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**Romans 9-11: The Faithfulness of God to Israel as a
Basis for Christian Assurance**

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Introduction

Romans 9-11 quite rightly remains one of the most studied portions of the Bible resulting from the important discussion on the issue of the beneficial and revelational-historical position of Israel in the dispensation of the New Testament – and of God's covenanted faithfulness toward Israel (Coetzee, 1995:54). Because Romans 9-11 are the most studied portions of the Bible, there are many different opinions articulated by the scholars who studied these chapters. Some

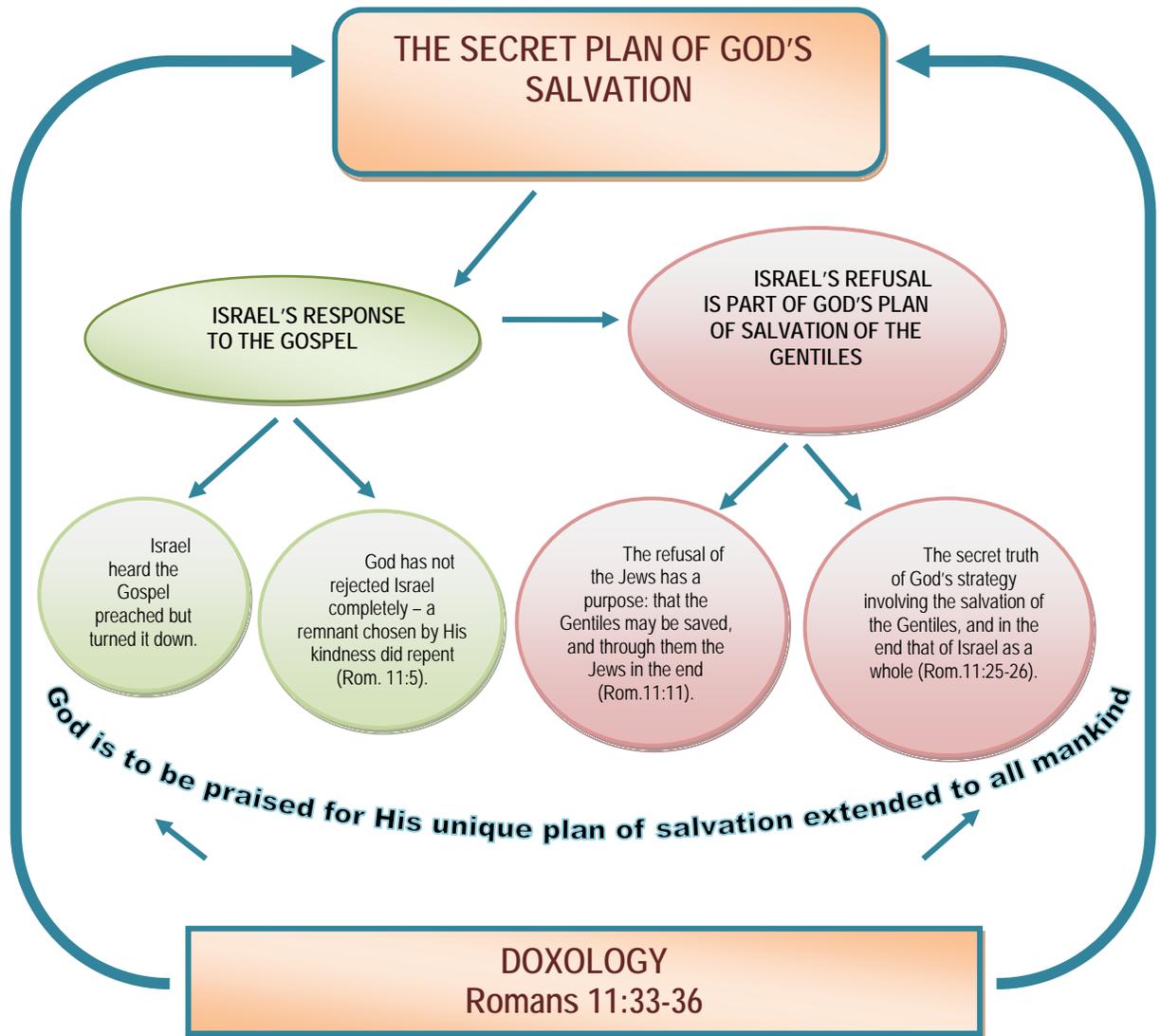
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² See <http://web.up.ac.za/> for school.

