

“HAS GOD CAST AWAY HIS PEOPLE?”

Gary Fisher

Text: Rom. 9-11

Introduction:

- I. The place of these chapters in the context of Romans
 - A. In chapters 1-5, Paul deals with the need for the gospel, the plan of the gospel itself and the blessings of the gospel
 - B. In chapters 6-8, Paul treats a possible objection: that the teaching of the gospel encourages sin
 - C. In chapters 9-11, Paul discusses a second objection: that the teaching of the gospel contradicts God’s promises to the Jews
 - D. In chapters 12-16, Paul shows practical applications of the gospel
- II. The objection
 - A. It is impossible to understand the answer to a problem until one fully understands and feels the problem
 - B. If we feel the need to downplay and soft-pedal any teaching, we don’t understand it properly
 - C. Paul had insisted that his teaching was in accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures: see 1:2; 3:21
 - D. However, the Old Testament prophecies directed God’s promises to the Jews
 1. Isaiah 11:11-16; Jeremiah 31:31-37; 33:23-36; Zechariah 8:23; 9:9-10 and many, many others
 2. The majority of the Jews, because of unbelief, were excluded from the blessings of the gospel
 3. The majority of the Christians were Gentiles
 4. Yet, God had promised these blessings to the Jews!
 5. We do not have the right to simply enter these passages and substitute Christians for Israelites and the church for Israel
 - E. If the Jews as a whole rejected Christ, how was salvation through Him consistent with God’s previous promises?
 - F. In understanding and teaching these chapters, we must be sure that we sufficiently emphasize and sense the seriousness of this problem. To me, this is the most significant factor in understanding Paul’s answer.

Body:

I. Paul’s attitude toward the Jews 9:1-5

Strong affirmation 9:1

The contrast with 8:31-39 is quite painful

Strong, solemn, emphatic statement

Sometimes Paul says he is telling the truth (2 Corinthians 11:10; Titus 1:13) and sometimes he denies that he is lying (2 Corinthians 11:31; Galatians 1:20). Here and in 1 Timothy 2:7 he does both

Telling the truth in Christ

One who is in Christ has strong obligation to tell the truth always

Everything Paul did focused on Christ

Strong feeling 9:2

Great intensity in his sorrow and grief

Paul truly cared about his fellow-countrymen

Men don't care how much we know until they know how much we care—an important principle

Strong commitment 9:3

If it would do any good, he would rather be damned than to see his Jewish brethren lost

But only Christ could be such a substitute

Separated from Christ: see 8:38-39 where Paul notes that the love of God is experienced in Christ

These were Paul's brethren in the flesh, as opposed to His Christian brethren, who were brethren in the spirit

Description of the privileges of the Jews 9:4-5

Continues the list that Paul began in 3:2

The promises themselves

Israelites: God's chosen people

Adoption as sons: special relationship with God as His children

Glory: God's presence

Covenants: with Abraham, through Moses, with David

Giving of the Law: the privilege of knowing the Lord's will

Temple service

The promises: in Israelite religion the best was always yet to be

Wonderful privileges, the climax of which was Christ, who came through Jewish lineage

How ironic! Their greatest privilege was the very obstacle over which they stumbled

Christ is God; we must not downplay His deity

Debate over phrase "God blessed forever": does it refer to Christ as God or is it an ascription of praise to God the Father?

The word order and flow of the phrase favors this as an ascription of Christ; otherwise the subject must be abruptly changed

The idea that Christ was from Israel according to the flesh calls for a corresponding statement about Christ's spiritual nature (see 1:3-4)

A statement of praise almost always begins with "blessed be" instead of beginning with "God"

A joyful ascription of praise is out of place in a passage of such great grief

Gives a must stronger conclusion to this list of privileges

Because not all Israel are Israel 9:6-29

God has always chosen which descendants of Abraham are true heirs of the promises 9:6-13

Previously Paul said that God justifies both Jew and Gentile who have faith in Jesus

Since most Jews did not believe in Jesus, most Jews were not justified

Yet, God promised to bless the Jews

Paul insists that God's promises did not fail 9:6

Because not all Israel are Israel

There are Jews, and then there are Jews: John 1:47; Romans 2:28-29

Two illustrations 9:7-13

God chose Isaac, not Ishmael 9:7-9

Ishmaelites were physical descendants of Abraham, but were not counted as true children in respect to the promises

God chose which descendants of Abraham were the real ones

God chose Jacob, not Esau 9:10-13

A stronger case, since Ishmael's mother was the servant Hagar

In the case of Jacob and Esau

Both mother and father were the same

They were children of the same pregnancy

Esau was older giving him a greater human claim

Not of works

Jacob chosen before he had done anything

God chose regardless of personal merit

Goes against idea of inherited sin because Jacob and Esau had not done anything good or bad

