out upon the repentant prodigal (Luke 15:25-32). Thus the Jews are to become desirous of God’s evident blessing poured out upon the Gentiles, not that they might become Gentiles, but fulfilled Jews under their covenant head and Messiah. David Larsen comments: “Christian love, instead of arrogance [cf. vs. 18, 21], ought to foster ‘envy or jealousy’ among the Jews for what Christians possess in Christ (Rom. 11:11). How frequently has this phenomenon been in evidence in Christian history or now?”

b. Portrayal two - Israel’s fulfillment through Gentile enrichment, v. 12.

An expanded translation reads: “For if the transgression of national Israel leads to the riches of gospel mercy being poured out upon the world at large, and their faith failure results in rich grace for the Gentiles, then how much more abundant will the nation of Israel’s ultimate fulfillment be for the world.” Paul uses the familiar a fortiori form of argument here, cf. 5:9, 10, 15, 17, from the lesser to the greater, so that the major question concerns how the lesser “faith poverty of national Israel” will become the greater “fulfillment”? The word πληρωμα, plerôma, means “full measure” or “completeness” that can be understood either qualitatively or quantitatively. The contrast with “the [large numbered] fullness of the Gentiles,” v. 25 and implicit here, strongly suggests “the prospective large numbered fullness of the Jews.” That is the Jews will ultimately experience the “much more,” πόσο μακάλλον, posô mallon, cf. v. 24, fulfillment, that is national salvation (Ezek. 37:1-28; Hos. 3:4-5; Zech. 8:1-8; 12:10-14; 31:1-2; 14:9-11), including union with the remnant, that transcends the preceding blessing of the

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114 Moo, Romans, p. 689.
115 Johannes Munk, Christ and Israel, pp. 119-121, 132-136.
Gentiles. Thus Alford comments: “If then the disgrace of Israel has had such a blessed accomplishment, how much more a blessed one shall Israel’s honor bring with it, when His own people shall once more be set as a praise in the midst of the earth, and the glory of the nations.” 116 The language of Paul hardly envisages a mere totality of the remnant, as Hendriksen suggests. 117 Then will be fulfilled the words of Christ: “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD’” (Matt. 23:38-39). As Barrett states: “Paul looks beyond the advantages conferred on the Gentiles by the unbelief of Israel to the far greater eschatological bliss which Israel’s return will inaugurate.” 118

c. Portrayal three - Israel’s provocation through Paul’s ministry, vs. 13-14.

Aware of his enthusiasm for the glorious future rebirth of Israel, as well as most likely the large Gentile constituency of the church at Rome, the Apostle is careful not to disassociate his own distinctive calling from the present saving of Jews. In other words, in ministering to Gentiles, Paul constantly has evangelistic interest in mind for his kinsmen according to the flesh.

(1) It is glorious for Gentile ministry, v. 13.

As many today mischaracterize Paul’s calling to the Gentiles as being detached from his former involvement with Judaism, so similar clarification is needed for the Gentile Christians in Rome. “Yes,” says Paul, “I am an apostle of Gentiles.” But further, “I boast and exalt in my [appointed] ministry, even as you are its fruit; nevertheless there is a greater goal in view here that you need to keep in mind. There is a transcendent purpose, going beyond your salvation, that I always have in focus.” Thus he corrects “Gentile Christians [who] might appeal to Paul himself, ‘the apostle to the Gentiles,’ as further reason to disdain Jews and Jewish Christians.” 119

(2) It is provocative in Jewish evangelism, v. 14.

Expanded translation: “My Gentile ministry is fulfilled since by it I also have hope that it might provoke my kinsmen according to the flesh [9:3; I Cor.

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117 “His [Paul’s] words ‘their fullness’ pertain to the salvation not of a physical unit, ‘the people of Israel’; but of the sum of all Israel’s remnant.” Hendriksen, Romans, p. 368. This author is committed to the denial of any national restoration and future for Israel; refer to his Israel and the Bible, 63 pp. Thus he finds a difficulty here using irenic exegesis in that the “remnants” hardly reflect the greater glory of Israel that Paul so enthusiastically describes as being future, vs. 17-32. Further, if the “their transgression” refers to national Israel, as v. 11 indicates, then surely “their fulfillment” refers to a similar and related comprehensive body of people, that is, national Israel. Of the same amillennial exegesis are Bavinck, The Last Things, pp. 104-107, and Hoekema, The Bible And The Future, pp. 142-145. Back of this opinion is an overriding presupposition that the Christian church has superceded the nation of Israel as the one people of God. Thus the concept of the nation of Israel being saved according to Romans 11 is quite inadmissible. For further refutation of this interpretation, refer to v. 26.

118 C. K. Barrett, Romans, p. 214.

119 Moo, Romans, p. 691.
10:18] and result in some of them being saved.” In other words, Paul desires that Gentiles, in all of their godless paganism, might embrace the God of Abraham through faith in Christ, and thus stimulate carnal Jews to be partakers of the same rich blessing through the same means. The expression, “and save some of them” indicates that the carnal Jew, outside of Christ, is lost. But who are the “some of them”? Surely in the light of the future hope of national Israel’s “fullness,” v. 12, here Paul has in mind present additions to the remnant that are “no more than a modest contribution.” However, “[s]uch conversions of individual Jews, though few in number, are a precious foretoken of the salvation referred to in v. 26.” Thus for Paul, his pro-Semitic stance is unfading since “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew,” v. 2, and especially because “the natural branches [will] be grafted into their own olive tree,” v. 23, at a future time when “all Israel will be saved,” v. 26, with a glory that shall eclipse “the fullness of the Gentiles,” v. 25. Here Paul participates in the prelude, the theme of which subsequent centuries have ill-maintained; but he always has in view God’s grand finale.

d. Portrayal four - Israel’s resurrection through Gentile evangelism, v. 15.

The use again of the *a fortiori* form of argument returns us to the same basic proposition of v. 12, yet with added emphasis here on divine initiative. The downside is the nation of Israel’s “rejection,” ἀποβολή, apobolē, its being “cast away” (cf. Ezek. 37:11), which is parallel with the cause of this abandonment, that is the “transgression” of unbelief. As a result comes “the reconciliation of the world,” which is parallel with “riches for the world,” certainly not universalism, yet “a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9; cf. Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:17; Col. 1:23). Consequently the upside for the nation of Israel is “their acceptance,” πρόσληψις, proslempsis, or “receiving,” which is parallel with “their fulfillment,” which is more wonderfully described as nothing less than “life from the dead.” While it is grammatically possible that this last expression could refer to physical resurrection of the Gentile and/or Jewish world, yet the ongoing emphasis on the destiny of Israel suggests radical national conversion, after the manner of the language of 6:13.

Added support for the future national conversion/resurrection of Israel is found in Simeon’s prophecy that, “this Child [Jesus Christ in his arms] is appointed for the

120 Morris, *Romans*, p. 410. Also Moo, Murray, so that Paul does not anticipate that he will usher in the “fullness.”


122 Barrett, Cranfield, and Moo support a literal general resurrection that climaxes national Israel’s national conversion. However Murray provides more convincing proof that a figurative expression is used, Romans, II, pp. 82-84. Nanos comments: “Even though Paul is bringing the gospel to gentiles it is in the service of Israel’s eventual restoration, which will be incomparably superior to the present circumstances that have been benefiting the gentiles, even as life is incomparably superior to death.” *The Mystery of Romans*, p. 248. Even amillennialist Hoekema comments, “‘Life from the dead’ does not refer to a literal resurrection; these words are probably used as a figure to describe the happy surprise that will be ours when Jews who have been rebellious turn to the Lord,” though we do not agree with his further comment that, “[t]here is no need however to restrict this acceptance to a period of history at the end-time.” *The Bible And The Future*, p. 143.
fall and rise [resurrection, ἀνάστασις, anastasis, of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). Furthermore, the expression “life from the dead” being descriptive of national Israel’s future spiritual resurrection is strongly suggestive of Ezekiel 37:11-14 where the vision of the valley of dry bones is interpreted.\textsuperscript{123} As Spurgeon comments:

I wish never to learn the art of tearing God’s meaning out of his own words. If there be anything clear and plain, the literal sense and meaning of this passage [Ezekiel 37:21-22] – a meaning not to be spirited or spiritualized away – must be evident that both the two and the ten tribes of Israel are to be restored to their own land, and that a king is to rule over them.\textsuperscript{124}