accepted (while others denied the unity between chapters 9-11 and other chapters of the letter to the Romans. Some accepted while others doubted the fact that chapters 9-11 are written by the apostle Paul, sometimes chapters 9-11 were regarded as the appendix of the letter. According to C.H. Dodd (1932:150) it is universally recognized that Romans 9-11 forms a special section of the letter, rarely judged a later insertion. Refoulé, while defending the absolute coherence of Romans 9-11 (1987:239-242), concludes that they are unconnected with the remainder of Romans (1995:193) or even incompatible with Pauline authorship (1991:79). On the basis of the lack of scriptural quotations in Romans 11:28-32, Ponsot considers these verses a possible “addition actualisante” (1988:169). Against these, a large majority of scholars considers chapters 9-11 an integral part of the letter, linked thematically and stylistically to the rest of it (Räisänen, 1988:180; Aletti 1991:150-155, 199-203).

Elizabeth E. Johnson (1989:147) is of the opinion that Romans 9-11 argue not three separate points but are sustained case in three stages. **First**, Paul demonstrates that God has always elected Israel just as He now called the Gentiles, without regard for human worthiness (Rom. 9:6-29). **Secondly**, he explains that the current imbalance of Gentile faithfulness and Jewish unbelief is a function of God’s impartiality – Israel is hardened in order that the Gentiles might hear the Gospel (Rom. 9:30-10:21). And **thirdly**, he says that the contemporary hardening of part of Israel will be ended by the imminent fullness of Gentile faith (Rom. 11:1-32). All these reveal the secret plan of God’s salvation to His people. I will illustrate the secret plan of God which will be discussed meticulously in this article by summarizing it in the following diagram.

Diagram illustrating the secret plan of God's salvation



1. Personal Problem of the Apostle Paul, the Jew

The beginnings of Romans 9:1-3 and Romans 10:1 reveal an exceptional involvement in the topic of these chapters. The apostle begins with underlining his sincerity in what he is going to write. With his invocation of Christ and the Holy Spirit, this pledge comes close to an oath. This seems to be a tribute to widespread doubts

concerning his loyalty to his Jewish people (see Acts 21:28).³ But that is no reason to downgrade the content of his statement. Chapter 9 discloses the deep anguish of soul with which Paul contemplated the sinful unbelief of his nation. He was not indifferent to the need and the plight of the Jews. He writes out of a bleeding heart; words were inadequate to express the depth of the apostle's feelings, because of their rejection of the true Messiah.⁴ He loved them intensely, although they had shown so much hatred towards him (Olyott, 1979:111). Paul's deep concern for Israel is confirmed and illustrated by stories in Acts which report that again and again Paul tried to win believers from Jewish communities – contrary to his having been commissioned with the Gentile mission (Kaizer, 2000:77; cf. Campbell, 1992:83) and not the mission among the Jews at the Jerusalem council (Gal. 2:7-9). Paul's confession of sorrow and anguish in Romans 9:2 must be taken at face value, especially if it is addressed mainly to Gentile believers in Rome, who, according to Romans 11:17-24, might be tempted to nourish arrogant attitudes towards unbelieving Jews.

