

Israel Reborn (Part 1)

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(By Matt Waymeyer)From Pulpit Magazine

The Salvation of Israel in Romans 9-11

In Romans 9–11, the apostle Paul addresses the question of how to reconcile the faithfulness of God and the unbelief of Israel. In the words of Scott Hafemann:

Israel’s rejection of the Messiah seems to call into question God’s faithfulness to the very covenant promises and privileges outlined in [Romans 9:4–5], promises and privileges which entail and imply the eschatological redemption of Israel. For Paul it is thus God’s word and consequently his trustworthiness which is ultimately at stake.



The apostle’s assertion in Romans 9:6a addresses this dilemma directly and establishes the theme for the entirety of Romans 9–11: “But it is not as though the word of God has failed.” In other words, in spite of the fact that most of Israel has rejected the Messiah, God’s covenant promises to His chosen nation *nevertheless* have not failed. God is faithful, and He will fulfill His promises.

To support this claim, Paul begins in 9:6b–13 by reminding his readers that God never promised to save every ethnic Israelite, for there is a spiritual Israel within physical Israel which is the recipient of that promise. This leads to Paul’s question in 9:14a about whether or not God is just in choosing to save only some of the Jews. Paul responds to this question in 9:14b–29 by affirming God’s justice and His sovereign right to do as He pleases. This, in turn, leads to the question in 9:30–31 of why the Gentiles have attained righteousness while Israel did not. Paul responds in 9:32–10:21 by setting forth the failure of the Jews to embrace Christ and the gospel.

This description of the failure of the majority of the Jews to embrace the Messiah leads to Paul’s question in 11:1a, which is repeated in 11:2a. His question is whether or not—in light of Israel’s disobedience and obstinacy (10:21)—God has permanently rejected His chosen people, the nation He set His love upon. His immediate reply is an emphatic negative—“May it never be!” God has not rejected Israel. In the remainder of Romans 11, Paul expounds on His answer to the question.

In 11:1–10, Paul asserts that the present hardening and unbelief of Israel is only *partial* (for a believing remnant does exist), and in 11:11–32 he asserts that it is only *temporary* (for the nation as a whole will one day be saved). There will be a time, Paul says, when Israel’s “transgression” and “failure” will give way to her “fulfillment” (v. 12), when her rejection by God becomes her acceptance by Him (v. 15), and when her unbelief turns to belief and she is grafted in again (vv. 23–24). The current hardening that has come upon the majority of Israel will be removed at the end of the age (v. 25), and in this way all Israel will be saved (v. 26a). This salvation of the nation at the time of Christ’s return will be the fulfillment of Old Testament promises and ultimately the fulfillment of the New Covenant itself (vv. 26b–27).

Until that time, however, the nation of Israel can be regarded from two perspectives. From the perspective of her rejection of the gospel, she is the enemy of God, but from the perspective of God’s choice of the nation as His own possession, she is still beloved (v. 28), for God will not go back on the promises He made to her forefathers (v. 29). As Thomas Schreiner writes:

The salvation of Israel at the end of history, then, is the fulfillment of the covenantal promises that were made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God will not forsake his people but has pledged, in accordance with his covenantal love, to graft them again onto the olive tree.

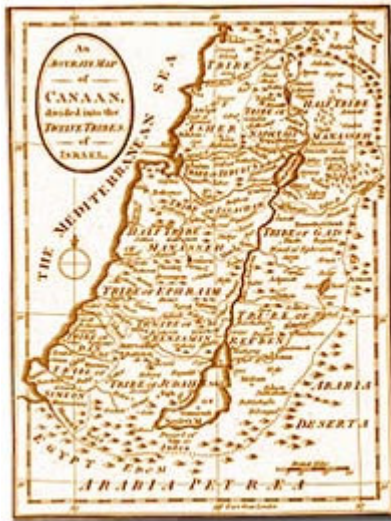
In this way, as Hafemann notes, Romans 11:25–32 provides “the last and perhaps the most important support” for Paul’s assertion in Romans 9:6a. Why has God’s word not failed? Because, just as He has promised, all Israel will be saved.

To Be Concluded Tomorrow

[Israel Reborn \(Part 2\)](#)

June 14th, 2007

(By Matt Waymeyer)



In Romans 11:26, the apostle Paul predicts an eschatological salvation of the ethnic nation of Israel. Of this I am firmly convinced. I realize full well, however, that others are less than convinced, and still others are firmly convinced I am dead wrong.

One of the most common reasons people reject this view of Romans 11:26 is because they believe it contradicts the entirety of Paul’s argument in Romans 9-11. Charles M. Horne has articulated this objection well.

He writes this:

If Paul is speaking in 11:26 of a future mass conversion of the nation of Israel, then he is destroying the entire development of his argument in chaps. 9–11. For the one important point that he is trying to establish constantly is exactly this: that God’s promises attain fulfillment not in the nation as such (that is, all of ethnic Israel) but rather in the remnant according to the election of grace. It would seem from this fact therefore

that the widely-held theory that the term “all Israel” refers to the nation as a whole is incorrect.

According to fellow objector William Hendriksen, if Romans 11:26 teaches a mass conversion of the Jews, it would seem that Paul is saying, “Forget what I previously told you earlier in Romans 9–11.”