So Charles Simeon comments on Ezekiel 37:15-22:

The Jews are spread in almost every part of the world. Their conversion to God being simultaneous in every country, it will attract the attention of all, and create a vast sensation through the whole world. The victories, too, which they will gain over all who shall oppose their establishment in their own land will yet further demonstrate, not only that God is with them, but that there is no other God but He. They will be struck, as Baal’s worshippers were by the fire which descended from heaven to consume Elijah’s sacrifice; and will exclaim, with wonder and amazement, ‘The Lord, he is the God! The Lord, he is the God!’ Instantly will multitudes, in every place, ‘lay hold on the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we see that God is with you of a truth [Zech. 8:23].’ In truth, it will be a signal to all mankind to acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Savior; and it will ‘be as life from the dead’ [Rom. 11:15] to the whole world.\textsuperscript{125}

2. God will bless the Jews through wise cultivation, vs. 16-24.

Since 9:6, the overriding concern of Paul has been the vindication of God in the face of national Israel’s continuing unbelief. While the remnant is reassuring in terms of proving God’s ongoing covenant investment, 11:1-5, yet it does not fully satisfy with regard to God’s original promise of great blessing to Abraham that is repeatedly ratified in the Old Testament. Hence, while many a man quits a difficult task, the burden of Paul is now to demonstrate God’s resolve in the saving of national Israel (Gen. 18:14; cf. Phil. 1:6) as reflected by two Old Testament images in vs. 16-24 that will stimulate the climactic declaration of vs. 25-32. So that in spite of Gomer-like spiritual adultery (Hos. 3:1), all of the vicissitudes of human history, the conflict of the centuries in which the Jew has suffered unspeakable persecution, being “for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols” (Hos. 3:4), yet “the sons of Israel will return and seek the L ORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the L ORD and to His goodness in the last days” (Hos. 3:5).\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{123} See Alford, \textit{The Greek Testament}, II, p. 404, and John Gill who both make this same association.

\textsuperscript{124} C. H. Spurgeon, \textit{Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit}, No. 582, pp. 536-37. W. J. Grier declares, in commenting on this chapter, that “[w]hen Ezekiel speaks of the people being restored to their own land, he gives us clear hints that we are not to take this literally.” \textit{The Momentous Event}, p. 35. However, when the literal meaning of Ezekiel 36 becomes an indisputable necessity concerning “the house of Israel” and “the land” and “the scattering,” cf. vs. 16-20, 24-28, 33-36, the suggestion that Ezekiel 37 describes not Israel restored to the land, but believers collectively who inhabit a heavenly paradise, is hermeneutical schizophrenia.

\textsuperscript{125} Charles Simeon, \textit{Horæ Homileticae}, IX, p. 474.
a. The analogy of Israel as a lump of dough, v. 16a.

Translation: “So if the firstfruit [ἀπαρχὴ, aparchē] is holy, the lump is also holy.” The “firstfruit” is described in Numbers 15:17-21 as the offering of a cake made from the first grain obtained from the threshing floor in celebration of entering the land of promised abundance. Thus the consecration of this first production of dough meant that the whole remaining lump, the produce to follow, was likewise consecrated, as Leviticus 6:14-18 well indicates. The “firstfruit” represents the Abrahamic covenant or patriarchs while the “lump” is the resultant Jewish nation, even as there is a parallel with the “the root” and “the branches” of the olive tree as is immediately described. Hence the “sanctification” of Abraham guaranteed the “sanctification” of the resultant nation, discipline and exile notwithstanding. Haldane puts it this way: “[A]s the lump is holy, through the offering of the first-fruits, so this is a pledge that the lump, or body of the nation, will yet be made holy.”

b. The analogy of Israel as natural olive branches, vs. 16b-24.

This section is dominated by Paul’s expansion of the olive tree analogy. He intends to provide his most compelling reasons as to why national Israel has glorious prospects in spite of ongoing obstinacy in unbelief and dispersal in the face of Gentile dominion. In a word, the reason is “grace” through sovereign promise (4:13-16; 9:8). However, while this Gentile dominance continues, such privilege for saved barbarians should stimulate humble gratitude and loving respect for the severed natural branches rather than arrogance and conceit.

(1) The biblical analogy introduced, v. 16b.

The olive tree is symbolic of national Israel in the Old Testament, especially insofar as the members are branches united by one root and trunk, both with regard to rebellion (Jer. 11:16-17) and restoration (Hos. 14:4-6). This individual/corporate unity is similarly reflected by rocks hewn from a quarry (Isa. 51:1-2), and a holy seed that will sprout from the stump of an oak tree hewn down in judgment (Isa. 6:13). This leads us to the widely held belief that the “root” here is the patriarchs, and the Abrahamic covenant in particular, which grows natural branches, Jews, and engraves wild branches, Gentiles. Further, not only is the headship of Abraham through promise emphasized in 4:1, 11-13, 16-17, but 11:28 especially accentuates the fact

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126 This is the most common understanding which is derived from the more specific parallel of the analogy of the fig tree that follows.

127 Haldane, Romans, p. 544.

128 Alford, Bruce, Calvin, Haldane, Hendriksen, Hodge, Moo, Morris, Moule, Munck, Murray, Shedd, Stott. There are two other interpretations of the olive tree representation. First, the root is Christ who engrafts both Jew and Gentile, yet even Messiah is of the seed of Abraham (Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16). Paul still claims to be “an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham,” 11:1, cf. v. 28, and this is his present mindset. Second, the root is the remnant of Jewish Christians, but this is unlikely since they are the remaining natural branches, v. 17. Furthermore, as Hodge points out, “[t]he Gentile Christians are not said (v. 17) to be grafted into the stock of the converted Jews, but as branches with them they are united to a common stock.” Romans, p. 367.
that Israel’s temporary abandonment is eclipsed by the nation being “beloved for the sake of the fathers.” Thus Murray comments:

This fact of consecration derived from the patriarchs is introduced here by the apostle as support for the ultimate recovery of Israel. There cannot be irremediable rejection of Israel; the holiness of theocratic consecration is not abolished and will one day be vindicated in Israel’s fullness and restoration.¹²⁹

Surely this is the intent of Paul here in his emphasis upon the inevitable holiness of the branches. In other words, there is a prospective olive tree that shall be luxuriant in glory and splendor because of the Divine Orchardist/Cultivator.

(2) The ingrafting of the Gentiles, vs. 17-22.

Most likely Paul has in mind some Christians in Rome who have assumed that Gentile favor in the sight of God is elevation that has permanently replaced the nation of Israel, v. 19. The whole tenor of vs. 17-22 is warning to the Gentiles against vain presumption in this regard since they remain dependent upon the “root,” v. 18.

(a) Wild branches replace natural branches, v. 17.

The severing of “some of the [natural] branches,” indeed a high proportion of the branches (Isa. 6:13), portrays severe pruning by the Divine Orchardist/Cultivator due to fruitlessness (Matt. 3:7-10; 21:43; 23:38). Such destitution is the problem of Romans 9-11.

However, to magnify the grace extended to the Gentiles that ought to admit of no boasting, they are pictured as limbs of “a wild olive tree,” that is “Greeks and barbarians,” 1:14, “a nation without understanding,” 10:19, that are “grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, v. 24; they are commoners married to royalty. To graft the natural into the wild was a known practice, whereas Paul describes the reverse procedure. C. H. Dodd’s objection that here Paul exhibits the horticultural “limitations of a town-bred man,” has been adequately answered by William Ramsay.¹³⁰ However, the point here is that the wild branches are engrafted so as to receive rather than provide benefit, v. 18, specifically “the rich root of the olive tree,” that is “fatness,” πιότης, piote¯s. Surely this lavish spiritual nourishment is that promised through Abraham who was told by God: “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Here we are introduced to the vital point that the Church is not a new creation that

¹²⁹ Murray, Romans, II, p. 85.
¹³⁰ C. H. Dodd, Romans, p. 180. Ramsay, quoted by Munck, Christ & Israel, pp. 128-130, cites instances where the grafting of an uncultivated shoot into a fruitless cultivated tree is able to stimulate regeneration and fruitfulness.
has supplanted Israel, but rather a derivative of the same stock of Israel, that is Abraham.\(^\text{131}\)

(b) Wild branches receive needed advice, vs. 18-22.