As proof of his unbroken solidarity with Israel, Paul claims to have offered himself as a sacrifice for his people (Rom. 9:3).⁵ According to Walvoord and Zuck (1985), by repetition in positive and negative terms (internally attested by the witness of his own conscience in the presence of the Holy Spirit) Paul affirmed his deep anguish of heart over the rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of Jews. His desire for their salvation was so strong that he was at the point of wishing (*imperf. tense*, I could wish) that he were cursed and cut off from Christ for his kinsmen, the Israelites.⁶ In any case, the emphatic 'I myself' indicates that the apostle is speaking of something extraordinary, an exceptional destiny he was ready to accept on behalf of his fellow-Jews. It may be that Paul's determination to visit Jerusalem, irrespective of the dangers of that

³ Klaus Haacker, *The Theology of Paul's letter to the Romans*. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University) 2003:78

⁴ Richardson, R. John, and Chamblin, Knox, *Proclaiming the New Testament*. The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House) 1963:93

⁵ Boers, 1994:134; cf. Klaus Haacker, 2003: 78

⁶ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1985.

journey (Rom. 15:31) and in spite of prophecies that warned him (see Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-14), was due to his readiness to become a martyr of his passionate love for his people.⁷ In Romans 10:1 the wording is quite clear: Paul's innermost feelings lead him to pray for the salvation of Israel – which means that the 'mystery' which he discloses in 11:26 "All Israel will be saved"⁸, was revealed to him as an answer to such prayers. Klaus Haacker says, "As it is no blemish for medical research to be motivated by compassion with suffering people, we should appreciate the connection between Paul's earnest prayers for his people and his teaching on the future of Israel in Romans 9-11. After all, the solutions of afflicting problems usually do not come out of the blue to those who have wrestled with them for a while" (2003:79-80).

2. A Theological Dilemma of the Apostle Paul.

As for the question of consistency, we have to remember that as early as in Romans 3:2 the apostle Paul had set out to enumerate the 'extras' of Israel compared with the rest of the world. There he had stopped short after having started that the Israelites had been 'entrusted with the words of God'.⁹ Now, in Romans 9:4-5, he offers up to ten marks of distinction (if we count 'Israelites' at the beginning as honorific name¹⁰ and accept the conjecture 'to whom belongs God ...' at the end). Paul then listed seven spiritual privileges which belonged to the people of Israel as God's chosen nation: *the adoption as sons* (cf. Ex. 4:22), *the divine glory* (cf. Ex. 16:10; 24:17; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11), *the covenants* (Gen. 15:18; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Jer. 31:31-34), *the receiving of the Law* (Deut. 5:1-22), *the temple worship (latreia)*,¹¹ "sacred service," which may also include service in the tabernacle), *and the promises* (esp. of the coming Messiah). Also the Israelites were in the line of promise from its beginning in *the*

⁷ Klaus Haacker, 2003:79

⁸ Kaizer, C. Walter Jr, *Mission in the Old Testament*. Israel as a light to the nations (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books) 2000:77

⁹ Klaus Haacker, 2003:80

¹⁰ 'Israelites' at the beginning of Romans 9:4 is not just an opposition to 'my brothers' and 'my own race' (as in the New International Version) but part of the first of four or five relative clauses which expound the distinctive dignity of God's chosen people (Haacker, 2003:80).

¹¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* Volume 1 (New York, USA: United Bible Societies) 1989:533

patriarchs (cf. Matt. 1:1-16; Rom. 1:3) to its fulfillment in the Messiah, *who is God over all, forever praised! Amen*. This is a clear affirmation of the deity of Messiah.¹²