Those who raise this objection often appeal to two verses in particular: Romans 9:6b and Romans 10:12. First, in Romans 9:6b, Paul substantiates his claim that the promises of God to Israel have not failed, writing, “For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.” According to Ben Merkle, this verse teaches that

God’s promises to Abraham never included the promise that his descendants would be saved based on their ethnic identity. True Israel consists of those who are the children of the promise, rather than children of the flesh. God never promised that every individual Jew would be saved, but only those he unconditionally elected within Israel.

As a result, Paul’s statement in Romans 9:6b is said to preclude any interpretation of Romans 11:26 in which the nation of Israel as a whole is saved.

Second, in Romans 10:12, the apostle Paul writes, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him.” According to Anthony Hoekema: “Paul’s point here is that *as far as the obtaining of salvation is concerned*, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. If this is so, a future period of time in which only Jews will be saved . . . would seem to be ruled out.” In the words of N.T. Wright, the issue is this:

If Paul rejects the possibility of a status of special privilege for Jews in [Romans 9 and 10], how does he manage, apparently, to reinstate such a position in [Romans 11]? It is this apparent inconsistency that has led many to suggest that the section contains a fundamental self-contradiction.

To summarize, this objection from Romans 9-11 can be broken down into two parts: (1) God never promised that every individual Jew would be saved, only those He unconditionally elected within Israel; and (2) God clearly denies that He will save Israelites based on their ethnic identity, for salvation is irrespective of ethnicity and open to Jew and Gentile alike. It may surprise those who reject my view of Romans 11:26 to find that I do not disagree with these two statements. Instead, my disagreement involves the implications they have on a proper interpretation of Romans 11:26. Let me explain.

Regarding the first half of the objection, I fully agree that God never promised to save every single Jew. Furthermore, I fully agree that He promised to save only those whom He unconditionally elected within the nation of Israel. But my view of Roman 11:26 does not claim salvation for very single Israelite throughout history, only for the nation as a whole at the *end* of history. As Thomas Schreiner explains:

It is crucial to observe that Paul promises the salvation of ethnic Israel only after the fullness of Gentiles has been incorporated into God's saving promises. He does not argue that all ethnic Israelites throughout history will be saved. That would contradict the argument in chapter 9.

In other words, as Schreiner says later, Romans 11:26 "does not promise salvation to all Israel throughout history but to 'all Israel' at the end of history. Such a salvation of 'all Israel,' therefore, is still the salvation of only a remnant of Israel throughout history." And for this reason, an eschatological salvation of the nation does not contradict Paul's affirmation in Romans 9:6b that not all physical Jews are also spiritual Jews.

Regarding the second half of the objection, I fully agree that God saves people regardless of their ethnicity, for all who cry upon the Lord will be saved, whether Jew or Gentile. However, to claim that Romans 10:12 precludes the possibility of a future conversion of national Israel goes far beyond what the verse actually says.

As John Piper observes, Romans 3:22 and 10:12 define the ways in which there is no difference between Jew and Gentile: "In 3:22 there is no difference in the sense that 'all have sinned and lack the glory of God' (3:23). In 10:12 there is no difference in the sense that 'the same Lord is over all, rich to all who call upon him (10:12; cf. 3:29f).'" But neither of these imply that God will not save the nation of Israel at the end of present age.

Frankly, this objection seems to flow out of the assumption that God cannot or will not do in the future what He has not done in the past. In turn, this assumption seems to have silenced the teaching of Paul in the last part of Romans 9-11 by turning Romans 11:11-32 into a reiteration of his teaching in Romans 9:6-11:10. In contrast, as I pointed out in yesterday's post, I believe that Paul's argument in Romans 9-11 culminates in Romans 11:11-32 where the apostle affirms that the present hardening of Israel will be removed at the return of Christ and all Israel will be saved.

Back to the objection itself, the overriding concern is that ethnicity cannot be the basis for the salvation of Israel, because this would undermine the unconditional nature of God's sovereign election. This, however, is simply not the case with my view of Romans 11:26. As Schreiner points out, "Israel's ancestry does not amount to a claim on God. God freely pledged to bestow his grace upon Israel as an expression of his lovingkindness." In the words of commentator C.E.B. Cranfield: "Israel is beloved because God is faithful to His own love, which in His sovereign freedom He bestowed upon the fathers on no other ground than His love, which knows no cause outside itself (cf. Deut. 7:7f)."

In the end, I think John Piper said it best:

Since God's free and unconstrained election of Israel from all the nations of the earth (Deut 7:6) embraced from the outset his intention to bless Israel for centuries in unique ways among the nations and in the last days to purify and save the whole people, his fulfillment of this intention is just as free from human constraints as the initial election of Abraham. We may infer from Rom 9:6ff that God has employed four thousand years of redemptive history to teach that he is free and not bound to save anyone because of his Jewishness nor to condemn anyone because of his non-Jewishness. Can he not at the end of the age, having demonstrated his freedom beyond the shadow of a doubt, bring his free and sovereign election of Israel to a climax by banishing ungodliness from Jacob and saving the whole people?

Can He not, in other words, have mercy on whom He desires (Rom 9:14–18)?