The dominant issue that now concerns Paul is not the attitude of the Gentiles toward the grace of their engrafting so much as their attitude mainly toward the severed limbs of national Israel, v. 19, although the remnant later represented in 14:1-15:13, most likely as the “weak,” cannot be excluded.

1) Shun arrogance before God, 18-19.

The “arrogance” of the Gentiles is κατακαουχάωμαι, katakauchaomai, an intensive form of “to boast,” or “to proudly declare,” or “to assert superiority over,” hence “to be arrogant against [the Jews] with proud zeal.” As the Jews had earlier been warned about a distorted appreciation of their election (Deut. 7:7-8), so the Gentiles need a similar exhortation.

a) Arrogance toward the broken branches, v. 18.

Moo comments that, “Gentile believers were apparently convinced that they belonged to a new people of God that had simply replaced Israel,”\(^\text{132}\) and consequently their derisive attitude was showing. Haldane adds that here is well described, “the [overbearing] spirit that has long prevailed among the Gentiles who profess Christianity. What marvelous ignorance, folly, and vanity, are often displayed even in God’s people!”\(^\text{133}\) However, while Israel is under discipline in the Lord’s woodshed, Gentiles are to show them loving respect, even if the task is at times frustrating, though church history

\(^{131}\) Walter Kaiser well addresses this issue as follows. “The most basic problem [with the major concepts of the relation between Israel and the Church] is that each begins with the church and then considers Israel from within the church, trying to fit the Jews within this framework. Each of these . . . [concepts] . . . fails to reckon with one or more of the following three primary assertions of Scripture:

1. The church is grafted into Israel, not Israel into the church.

2. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 was made with “the house of Judah and the house of Israel,” not with the church. It is not a covenant made with all humanity, but all humanity may be grafted into it.

3. God has had a faithful remnant ever since the beginning of the human race. The church is that portion of the faithful remnant that was called out of the Gentiles, since Pentecost, to be grafted into the faithful remnant in Israel. There is a distinction between Israel and the church, but not a separation; there is a oneness in which distinguishable aspects of that oneness may be seen without implying or necessitating a division of identity or destiny.” “An Evangelical Response,” *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, eds. Blaising and Bock, pp. 360-361. Further read pp. 367-369.

\(^{132}\) Moo, *Romans*, p. 704.

\(^{133}\) Haldane, *Romans*, p. 546.
does not reflect a good record.\textsuperscript{134} On the other hand the attitude of Paul, already considered in the introduction to Romans 9, becomes a model in terms of what is here commended. One scholar of this shameful period declares:

The Holocaust was, of course, the bitter fruit of long centuries of Christian teaching about the Jewish people. From the time of the gentile Church Fathers and the legal establishment of a triumphant ecclesiastical and philosophico-political control system with Constantine the Great, Christendom treated the Jewish people with contempt and taught contemptuously of them. . . . [T]he baptized gentiles succumbed to that wrongheadedness against which Paul had warned: they turned in jealousy and envy against the very root that bore them (Rom. 11:18).\textsuperscript{135}

Surely the Gentile, in not being arrogant, in “continuing in the kindness of God,” v. 22, is to allow grace received to be a stimulant of graciouslyness that is to be directed toward the unbelieving Jews, and thus promote jealousy, vs. 11, 14. It is well worth contemplating here how a Christian, whose eschatological system denies the existence of Jews in the sight of God since 70 AD, can adequately respond here in parallel with Paul.

The role of the Christian church in relation to the Abrahamic covenant is significant and humbling here since, contrary to popular opinion down the centuries, it originates out of Judaism and does not replace it. Here is the heart of the “mystery which for ages has been hidden in God” (Eph. 3:8-10; cf. Rom. 15:8-12; Eph2:11-13, 19; 3:6; Col. 1:25-27), namely the engrafting of the Gentiles into the stock of Abraham. Amidst all of the illustrious saints of the Bible, including Adam, Noah, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and the Apostles, Abraham rises above them all in both the Old and New Testaments because of the singular call of God and his response of faith (Gen. 15:6-7).

b) Arrogance toward Gentile ingrafting, v. 19.

“Therefore you [the Gentile] will say,” leads to a representation of proud self-importance: “But some [natural Jewish] branches were cut off for the purpose that I [even I the more evidently worthy Gentile] might exclusively be engrafted into the stock of privileged blessing in Abraham].” In view of the humble reminder of v. 18, the Gentile is now

\textsuperscript{134} A study of church history regarding the treatment of the Jews by Christians is vital at this point. Refer to Paul E. Grosser and Edwin Halperin, \textit{The Causes And Effects Of Anti-Semitism}; David L. Larsen, \textit{Jews, Gentiles, And The Church}; David Rausch, \textit{A Legacy Of Hatred}; Clark M. Williamson, \textit{Has God Rejected His People?}

\textsuperscript{135} Forward by Franklin H. Little, Chairman, Department of Religion, Temple University. Paul E. Grosser and Edwin G. Halperin, \textit{The Causes And Effects Of Anti-Semitism}, p. xii.
perceived as accepting his roots and yet still boasting in his replacement of the Jew. Paul did not write in vain here, as the shameful history of the main stream of thought issuing from the church fathers indicates. As Grosser and Halperin explain, Hilary, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Cyril, Augustine, etc. are not bishops and fanatical monks or mendicant preachers, they are the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. . . . Their anti-Semitism just as their other writings had widespread profound and lasting impact. They bestowed a sanctity and respectability on anti-Semitism that survived the struggle between Judaism and Christianity of their times.  

2) Seek fear before God, vs. 20-21.

When Christians turn, ever so slightly, away from God, and focus upon their condition relative to others, there is the inevitable temptation to exude Pharisaic pride (Luke 18:11). So in Church history the Gentiles have frequently despised the Jews and sanctimoniously accused them of being “Christ-killers,” as if they were far less guilty (Acts 4:27). Chrysostom declared:

The Jews are the most worthless of all men. They are lecherous, greedy, rapacious. They are perfidious murderers of Christ. They worship the devil, their religion is a sickness. The Jews are the odious assassins of Christ and for killing God there is no expiation possible, no indulgence or pardon.  

a) Fear God’s dealing with the Jews, v. 20.

By way of expanded translation: “In the main it is true what you say. The greater proportion of Israelites were faithless and consequently broken off from the olive tree. However, you are to stand upon faith that hopes in mercy rather than self-congratulatory posturing. Do not place yourself on a pedestal by having a high opinion of yourself, but rather fearfully consider your own status before God.” As Israel’s fundamental sin was “unbelief,” 3:3; 9:32; 11:31; 15:31, so the Gentile is warned about proudly claiming immunity.

b) Fear God’s dealing with the Gentiles, v. 21.

While God is partial in His elective purposes, He is impartial insofar as the requirement of faith is concerned. Hence faithlessness in Israel resulted in severance so that faithlessness amongst the Gentiles can expect identical discipline. Haldane adds that this warning, “appears to be a

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137 Ibid., p. 78.
prophetic intimation of the apostasy of the great body of the professors of Christianity under the mystery of iniquity.” In other words, the fullness of blessing for the Gentiles will end in apostasy while the apostasy of Israel will end in fullness of blessing, cf. vs. 22-26.

3) Sustain gratitude before God, v. 22.

Paul contemplates how God’s dealings with both Jew and Gentile should cause us to ponder the polarity of His justice which is differently viewed according to the perspective of either faith or faithlessness. Both “goodness” χρηστότης, chrestotes, cf. 2:4, and “severity” ἀποτομία, apotomia, cf. 1:18, were manifest to Jew and Gentile, and comprise aspects of God’s righteousness, that is His judging and justifying righteousness that originate in the Old Testament (Ps. 85:10; Hab. 3:2; Is. 46:12-13) and culminate in the righteous Christ becoming the believing sinner’s righteousness (Rom. 3:26; I Cor. 1:30; I John 1:9).

Thus, up to the present, faithlessness amongst the Jews has resulted in severity, while faithfulness amongst the Gentiles has resulted in goodness. But regarding the future, if the Gentiles persevere in faith there will be ongoing goodness from God, though if they become faithless there will be severity poured out upon them even as the Jews have experienced. Thus Paul stresses the responsibility of the Gentiles in Rome lest they presume upon the sovereignty of God, though the conditional “if” clause here expresses probable fulfillment.