The order of this enumeration seems to be haphazard, but one thing is clear: Paul is referring to the history as a story with God: ‘adoption’ alludes to texts like Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9, 20 and Hosea 11:1, which speak of Israel as God’s son. ‘Glory’ is not the nation’s fame but the term used in the Old Testament for the presence of God in Israel’s sanctuary or in the course of special experiences with God (see Exodus 14:4; 15:7). The plural ‘covenants’ refers to the decisive aspect of God’s repeated initiatives to create a special relationship with the nation or with their ancestors or particular families within Israel (such as the dynasty of David or certain priestly families). The ‘legislation’ is affirmed as an aspect of Israel’s election that is in no wise diminished by the fact that according to the apostle Paul it is not to be imposed on Gentile believers. The Law remains part of Israel’s precious heritage and calling. The inclusion of the term ‘worship’ may astonish those who interpret the atoning death of Christ as replacing and putting an end to the temple of Jerusalem and its cultic performances. But Paul himself had continued to participate in temple services – including sacrifices (see Acts 21:26; 22:17-21; 24:17). Most important is the mention of ‘the promises’ because this term stands for the conviction that God is in control of history – at least in the long run – and that He is determined to lead His people into a future of peace and blessing. The last three topics are not abstract concepts but persons: the patriarchs as the roots of the chosen nation and the first recipients of God’s election and promises (Rom. 11:28; 15:8) – the Messiah who was to be born as a Jew (and whose mind and mission would be formed by Jewish traditions)¹³ – and God Himself, who again and again had declared Himself to be Israel’s God (a covenant which, according to Romans

¹² Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1985.

¹³ Romans 1:3; 15:12; John 4:22-26

3:29-30, now includes all humankind but has not been withdrawn from Israel).¹⁴

One can ask the following question, “Now what is the function of this long list? As the sequel to Romans 9:1-3, it should explain the reasons for Paul’s sorrow when he thinks of his fellow-Jews. The logic of this sequel seems to be its contrast to the present state of Israel, which, according to Romans 10:1, is outside of the sway of salvation (Rom. 11:26). Therefore it is a challenge to all who trust that God is carrying His plans to completion as it is clearly indicated in Philippians 1:6 which says, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”. Especially the mention of God’s *promises* evokes the question of *God’s faithfulness*. In a word, the most piercing question behind the whole discussion of Romans 9-11 is not “What becomes of Israel?” but – in the words of Romans 9:6, “Can it be that the word of God has failed?” Although Paul is pushing aside this idea in the very act of verbalizing it, he will need the whole of these three chapters in order to explain and to substantiate this “No”. In the end Paul can sum them up with the assertion that “God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29) (Chapbell, 1992:87). If it were otherwise, the call that constituted the Church (Rom. 1:6-7; 8:30) could not be trusted either. Thus, the topic of Romans 9-11 is the fate and future of Israel, but the issue that is at stake is the reliability of God’s word, which is challenged by present experience. That is, these chapters are about the truth of God, which has to be vindicated by His truthfulness in making good the promises once made to the patriarchs (Rom. 15:8) (Coetzee, 1995:50).

3. God’s Freedom Affirmed

According to Christi J. Coetzee, the tragedy of Israel, the covenanted people: the huge percentage of this people did not want to believe in the Christ of God (Rom. 9:1-5).¹⁵ The failure of the Jews to respond to the gospel of Christ did not mean *God’s Word had*

¹⁴ Klaus Haacker adopts the conjecture to read ‘*hon ho ... theos*’ instead of ‘*ho on ...theos*’. A formal parallel to Romans 9:4-5, i.e, an enumeration of ‘properties’ of the Church with God as the last clause, is found in Ephesians 2:12 (2003:80).

¹⁵ Coetzee J. Christi, *Route Map to the Books of the New Testament*. Part 1: The Letters of Paul, (Orkney:EFJS Printers) 1995:50.

failed. Instead this rejection was simply the current example of the principle of God’s sovereign choice established in the Old Testament. Paul reminded his readers of a truth he had presented earlier: *For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel*, that is, spiritual Israel (cf. Rom. 2:28-29).¹⁶ That Paul’s thinking is not dictated by his patriotic feelings can be seen from the outset of his argument in Romans 9:6-29. Right at the beginning, in Romans 9:6, he bluntly states that descent from Israel (= Jacob) is not a sufficient definition of the people of Israel (or the only condition of sharing the special dignity of ‘Israelites’, as used in Rom. 9:4). If the word of God cannot fail, His people can fail and did fail in the past (cf. Isaiah 40:6-8). Descent from the patriarchs does not allow any feeling of security.¹⁷