The Jew claimed the flesh and law-keeping as the ground of his special right to the promises

God has always chosen which descendants of Abraham were heirs of the promise

God has always chosen without regard to degree of goodness

God chooses whom He pleases and He always has

When God in Jesus' day chose the Jew who had faith in Christ, He was acting as He always had: making the choice as to which physical descendants of Abraham He considered to be the true children of Abraham

God has the right to define the true Jew regardless of fleshly descent or law-keeping

If God was not unrighteous in excluding Ishmael or Esau from God's promises to Abraham, He was not unrighteous in excluding unbelieving Jews

God's choice is not unrighteous 9:14-18

God has the right to show mercy on whom He chooses 9:15-16

God's mercy is not within man's power to compel

It is the Lord's mercy

The Jew thought he had the right to control the dispensation of God's mercy, but man's actions do not obligate God

God has the right to harden whom He chooses 9:17-18

Pharaoh asked, 'Who is Jehovah,' and God signed him up for a ten-lesson course!

God raised up Pharaoh and punished him

God hardened his heart through the plagues and their withdrawal. These same actions softened the hearts of other Egyptians. The same fire that hardens brick softens metal

God's hardening a man's heart is a punishment of the man's refusal to love the truth (see 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; 1 Kings 22)

Notice

This paragraph does not say that God chooses to have mercy or to harden without regard to man's attitudes and actions

In fact, God chooses to have mercy on the ones who have faith (see Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 55:7)

This passage simply affirms God's right to choose the ones or the categories whom He will bless or punish

It is not unfair for God to choose the Jew who believes in Christ

God has the right to do what He wants with His clay 9:19-24

The complaint: Why does God still find fault? How can I resist His will? 9:19

God's right over the clay 9:20-21

This reply rebukes the presumptuous spirit of the one who would ask such a question

This reply only deals with God's right and not with questions of human responsibility and free will; to study those questions under the figure of potter and clay; see Jeremiah 18:1-12 and 2 Timothy 2:19-21

God took the lump of Israel and made the unrepentant part a vessel unto dishonor and the faithful part a vessel unto honor

The Jew thought he alone should be an honorable vessel, but God has the right to choose the vessels of faith for honor

How God exercised His right 9:22-24

What He actually did with His right was to endure with great patience those who had prepared themselves for destruction; God gave them many opportunities

God endured many generations of unbelieving Jews so that He could produce, through them, the Israel of faith

God showed mercy on both Jews and Gentiles of faith

Testimony of the Old Testament about Jew and Gentile salvation 9:25-29

God would call those who were not His people 9:25-26

In context of Hosea applied to the Jews: shows that those who were once rejected can be taken back

In God's pardon of unfaithful Israel who had put themselves in the category of "not My people" there was a type and principle that was applicable to the Gentiles

Only a remnant of the Jews would be saved 9:27-29

This is Paul's key point

There are two groups of Jews: those who are real Israelites, and those who aren't. God fulfilled His promises to the true Israel and as predicted, the Gentiles joined in also

Because the Israelites had full opportunity 9:30-10:21

Israel did not pursue righteousness in the right way 9:30-33

The Gentiles did not pursue righteousness, but attained it anyway 9:30

The Jews pursued righteousness, but did not arrive. Why not? 9:31-33

They sought it by works, not by faith

They tried to obtain righteousness by their own achievement, without relying on God

They viewed the law as a means of earning salvation (see Philippians 3:9)

They tried to find righteousness in the wrong way

They stumbled over Christ; He was intended as a rock of refuge, but when rejected, He becomes a stumbling block

Israel did not submit to God's righteousness 10:1-3

Paul greatly desired their salvation 10:1

He prayed for them

We should pray for those we want to be saved

Argues against a predestinarian view of salvation

His referring to the Jews in the third person indicates that the Roman church was primarily Gentile

They were zealous 10:2

Enthusiasm without knowledge leads to disaster

Zeal and sincerity alone are insufficient; everything depends on the content and direction

It is better to limp in the right way than to run with all our might in the wrong way

They tried to make themselves right 10:3

They wanted to do it themselves

Self-achieved righteousness glorifies ourselves and not the Lord

They thought of a right relationship with God as something merited by their law-keeping, not as a gift conditioned upon their faith

Righteousness of the law 10:4-5

Ended by Christ 10:4

Salvation by Christ makes irrelevant the requirement of perfect obedience to the law as a means of justification

The Jews continued to seek righteousness by the law because they did not recognize the work of Christ