(3) The engrafting of the Jews, vs. 23-24.

As the olive tree analogy commenced with reference to Israel, and then focused on necessary warning for the Gentiles, so now we revert to the major concern of Israel’s future destiny, that is the unbelieving nation as a whole apart from the remnant.

(a) The Jews can yet be engrafted, v. 23.

“And they [the unbelieving nation], if they do not continue [same present tense of ἐπιμένω, epimenō, as in v. 22] in unbelief,” is the same type of third class conditional sentence expressing probable fulfillment as was in v. 22. Hence, whatever conditionality is valid for Israel is equally valid for the Gentiles, though God’s underlying elective

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138 Haldane, Romans, p. 547.
purposes are also equally valid and will not fail. Thus the probability is that “they [unbelieving Israel as a nation, not the remnant, cf. vs. 19-22] will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.” Humanly speaking, Israel’s condition is hopeless, even as is the case with any lost sinner or backslidden believer. However, “God is able to graft them [the unbelieving nation of Israel] in again [into the olive tree and root of Abraham].” That is, He has the sovereign power and covenant commitment whereby Israel as a nation can indeed be saved.

Haldane comments: “He [God] is able to make the dry bones live [Ezek. 37:1-14], and to restore the severed branches of the Jewish nation.”

Here then is Paul’s implicit denial that national Israel has been irrevocably cast aside, otherwise such a comment would be out of place. If God has previously determined that Israel has been permanently rejected as a nation, surely Paul would not imply the opposite in declaring that “God is able [has the power]” to save them,” unless His power could not rise to conquer their unwillingness!

(b) The Jews can lay claim to being engrafted, v. 24.

This a fortiori argument, from the lesser to the greater, seemingly injected to accentuate the truth of God’s saving power in v. 23, also introduces a glorious prospect that will now be developed and reach a climax in vs. 26-27. Thus: “If you Gentiles were broken off from a wild olive tree and unnaturally grafted into a cultivated olive tree, then how much more is it likely that those severed natural branches [that is the nation as a whole] will be grafted back into their own olive tree?” Simply put, the Jews will not lose their national identity but rather return home from whence they came, that is the root of Abraham. Further, the apodasis suggests something even more glorious than that which the fullness of the Gentiles conveys. It is a future hope expressed with the future tense of ἐκκεντρίζω, enkentrizo¯ , meaning to engraft. For this reason Paul here could not merely be referring to the remnant within Israel which has been engrafted on an ongoing basis; such a conclusion would be anticlimactic in the argument here whereas Paul anticipates something climactically, transcendentally wonderful.

Thus Moo concludes concerning this exhortation for the Gentiles:

The picture Paul sketches reveals the danger of the simple and popular notion that the church has ‘replaced’ Israel. For this formula misses the stress Paul places on historical continuity in the people of God. Paul suggests that the church, defined as the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, is simply the name for the people of God in this era of salvation history as —‘Israel’ was the name of that people in the previous age. To be sure, the dual nature of OT Israel—both spiritual and national

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140 It is astonishing to read the Calvinistic amillenialists who at this point emphasize conditionality whereas, in elsewhere vigorously upholding unconditional election especially with regard to the Gentiles, they are emphatic concerning the gift of faith and the perseverance of the saints. So Hendriksen, Romans, p. 375.

141 Haldane, Romans, p. 548.
—complicates the matter, but in neither sense does the church simply ‘replace’ Israel. As a spiritual entity, Israel is organically connected to the church; and as a national entity, as Paul has made clear (11:1-2), Israel continues to exist as the object of God’s care and attention.

What is particularly pernicious in the ‘replacement’ model is the assumption so easily made that ‘church’ = Gentiles. This assumption was apparently beginning to be made by Paul’s contemporaries. And it has certainly been embraced by many Christians throughout history, contributing (albeit often inadvertently) to anti-Semitism that has too often stained the name of Christ. . . . The coming of Christ did not for him [Paul] involve ethnic subtraction, as if Jews were now eliminated, but addition, with Gentiles now being added to believing Jews. Paul’s boundary for the people of God is a religious one—faith in Jesus Christ—not an ethnic one. We must not become so focused on the theology of Paul’s teaching here that we miss its purpose: to criticize those of us who are Gentiles for arrogance toward believing and unbelieving Jews and to remind us that our own spiritual heritage is a Jewish one.

C. Israel’s hardening in unbelief is impermanent, vs. 25-32.

Since the beginning of Romans 9, the overriding concern of Paul has been the justification of God in His covenant dealings with the nation of Israel. Now a climactic thrust is reached that seals the dogmatic assertions of 11:1, 11. The emphasis upon the nation as a whole continues in large focus, especially since for Paul the Old Testament manifestation has ongoing New Testament significance. The evidence for this is best grasped by reviewing the eleven references to “Israel” in Romans 9-11, thus far in 9:6, 27, 31; 10:19, 21; 11:2, 7, here also in v. 25, and yet again in v. 26; in these the nation is always in view. Even the concept of the lesser remnant mirrors the remaining greater unbelieving portion that together comprise the nation of Israel as a whole, which is the exact meaning in verse 26.

1. The hardening of Israel will conclude, v. 25.

It is common for a too hasty attitude to focus on v. 26 because of its prophetic significance without giving sufficient weight to the preceding context. The reason for such intense and often impatient interest is that the major millennial schools of eschatology set their sails according to the place of Israel in their distinctive schemes. So Horatius Bonar writes: “[T]he prophecies concerning Israel are the key to all the rest. True principles of interpretation, in regard to them, will aid us in disentangling and illustrating all prophecy together. False principles as to them will most thoroughly perplex and overcloud the whole Word of God.”\(^{143}\) Even now it is vital to carefully study v. 25 since it really establishes the course of v. 26.

\(^{142}\) Moo, *Romans*, pp. 709-10. Here, along with the brief remark of Haldane previously noted, is an honest encounter with the shameful historic ramifications of Paul’s teaching at this point that is uncommon amongst commentators.

\(^{143}\) Horatius Bonar, *Prophetic Landmarks*, p. 228.
a. The exhortation of the brethren.

“For I do not want you to be ignorant/uninformed [ἀγνωστόν, ἀγνόητον], brethren, of this mystery, so that you will not be conceited/wise according to your own perception.” Paul continues the thought of v. 25 concerning the greater apodosis, the much more glorious prospect of natural branches being engrafted back into the root of Abraham. But who does he address with a note of reprimand? Surely it is the proud Gentiles, already chastised, lest they think that world history will climax with their exaltation. There is wide agreement at this point; Moo comments that Paul leaves no doubt about what he wants his readers to learn from this mystery: to stop thinking so highly of themselves in comparison with Jews (v. 25a). We who are Gentiles should likewise take these verses as a reminder that we are only part of the great salvation-historical plan of God and that that plan has its climax in the salvation of Israel.\(^{144}\)

They are not to act with an “elder brother” attitude (Luke 15:25-32). Trench, in expounding the Parable of the Prodigal Son, explains:

[W]e Gentiles must not forget that at the end of the present dispensation all will be reversed, and that we shall be in danger of playing the part of the elder brother, and shall do so if we grudge at the largeness of the grace bestowed upon the Jew, who is now feeding upon the husks, far away from his Father’s house.\(^{145}\)

b. The revelation of the mystery.

What is this “the mystery,” τὸ μυστήριον, to mystērion, which the Gentile believers need to comprehend? It is a revelation of God, previously undisclosed during the Old Testament dispensation, that has now been made known; it especially focuses on the inclusion of the Gentiles into the root of Abraham, as 16:25-26 confirms, without the ultimate exclusion of national Israel (cf. Eph. 3:3-10, which intimates revelation from Christ; Col. 1:25-27). Hence, this mystery is not the supplanting of Israel by the Gentiles, but rather the incorporation of the Gentiles followed by Israel’s salvation, v. 26a. Thus the mystery includes the sequence of Jewish hardening, Gentile fullness, Jewish salvation.

c. The fullness of the Gentiles.