Received by perfect obedience 10:5

Compare the law of the nation: one is innocent of murder by never killing; once one kills the law convicts of murder

The obedience necessary to be righteous by law is flawless obedience

Because all men sin, this righteousness is impossible

Righteousness of faith 10:6-13

Accessible 10:6-10

Not dependent on a long and difficult search, does not require heroic actions 10:6-8

Cites the language of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 which in its original context referred to God's grace in making His commandments available to Israel; similarly, in Christ, God makes His justification accessible

"Do not say" quotes Deuteronomy 8:17; 9:4 which warn against complacent boasting in one's own merit

God has put the way of salvation within easy reach of man; it is not an impossible achievement

We need not storm the citadel of heaven nor the kingdom of the dead to receive salvation in Christ—salvation is neither remote nor unavailable

Available to those who believe and confess 10:9-10

Ties in with 10:8: in your mouth (confession) and in your heart (belief)

These are things that are attainable; perfect obedience is not

This belief and confession do not refer to one-time acts but describe a man's life in contrast with a life of perfect obedience

Confessing Jesus as Lord

Lord means Master or Ruler

Lord was the word used in the Greek Old Testament to translate the name of God

Universally available 10:11-13

Emphasis on whoever and all

There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, a fact not believed by some premillennialists

Also goes against the unconditional election of Calvinism

How does God feel about our looking down on those of another rank, color or social status?

Calling upon the name of the Lord

Lord here refers to Jesus; see 10:9

Shows His deity because the Old Testament text (Joel 2:32) refers to Jehovah

Shows that we should call on the name of Jesus; all worship appropriate for the Father is appropriate for the Son: John 5:23

Calling on

Does not refer to merely citing Jesus' name (Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21-23)

Ananias explained to Saul how to call on the Lord's name (Acts 22:16)

Our obedience to the conditions of repentance and baptism must be part of our appeal to God for cleansing (see Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21)

Analysis of process of calling on the Lord shows that the Jew's failure is inexcusable 10:14-21

The process 10:14-15

Christ sends heralds

Men do not accomplish on their own initiative

Revelation can only occur when men are authorized and commissioned by God

Heralds preach

People hear

Hearers believe

Believers call

Those who call are saved

The breakdown occurred in the belief of those who heard 10:16-17

Christ sent the heralds, the heralds preached, the people heard, but the hearers did not believe the message delivered

Hearing

Is a vital part of the process

Believing does not come from a feeling, an experience, nor an inner voice

Shows the importance of teaching and studying

Christ constantly repeated the exhortation to hear

Must never present the conditions of salvation without a clear and full presentation of Jesus Christ

The Jews did hear

The gospel had been spread widely

Like the universal reach of general revelation

Paul's teaching should not have taken them by surprise 10:18-21

Both Moses and Isaiah predicted God's acceptance of the Gentile and rejection of the Jew

The rejection of God's appeal to the Jews destroys the notion of irresistible grace

Paul demonstrates the inexcusableness of Israel by appealing to their own Scriptures

The point of this major point is to assign the blame for the Jews' failure to be justified: God didn't fail; Israel rebelled

Because Israel has not been totally nor definitively rejected 11:1-36

Israel has not been completely rejected 11:1-10

God has not rejected His people: 1 Samuel 12:22; Psalm 94:14

Not, yes, temporarily, but will restore them later

Not, yes, and replaced them with the church

Proof 11:2-6

Paul

Case in point

Living proof of an Israelite who was not rejected

In Elijah's day

Paul always brought people back to the Bible

Elijah thought he was the only faithful servant left, but in fact, there were 7000 remaining

Now

There is a remnant; the remnant are God's people

Not by merit, but by grace

Does not mean that salvation is unconditional

Means that man does not earn salvation; when he meets the conditions and receives it, it is still a gift (that is, something that he does not deserve)

We either rely on self or Christ

Conclusion 11:7-10

The chosen remnant received the promises

The bulk of the nation was hardened

God hardens as a judgment, not arbitrarily

They were hardened because they failed God; they did not fail God because they were hardened

God gives people up to hardness when they continually refuse Him

Prayer for truth and righteousness to prevail necessarily implies the punishment of the persistently rebellious

Notice the division between Israel (the true Israel, the remnant) and Israel (those who were mere physical descendants of Abraham)

Israel has not been finally rejected 11:11-24

The Jews can return 11:11-16

Why did they stumble?