What then is this “fullness [τὸ πλήρωμα, the plērōma] of the Gentiles”? Of vital importance here is v. 12 where we saw that “the riches of gospel mercy [are] being poured out upon the world a large” (Matt. 24:14; Acts 2:17), and this is parallel with and yet outshone by the subsequent plērōma of gospel blessing that will come to the unbelieving nation. While a remnant of national Israel is presently being saved during the blessing of the Gentiles, yet there is an anticipated “much more fulfillment” that will unite and bless the nation as a whole. Luke 21:24

\(^{144}\) Moo, Romans, p. 713. Also Barrett, Cranfield, Haldane, Hendriksen, Hodge, Morris, Murray, Shedd.

\(^{145}\) R. C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, p. 152. Cranfield makes a similar comment: “The order of salvation thus described marks significantly an inversion of the order in which the good news is preached according to 1:16 (‘both for the Jew first and for the Greek’). Romans, II, p. 572.
describes this same sequence in world history when, “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until [ἐχθρί, achri, temporal preposition indicating sequence] the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Thus at the end of Gentile blessing through the gospel, there will follow even greater fullness of gospel blessing upon the nation of Israel. This does not mean that no more Gentiles will be saved following this transition any more than there were no Jews saved before it.\textsuperscript{146}

Hence πληρώμα means, “the [large numbered, but not elect totality] fullness of blessing” of the Gentiles when they “come in” to the kingdom of God’s redeemed people. This fullness is reflected in the Parable of the Great Supper where the master, having been spurned by the initial invitees (Jews), instructs his slaves to give repeated invitations to the disreputable Gentiles: “Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them [the Gentiles] to come in, so that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23).

d. The partial hardening of Israel.

Thus “a large segment/part of Israel has become hardened/calloused [πώροσις, pó rōsis].” Hence Israel here is imperfectly comprised of both “the remnant” and “the hardened part,” though this present disjunction will eventually become a perfect union when “all” Israel is saved, v. 26. Such a radical change will take place in chronological order, “until,” ἕχθρα, ἕχρι, temporal preposition,\textsuperscript{147} and hence following that time when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” In other words, “I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep my ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God” (Ezek. 31:17-19; cf. 36:22-28). Then, as Spurgeon preached, “the nation of Israel . . . shall be effectually and permanently converted, the hearts of the fathers shall be turned with the hearts of the children unto the Lord their God, and they shall be the people of God, world without end.”\textsuperscript{148}

2. The salvation of Israel will come from Zion, vs. 26-29.

While Paul has already revealed that national Israel has a future day of glory which he designates as “their fulfillment,” v. 12, “their acceptance,” v. 15, their being

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\textsuperscript{146} Refer to Murray, \textit{Romans}, II, pp. 91-96 for the best consideration of this whole matter.

\textsuperscript{147} Consider the use by Paul in 1:13; I Cor. 11:26; 15:25; Gal. 3:19; 4:2; Phil. 1:6 where a future change of circumstances is envisaged. Moo adds, “But decisive for this interpretation is the context, for Paul has throughout vs. 11-24 implied that Israel would one day experience a spiritual rejuvenation that would extend far beyond the present bounds of the remnant (“their fulness” contrasted with “their defeat” in v. 12; their “acceptance” contrasted with “their rejection” in v. 15; the “holiness” of even the broken-off branches in v. 16; the hope that these branches might be grafted in again in v. 24).” \textit{Romans}, pp. 717-8.

“regrafted” into the olive tree, vs. 23-24, their hard-heartedness being ended, v. 25, now he is even more forthright that such salvation is covenantally inevitable and climactic in world history. While it is inferred that the engrafting of the Gentiles is through the saving work of Christ, the regrafting of Israel is now explicitly declared to be through “the Delivering One” (cf. I Thess. 1:10).

a. The Deliverer will save national Israel, v. 26-27.

The controversy that surrounds this verse is closely related to systems of eschatology that have espoused three main perspectives. 1. “Israel” here refers to the redeemed of the New Testament era who comprise the church, whether converted Jew or Gentile. Thus the Christian church has become the new Israel that has replaced the former Old Testament nation. This view of Calvin has diminished support because of obvious exegetical weakness. 2. “Israel” here refers to the totality of the saved remnant of national Israel 11:5, that, while being comprised of Jewish Christians, yet is merged with the church which is the new Israel. Both of the above views can admit to a larger number of Jews being converted at the end of this age, though without there being any national significance with regard to the future. Such an increase, again, merges with the church. This view is especially supported by Dutch and Reformed scholars. 3. “Israel” here refers to a future national conversion of Israel, the larger unbelieving segment in particular, that results in Israel serving under Christ in the promised land with restored glory. This view, with variations, is most widely held today.

(1) The national salvation of all Israel, v. 26a.

The meaning of πᾶσα Ἰσραήλ, pas Israēl, is the key here. The context of v. 25 where “Israel” must refer to the nation as a whole is decisive, as is the consistent use in the other 9 instances in Romans 9-11 that never refer to Gentiles. The “all” incorporates the implied “remnant” and the “unbelieving remainder” of v. 25. Thus Murray comments, “that it is exegetically impossible to give to ‘Israel’ in this verse any other denotation than that which belongs to the term throughout this chapter.” The remnant has not been explicitly mentioned since vs. 5, 7. Again in vs. 24-25, the regrafting is portrayed as climactic in the future, and not periodic throughout the church age. If only the remnant was in mind here with regard to this age, the present tense would be more appropriate. Rather, “Israel will be saved [future tense]” parallels “will be engrafted [future tense]” in v. 24. Thus, the

149 Murray, Romans, I, p. 96. So Barrett, Boice, Cranfield, Haldane, Hodge, Lloyd-Jones, Moo, Morris, Moule, Stott. Roman Catholic scholar Brendan Byrne comments that equating “all Israel” with “the totality of believers, Jewish and Christian . . . is generally rejected today in favor of a reference to the whole of ethnic Israel,” Romans (Sacra Pagina), p. 354. However, such agreement does not necessarily imply the belief that national Israel will inherit the promised land of Palestine.

150 The suggestion that Israel here is the accumulation of the remnant over the centuries, according to Bavinck, Hoekema, Hendriksen, Palmer Robertson, is, according to Schreiner, “stunningly anticlimactic,” Romans, p. 617. Reymond betrays this weakness in stating: “This view still allows enough [emphasis added!] Jewish conversions to Christianity throughout this age to meet the demand of the ‘riches’ (πλοῦτος, ploutos, 11:12) and ‘life from the dead’ (ζωή ἐκ νεκρῶν, zōē ek nekrōn, 11:15) which Paul envisions ‘all Israel’s’ salvation will bring to the world.” A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, p. 1029.
meaning of “and so,” καὶ οὖτως, kai houtōs. Added support for the future national conversion/resurrection of Israel is found in Simeon’s prophecy that, “this Child [Jesus Christ in his arms] is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34), is not the operative concern here. It can mean “and then” in a temporal sense, as Bruce and Barrett uphold, or it can mean “and thus” in accord with the Scripture about to be quoted, or most likely it means “in the same manner,” that is concerning how the thrust of vs. 7-25 works out, which is very much time/sequence oriented.

But more specifically, what is the nature of this future national conversion of Israel? Most likely it comprises the nation in general without absolute totality, as is reflected in the approximate numbering of Israel (Num. 2, 26). Further, it is paralleled by numerous Old Testament prophetic references that present a harmonious picture of the resurrected nation, v. 15, that has returned to its land and become the object of unequaled blessing and universal acknowledgment, and are not adequately fulfilled in Israel’s post-exilic blessings (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 43:1-7; Jer. 23:3; 30:1-11; Ezek. 11:14-21; 20:39-44; 36:22-37:28; 39:25-29; Hos. 1:10-11; 2:14-23; 3:4-5; 14:1-7; Amos 9:13-15; Zech. 10:6-12). So Jonathan Edwards describes this restoration:

Without doubt, they [the Jews] will return to their own land; because when their unbelief ceases, their dispersion, the dreadful and signal punishment of their unbelief will cease too. As they have continued hitherto, with one consent, to dishonor Christ by rejecting the gospel, so shall they meet together to honor him, by openly professing of it with one mouth, and practice it with one heart and one soul, together lamenting their obstinacy, as it is said they shall (Zech. 12:11-12), and together praising God for his grace in enlightening them. And as they have hitherto continued a distinct nation, that they might continue a visible monument of his displeasure, for their rejecting and crucifying their Messiah, so after their conversion will they still be a distinct nation, that they may be a visible monument of God’s wonderful grace and power in their calling and conversion. . . . But yet, we are not to imagine that the old walls of separation will be set up again. . . . For they shall look upon all the world to be their brethren, as much as the Christians in Boston and the Christians in other parts of New England look on each other as brethren.

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152 Moo provides the most comprehensive study of v. 26a and comments “that houtōs, while not having a temporal meaning, has a temporal reference: for the manner in which all Israel is saved involves a process that unfolds in definite stages.” Romans, p. 720. This is the identical situation in vs. 4-5 where houtōs is used in a temporal context with regard to the past concerning Elijah and the “present time.”

153 It is surprising that Moo, Morris, Murray, but not Haldane, make no reference to this broad canvas and obvious association, even though the following quotations of Isaiah and Jeremiah draw from this pervasive Old Testament theme and reflect Paul’s ongoing Jewish connection with it.

154 Jonathan Edwards, Works (Yale), V, p. 135. Iain Murray indicates that many English Puritans were of this same opinion concerning the national conversion and restoration of Israel. The Puritan Hope, pp. 175-8.
(2) The national Deliverer of Jacob, v. 26b.

The salvation of all Israel is confirmed and explained in the Word of God, specifically Isaiah 27:9; 59:20-21a; Jer. 31:33-34, which Paul freely adapts to complement the revelation of the “mystery,” v. 25. Thus, “Out of Zion will the Delivering One come.” The future tense suggests the return of Jesus Christ, after the manner of, “Jesus, who rescues [delivers] us from the wrath to come” (I Thess. 1:10; cf. 2:4, 8), having come from the heavenly Zion and his throne of intercession (Heb. 12:22-24); this complements the other future aspects of vs. 24, 26. However, Paul’s flexible manner of using the Old Testament is evident when, as distinct from the LXX declaring “the deliverer shall come for Zion’s sake” in basic agreement with the Hebrew, he uniquely writes that Christ shall come “out of Zion,” ἐκ Σιὼν, and probably with the thought in mind of Psalm 14:7, “Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores His captive people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad.” This is further indicated since this Delivering One “will remove [future tense] ungodliness from Jacob” (Isa. 27:9; cf. vs. 6, 12-13 which, according to Paul’s reference here, must transcend the return from Babylon). This scene is repeatedly eschatological, and for this reason we reject Lloyd-Jones’ interpretation. It is well reflected in William Cowper’s poem, “Israel’s Redemption.”

On the mountain’s top appearing,
   Lo, the sacred Herald stands!
Welcome news to Zion bearing,
   Zion long in hostile lands;
   Mourning captive,
   God Himself will loose thy bands!
Has thy night been long and mournful?
   All thy friends unfaithful proved?
   Have thy foes been proud and scornful?
   By thy sighs and tears unmoved?
   Cease thy mourning;
   Zion still is well beloved.
Lo, thy Sun is risen in glory!
   God himself appears thy friend;
   All thy foes shall flee before thee;
   Here their boasts and triumphs end;
   Great deliverance
   Zion’s King vouchsafes to send!

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155 “The Zion out of which He will come is indeed heaven itself; His influence will come from there. I am not saying that this is the Second Coming, I am simply saying that the Apostle is saying here that in this spiritual manner the Redeemer will exert this tremendous influence upon the nation of the Jews and will turn iniquity from them and will bring them to faith and salvation and bring them into membership of the Christian church.” Romans 11, p. 191. Also note that in vs. 23-4 the Jews are regrafted into their former stock, the olive tree or root of Abraham, not the wild olive branches.

156 James A. Begg, Extracts on Prophecy, pp. 343-5.
Enemies no more shall trouble;
All thy warfare now is past;
For thy shame thou shalt have double;
Days of peace are come at last:
All thy conflicts
End in everlasting rest.

(3) The national covenant of cleansing, v. 27.

The continuing quotation of Isaiah 59:21a, now incorporating the thought of covenant and cleansing from Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 31:31, 33-34, indicates that the basis of the aforementioned salvation of Israel will be the atoning “Seed” of Abraham. The “newness” of this covenant (Heb. 8:8-13; 12:18-24) is in relation to the old covenant made at Mt. Sinai, while it is but the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, v. 28. Cranfield rightly concludes that such unilateral deliverance, “dashes Israel’s self-centered hopes of establishing a claim upon God, of putting Him under an obligation by its merits, making it clear that the nation’s final salvation will be a matter of the forgiveness of its sins by the sheer mercy of its God.”

3. The salvation of Israel will be comprehensive, vs. 28-32.

The whole problem for the Gentile has been one of misplaced focus, that is self-centeredness; the overriding purpose of Paul has been to correct this narrow vision so that it encompasses the broader perspective of Jew and Gentile in God’s plan of redemption. Notice the contrast between “they” (Israelites) and “your” (Gentiles), v. 28, between “you” (Gentiles) and “their/these/they” (Israelites), vs. 30-31. By way of concluding summation, Paul now continues to address the Gentile in much the same way that God needed to address the narrow focus of Peter (Acts 10:44-11:18).

a. According to irrevocable covenant, vs. 28-29.

Here biblical covenantalism, with regard to God’s saving purposes, is brought to the forefront, and this in turn causes us to grasp that God’s gospel is rooted in His sovereign will and commitment rather than human cooperation. Hence we are constrained to view God’s dealings from His point of view rather than that of either the Gentile or Jew, and here this calls for continued emphasis on the Gentile having his vision expanded even as this thrust was introduced at v. 17. The necessity may be due to the glorious deliverance of vs. 26-27 that could arouse Gentile discomfort, again after the manner of the “elder brother” (Luke 15:25-32).

(1) The covenant incorporates God’s choice of Israel, v. 28.

“On the one hand, according to the gospel, they [the Israelites] are enemies for your [the Gentiles] sake, but on the other hand, according to the election, they [the Israelites] are beloved for the sake of the fathers [the patriarchs,

\(^{157}\) Cranfield, Romans, II, p. 579.
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob].” Even more literally we translate: “On the one hand, according to the gospel [τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, to euangelion], enemies [ἐχθροὶ, echthroi] they are for you; on the other hand, according to the election [τὴν ἐκλογὴν, tēn eklogēn], beloved [ἀγαπητοὶ, agapētoi] they are for the fathers, for irrevocable/not to be regretted, abrogated are the gifts [τὰ χαρίσματα charismata] and calling [ἡ κλήσις, hē klēsis] of God.” The antithetical parallelism in v. 28 is exact and instructive.

The interplay that God sovereignly ordains in history between Jew and Gentile, having been finely argued in vs. 11-27, is now brought to a summary conclusion. The absence of a connective with the preceding context only enhances the climactic nature of this truth. The first part of this proposition would not surprise the Gentile; he would readily accept that according to divine purpose, vs. 1-2, the Jew has been spurned by God on account of hostility to Christ. However an overri ding principle must be kept in mind being God’s covenant transaction with Abraham that preceded the revelation of the mystery through the church, namely the original election of Israel that was irrevocable, according to “foreknowledge,” vs. 1-2 (cf. Ps. 33:11-12; Isa. 44:1-2; Amos 3:2). Deuteronomy 7:7-8 declares that God’s election of Israel was not on account of national merit, but rather “the LORD loved you [Israel] and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.” So here Paul brings to mind this same foundational truth, namely the fixity of the Abrahamic covenant that guarantees the salvation of national Israel and not merely a remnant. The point is well expressed by the hymn writer Thomas Olivers who wrote, “The God of Abraham praise.”

He by Himself hath sworn—
I on His oath depend:
I shall, on eagles’ wings upborne,
To heaven ascend.