Because God did not want to bless them? No

Because God was irrevocably rejecting them? No

Jews' fall brought salvation to Gentiles: see Acts 13:44-48; 18:4-6; 28:23-28

Now, when the Jews see the Gentiles accepting their Messiah, hopefully it will stir them up and cause them to seek Him too. God is eager to bless them if they will return

If by their misfortune, the Gentiles were blessed, how much more wonderful it would be if the Jews could share in the blessings

Paul hoped by preaching to the Gentiles, he could stir up the Jews and save them

They would want to receive what they are missing out on

Paul was writing primarily to Gentile brethren

If the Jews' rejection led to the world's reconciliation, their acceptance could be nothing less than life from the dead, so to speak

If God accepted the Jewish patriarchs, then He can accept the rest of the nation as well

Compare the notion that the acceptance of Cornelius proved that the Gentiles could be saved

Paul stressed the idea that the Jews can return; some of the Gentiles thought that God had irrevocably rejected them, but that was not true

Attitude the Gentiles should have 11:17-24

God's people are here represented as an olive tree

Branches were broken off: the Jews

Wild olive branches were grafted in: the Gentiles

Gentiles should not be arrogant

Like the Jews had been

The root (the Jewish patriarchs) supports them

Each branch remains in the olive tree by faith

Should lead to fear and fear destroys pride

God can as easily cut off the Gentiles for unbelief as He did the Jews; He could thin out the branches again

Perseverance is a responsibility of the Christian, not an unconditional promise

God can easily graft the Jew in again if he quits refusing to believe

Actually one would think it easier to re-graft a natural branch than to graft a branch that came from a wild olive tree

Refutes many false concepts

Once saved/always saved

Once lost/always lost

Restoration of Jewish nation: Salvation for Jews involves their being individually grafted back into the olive tree and not some national restoration

Separate ways for Jews and Gentiles: there is but one olive tree

God's purpose is to show mercy 11:25-32

Need to distinguish between Israel and Israel

In the context: 9:6; 10:21-11:2; 11:7

Same contrasts here: partial hardening, yet all Israel saved; enemies, yet beloved

Isa 65:13-16

Consider Isa 42:25 in comparison with 43:2

Consider the all Israel of Isa 45:25

Paul is not

Making a distinction in the way Jews and Gentiles will be saved because he has been stressing that they are one olive tree

Saying that Jews can be saved apart from faith because he just said that they will be re-grafted if they do not continue in unbelief

Affirming the salvation of all Jews, because many Jews have died unsaved

Paul is affirming that Israel's salvation will be

With a partial hardening of the unbelieving mass

A spiritual salvation, not a political one (see citations of Isaiah)

Certain

God will not revoke His gifts and calling

Please remember that not all Israel are Israel; the Israel of promise is the remnant of the Jews who believe

Summary 11:30-32

Gentiles were disobedient, but now received salvation through the Jews' rejection of the gospel

The hope is that the Jews will want the salvation the Gentiles are receiving and will believe in order to receive mercy also

God's overall desire: all might receive mercy; God treats all men in the same way

God condemns all with a desire to save all

Praise of God's wisdom 11:33-36

God's knowledge: so deep that no one can know His mind

God's wisdom: so profound that no one can offer Him counsel

God's riches: so immense that no one can place God in their debt

He is the source, the sustainer and the goal of all

We depend entirely on the Lord; His is the initiative in redemption

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Bibliography

I have listed the commentaries in roughly the order of their value to me in studying Romans as a whole (not necessarily chapters 9-11). The first ten I mentioned some details about. The others are just listed.

McGuiggan, Jim: Excellent on chapters 9-11. Has a direct, forceful, personal style that I think is helpful.

Moo, Douglas (NICNT): Very full, interesting.

Cottrell, Jack (College Press NIV Commentary): Very interesting. Cottrell is an outstanding writer and this series of commentaries is a helpful new one.

Cranfield, C.E.B. (ICC): Very complete; too many concessions to liberal scholarship.

Schreiner, Thomas (ECNT): Complete, helpful.

Godet, Frederic: Deep, a little wordy.

Hodge, Charles: Excellent writing style; strongly Calvinistic.

Stott, John (BST): Good and practical.

Denney, James (EGT): Brief, insightful style.

Morris, Leon (Pillar): Good, easy to study.

Here are other commentaries I have read, roughly in the order of their value to me: Mounce (NAC), Murray (old NICNT), Stuart, Lard, Beet, Meyer, Byrne (Sacra Pagina), Turner, Dunn (WBC), Alford, Sanday and Headlam (old ICC), Liddon, Shedd, Hamilton, Barmby (Pulpit), Harrison (EBC), McGarvey and Pendleton, Whiteside, Hendriksen, Ziesler, Lenski, Thomas, Nygren, Vincent, Bruce, Lightfoot, Moser, Robertson, Vinson, MacKnight, Allen, Hunter (TBC)