So Moo comments:

Some think, because of the way that Paul describes election in 9:6b-13—an act by which God brings people into relationship with himself—that Paul must be referring here to the remnant. But a switch in subject in mid-verse, from the

158 Here “the election” is descriptive of “they” and thus the nation rather than a reference to the “remnant according to God’s gracious choice,” v. 5. So Barrett, Cranfield, Haldane, Hodge, Moo, Morris, Murray, contra Lenski, Robertson.
Jews who are God’s enemies in light of the gospel, to Jews who are beloved by God as elect members of the remnant, seems unwarranted.\textsuperscript{159}

Of course Paul is not writing here of the merit of the patriarchs which the Jews mistakenly lauded, but the faithfulness of God to them, His unilateral promise that rested solely in His holy character, His “loyal love” that is based upon elective mercy and divine integrity which results in Israel being “beloved” according to pure grace. Hence what was promised to Abraham shall certainly be accomplished. The loss of Israel would be the defeat of God; the saving of Israel is to the praise of His glorious grace (3:3; 11:1, 11). Here then is the most explicit indication that in this present dispensation, unbelieving national Israel, for all of its ongoing agony and relentless unbelief, continues to regarded as “beloved enemies” by the God who promised through Hosea: “I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lilly, and he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. His shoots will sprout, and his beauty will be like the olive tree and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon” (Hos. 14:4-6).

(2) The covenant incorporates God’s immutable calling, v. 29.

“For irrevocable are the gifts and calling of God.” The emphatic position of άμεταμέλητος, ametamele¯tos, meaning something done without regret and hence not to be taken back, draws attention to Paul’s passionate conviction that the details of the Abrahamic covenant have not been rescinded. Specifically, the grace gifts (tó χαρίσματα, ta charismata) cataloged in 9:4-5 along with the effectual calling of God intrinsic to these have not been abrogated. And witness to this is the whole history of God’s dealings with Israel, not only throughout the Old Testament (Isa. 49:14-16), but also on into the New Testament era that will climax with “all Israel being saved.” In other words, fundamental to God’s dealing with Israel is His immutable promise to Abraham that finds fulfillment through David and Christ that includes the engrafting of the Gentiles (Eph. 2:12-13).\textsuperscript{160} Here we see that God’s moral character, his holy integrity, is at the heart of His saving work.

\textsuperscript{159} Moo, Romans, p. 731. Thus “the election” is descriptive of “they” and thus the unbelieving nation rather than a reference to the “remnant according to God’s gracious choice,” v. 5. So also Barrett, Cranfield, Haldane, Hodge, Morris, Murray, Schreiner, contra Lenski, Robertson.

\textsuperscript{160} Walter C. Kaiser has maintained that this is the fundamental motif of the Old Testament. He writes: “In the main, this view [promise theology] agrees with the distinction between Israel and the church. But instead of continuing to say, as classical dispensationalism did, that there are two separate peoples (Israel and the church) with two separate programs (the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom of our Lord), this view stresses that there is one people (“the people of God”) with a number of discernable aspects within that one people (such as Israel and the church), and there is only one program of God (the “kingdom of God”) with numerous aspects under that single program.” “An Epangelical Response,” eds. Blaising and Block, Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church, p. 367. Also refer to Kaiser’s Toward an Old Testament Theology.
b. According to universal mercy, vs. 30-32.

It is a common quirk of human nature that we more readily focus on grace bestowed upon ourselves and at the same time sin manifest in others (Matt. 7:3-5). Likewise the Gentiles, particularly in their ascendancy, have tended to look with admiring exclusivity at themselves and disparagement toward the Jews. Hence Paul is persistent in communicating God’s inclusive perspective which, though none the less particular, intends that Gentile and Jew should be accepting of each other even as He has been equally gracious in showing “mercy to all.”

The significance of Paul continuing to exhort the Gentiles in particular from v. 13 up to v. 32 ought not to be missed. The point is that a wider perspective is necessary concerning God’s design for human history. So often we are blinded by a narrow and exclusive frame of reference, v. 18a, that requires divine enlightenment, vs. 24-29.

(1) God’s mercy overcomes Gentile disobedience, v. 30.

In the form of a protasis, the Gentile as “you” is exhorted to recall his former disobedience that found present mercy at the expense of Israel’s present disobedience. In other words, the Gentiles’ received mercy is to be pondered in terms of past pagan unworthiness or “disobedience to God,” not relative worthiness when compared with Israel, which arrogance is reflected in vs. 18-20.

(2) God’s mercy overcomes Israel’s disobedience, v. 31.

In the form of an apodasis, the Gentile is exhorted not to be less merciful in attitude than God with regard to “these/they” or the Jews. Mercy received ought to beget a merciful attitude that reaches out toward those in need of mercy (Matt. 18:23-35). Thus Gentile disobedience followed by mercy received is to be paralleled with Jewish disobedience followed by mercy received. The Gentile who has received mercy ought to rejoice at such a prospect, and consequently show mercy to the Jewish people.

(3) God’s mercy overcomes universal disobedience, v. 32.

So Paul’s grand conclusion is that, “God has shut up together [συγκλείω, sunkleiō, cf. Luke 5:6] [the] all [both Gentile and Jew] unto disobedience for the purpose that He might show mercy to [the] all [both Gentile and Jew].” The definite article here identifies classes previously described, namely the totality of saved, engrafted Gentiles, and “all Israel” previously indicated, and not “all men” in a possible universalist sense. The “confinement” here, reminiscent of 1:24, 26, 28, describes these Gentiles and Jews as being hopelessly captive, without distinction, 3:9, through willful sinning and divine abandonment, so that boasting is eliminated. Yet such consignment is

162 So Origen, Dodd, Cranfield.
intended to be eclipsed by sovereign divine mercy that finds ultimate exaltation, especially in vs. 33-36.

Thus God’s elect, “a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9; cf. 5:9) being comprised of Gentiles and Jews, has been hewn from the pit of pagan disobedience, through Abraham (Isa. 51:1-3), according to divine, magnanimous loving kindness. Thus, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,” 5:20-21. As Frederick W. Faber has penned:

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
   Like the wideness of the sea;
There’s a kindness in His justice
   Which is more than liberty.
For the love of God is broader
   Than the measure of man’s mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
   Is most wonderfully kind.

So this principle is true of human history as this verse also declares. Lloyd-Jones comments:

[T]he fact that you ever become Christians is entirely and solely the result of God’s grace and mercy and power. There is our general philosophy of history. Man made perfect, he sins, the world becomes chaotic. Civilizations try to put things right—it is no good, they are only going round in circles, or think that there is no purpose at all. But then you come to the Bible and you see this great purpose going right through, ending in the vision of the Book of Revelation; the final deliverance, the return of Christ, the conquest and destruction of evil and the setting up of this glorious kingdom which is eternal. That is the biblical view or philosophy of history.

That is the triumph of divine mercy.

D. Israel’s salvation by God is glorious, vs. 33-36.

When the gracious saving work of God is rightly appreciated, there will be an inevitable response of worship, praise, and adoration, personality variations notwithstanding. So here Paul reflects the attitude of David who, in acknowledging that God “brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay,” then responds, “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to out God” (Ps. 40:2-3). But also notice the further focus of David’s hymnic worship. “Behold, I will not restrain my lips, O LORD, You know. I have not hidden your righteousness within my heart; I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great congregation. You, O LORD, will not withhold your compassion from me; your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me” (Ps. 40:9-11). So Paul cannot “restrain his lips.” He must let the “fire of grace in his belly erupt.” He would agree with these further lines of Faber:

My God, how wonderful Thou art,
Thy Majesty how bright!
How beautiful Thy mercy-seat,
In depth of burning light!

It is significant that Robert Haldane, whose commentary on Romans was the result of his earnest teaching of some ignorant theological students at Geneva in 1816, gives the following extract of a letter he wrote in 1824 to Mr. Cheneviere, the well-known Socinian, and yet Pastor and Professor of Divinity at Geneva.

There was nothing brought under the consideration of the students of divinity who attended me at Geneva, which appeared to contribute so effectually to overthrow their false system of religion, founded on philosophy and vain deceit, as the sublime view of the majesty of God presented in the four concluding verses of this part of the Epistle [11:33-36].

But what is the context here? The weight of evidence must come down on the side of the preceding Rom. 9-11, but especially 11:11-32. Paul is overwhelmed with a sense of the triumph of God’s mercy that will crown that time when “the Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob,” v. 26.

1. The praise of God’s transcendent Being, v. 33.

Paul’s emotional exclamation, his adoring and worshipful “C”, cf. 2:1, 3; 9:20; Gal. 3:1; I Tim. 6:20, has been ignited by the concluding thought of v. 32, that is the unalloyed mercy and grace of God that has been exalted since 1:1-6, 16-17, and 3:21 onwards. It is mirrored against the futility of human law works, of boasting by the Jews, 2:17-29, and more recently that of the Gentiles, 11:13-32.

a. His depth of being, v. 33a.

“O the depth [βάθος, bathos] of [the] richness and [the] wisdom and [the] knowledge of God” suggests not simply God’s character in general, but three perfections that have distinct gospel significance and all coalesce in the person and work of Christ (2:4; 9:23; 10:12; I Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:7; Col. 2:3). Paul is reflecting wonderment more than frustration concerning “this mystery” v. 25, cf. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:2-3, 8-9; Col. 1:26-27; it is astonishing rather than incomprehensible. So Lloyd-Jones comments that because Paul has been expounding God’s great plan and purpose of redemption, “he is amazed at it himself and he feels there is only one thing to do, and that is to praise God with the whole of his being.” Like most new believers, the Gentile and Jew had learned of the mercy of God, but Paul expounds on a quality of mercy that provokes awe.

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164 Haldane, Romans, p. 560.
165 So Cranfield, Moo, Morris, Murray. For the broader context of Rom. 1-11, Bruce, Stott.
166 Lloyd-Jones, Romans 11, p. 254. He also points out the fallacy of Willam Barclay at this juncture who suggests that Paul, in his struggle and difficulty in understanding what he cannot grasp, simply becomes resigned to the basic truth that God is love, pp. 253-5.
b. His infinitude of being, v. 33b.

“How unsearchable [beyond human discovery] are His judgments [righteous decisions] and unfathomable [beyond human comprehension] are His ways [providential dealings].” The emphasis is not so much upon the unknowableness of God as the fact that what has been divinely made known would never have been understood apart from divine revelation. The whole course of Romans 9-11 has been the unveiling of God’s hitherto unknown purposes regarding Gentile and Jew. Having declared that which he received by revelation (Eph. 3:2-3), Paul glories in the gospel plan that is God’s by design and execution, as well as the impossibility of it having human origination.

2. The praise of God’s infinite purposes, v. 34-35.

The sequence of three questions, drawn from the Old Testament, is intended to reinforce the source of the gospel of free grace as being exclusively divine. More recently the Gentile has been exhorted not to boast, vs. 17-20, and here he is being similarly prompted to come to an inevitable conclusion; it is that salvation is wholly of the Lord and exclusive of human distinctions.

a. What human has plumbed His mind? v. 34a.

“For who has known the mind [νοῦς nous] of the Lord?” The quotation of Isaiah 40:13a reminds us of God’s humiliating interrogation of Job, Job 38:1-41:34. The expected negative response is intended to lead to the conclusion that God is known by revelation, not discovery (I Cor. 1:19-21); even the child of God does not assist in the establishment of the divine plan by means of sanctified aptitude. As John Greenleaf Whittier has written:

Who fathoms the eternal thought?
Who talks of scheme and plan?
The Lord is God! He needeth not
The poor device of man.

Paul is not recommending mindless faith, as the broad preceding context of Romans plainly indicates. However, he does reign in the use of the intellect that either goes beyond or extrapolates from the revealed Word in a manner resulting in conclusions that God never intended.167 This is especially so with regard to the doctrine of God’s sovereignty that calls for submission rather than understanding.

b. What human has plumbed His ways? v. 34b.

“Who became His [fellow] counselor [σύμβουλος, samboulos]?” The quotation of Isaiah 40:13b is also intended to abase the Christian, and especially the Gentile, who is convinced that his eschatology should be adopted by God. As Nathaniel

167 By way of illustration, consider the clear biblical truth that faith is a sovereign gift of God (Matt. 16:16-17; Luke 22:32; Acts 16:14; Eph. 2:8-9) and not the ability of autonomous man. Logically speaking then, men ought to be exhorted to seek the gift of faith rather than believe. However the consistent invitation of the Bible is simply for man to believe.
West has written, “Israel, the created people of God, abides Israel, and the history of Israel is not a mere frame in which to hang pictures of the New Testament church.” \(^{168}\) Even amongst Christians there is often retained an impudence that attempts to bring the Bible into conformity with a precast doctrinal system, and in so doing there is the implicit conformity of God’s ways to our own so that we end up being His counselor. Job descended to this level of thinking, that is until he was humbled by God and confessed, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:1-3).

c. What human has plumbed His grace? v. 35.

“Or who has first given to Him so that it might be repaid [as indebtedness]?” This quotation of Job 41:11 is but another means by which Paul excludes human initiative, whether in the realm of mental activity in v. 34 or human exertion here that obligates God. By implication the essential nature of grace, v. 6, 4:4-5; 6:23, is distinguished once again, and in the context of believers needing to be reminded of it as an abiding principle in relating one toward another, whether Gentile or Jew.

3. The praise of God’s infinite glory, v. 36.

Paul’s theocentricity reaches its apex here as a series of contrasting prepositions is used to describe God as the only independent Being! Everything and everyone else is derived and dependant. The reason that God has exclusive sovereignty that excludes the initiative of Gentile and Jew is that “all things,” \( \tau \alpha \pi \alpha \nu \alpha \tau \alpha \), ta panta, proceeding from Him, through Him, and to Him, are necessarily under his unqualified dominion. Thus the triune Jehovah has absolute sovereignty and the result is unparalleled grace and mercy according to His disposal.

Of course this declaration of praise is not a mere cerebral expression, but also a fervent and heart-throbbing exclamation that is inevitable insofar as the grasp of profound doctrine is concerned. John Stott well writes that:

It is of great importance to note from Romans 1-11 that theology (our belief about God) and doxology (our worship of God) should never be separated. On the one hand, there can be no doxology without theology. It is not possible to worship an unknown God. . . . On the other hand, there should be no theology without doxology. There is something fundamentally flawed about a purely academic interest in God. God is not an appropriate object for cool, critical, detached, scientific observation and evaluation. No, the true knowledge of God will always lead us to worship, as it did Paul. Our place is on our faces before him in adoration. As I believe Bishop Handley Moule said at the end of the last century, we must ‘beware equally of an undevotional theology and of an untheological devotion’ \(^{169}\)

\(^{168}\) Nathaniel West, *The Thousand Years in Both Testaments*, p. 7.

\(^{169}\) John Stott, *Romans*, pp. 311-2.
a. His triune dominion, v. 36a.

Paul, the converted Jew, testifies to the essence of monotheism. The trinitarian formula is at best inferential. What are the “all things”? Morris comments: “It may refer to the universe, the whole of creation, or Paul may be thinking of all things concerning salvation. Either way, the totality belongs to God.”

(1) All things are from Him, ἐξ ἀυτοῦ, ex autou, that is they originate from Him by creation. God is the only underived Being, while everything else is derived from Him.

(2) All things are by Him, δι’ ἀυτοῦ, di autou, that is they are maintained by Him according to sovereign providence. He upholds the order of things, whether directly or indirectly.

(3) All things are to Him, εἰς ἀυτὸν, eis auton, that is they give acknowledgment to Him through refunded glory. God is the goal of all things.

b. His glorious dominion, v. 36b.

“To Him be the glory [ἡ δόξα, hē doxa], eternally through the ages. Amen [Let the truth stand].” This doxology is a prayer of holy and passionate desire, especially as v. 32 anticipates that time of consummated mercy. “The word of God has not failed,” 9:6a, as has been amply demonstrated. He has been fully vindicated, and shall be at the climax of the ages.

So Jonathan Edwards summarizes this grand conclusion.

In the preceding context, the apostle observes the marvelous disposals of divine wisdom, for causing all things to be to him, in their final issue and result, as they are from him at first, and governed by him. His discourse shows how God contrived this and brought it to pass, by setting up the kingdom of Christ in the world; leaving the Jews, and calling the Gentiles; including what he would hereafter do in bringing in the Jews, with the fullness of the Gentiles; with the circumstances of these wonderful works, so as greatly to show his justice and his goodness, to magnify his grace, and manifest the sovereignty and freeness of it, and the absolute dependence of all on him. And then, in the last four verses, he breaks out into a most pathetic exclamation, expressing his great admiration of the depth of divine wisdom, in the steps he takes for attaining his end, and causing all things to be to him: and finally, he expresses a joyful consent to God’s excellent design in all to glorify himself, in saying, ‘to him be glory forever;’ as much as to say, as all things are so wonderfully ordered for his glory, so let him have the glory of all, for evermore.

170 Morris, Romans, p. 429.