Then Paul gave three Old Testament illustrations of God’s sovereignty (Isaac and Ishmael, Rom. 9:7b-9; Jacob and Esau, vv. 10-13; and Pharaoh, vv. 14-18). The first two show that God made a sovereign choice among the physical descendants of Abraham in establishing the spiritual line of promise. Ishmael, born to Hagar (Gen. 16) – and the six sons of Keturah as well (Gen. 25:1-4) – were Abraham’s descendants (*sperma*), but they were not counted as Abraham’s children (*tekna*, “born ones”) (Louw and Nida, 1989:110-111) in the line of promise. Instead, as God told Abraham (Gen. 21:12), “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned (lit., ‘in Isaac seed [*sperma*] will be called to you’). Paul repeated the principle for emphasis in different words: *It is not the natural children* (lit., “the born ones of the flesh”) who are God’s children (*tekna*, “born ones of God”), but it is the children (*tekna*) of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring (*sperma*) (Louw and Nida, 1989:116). To be a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough; one must be chosen by God (cf. “chosen” in Rom. 8:33) and must believe in Him (Rom. 4:3, 22-24). God’s assurance that *the promise* would come through Isaac, not Ishmael, was given to Abraham: *At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son* (a somewhat free quotation of Gen. 18:10).¹⁸ This is very

¹⁶ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1985.

¹⁷ Klaus Haacker, 2003:82

¹⁸ Walvoord and Zuck, 1985

interesting to see the Apostle Paul ground his argument in examples from the history of the patriarchs (see Rom. 9:7-13): the line of election did not include all physical descendants of Abraham (Guthrie, 1970:417) but only those of his son Isaac (and not of his firstborn, Ishmael – the alleged ancestor of the Arabs), and again not all descendants of Isaac but only those of Jacob (and not of Esau – the alleged ancestor of the Edomites or Idumaens).¹⁹ But essentially Paul was only repeating an aspect of the message of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8). Likewise the Essence taught that only those Jews who joined their community constituted the true Israel. So this position was an option within early Judaism – though certainly not the only one, not a comfortable one, and probably not a popular one. But Paul is looking out for a hope for his fellow-Jews, who, in his opinion, are undergoing a crisis of their spiritual history. In Romans 15:13 he will call God ‘the God of hope’. Now the first article of a creed of hope in God is God’s freedom, His liberty to direct history according to His wisdom and will and in complete independence from human conditions. That includes and demands His freedom also to determine the limits of His chosen people (the thesis of Rom. 9:6b). The situation of Israel, which, according to Romans 9:1-3, was so painful, to the apostle, has to be accepted as a reality that is not out of God’s control. But that is not the only consequence which Paul draws from God’s freedom. It is also the basis of an enlargement of the people of God (see Rom. 9:24-26). The inclusion of Gentiles who have responded to the call of the Gospel is also an act of God’s freedom. As such it has to be respected by those who originally opposed this development of Early Christianity.²⁰

There are some *objections*²¹ raised on the freedom of God. Paul’s emphasis on the sovereignty of God in salvation raises certain objections, as he well knew from many years of preaching. Paul deals with two of these in this section. *Is not God unfair to choose some and reject others* (Rom. 9:14)? *And how can people be blamed for rejecting God if He himself determines that rejection* (Rom. 9:19)? Such questions are our natural response to the biblical teaching about

¹⁹ Klaus Haacker, 2003:82

²⁰ See Acts 10-11 and 15; Galatians 2:1-10

²¹ Romans 9:14–23

God's sovereignty. It is significant that Paul here offers no 'logical' explanation for the compatibility of God's sovereignty with the equally biblical teaching that God is scrupulously fair and that human beings are justifiably blameworthy for their actions. We would do well to follow his approach: to affirm the truth of these great biblical doctrines without eliminating or weakening one or the other through an insistence on an exhaustive explanation. This is a point at which, with Paul (cf. Rom. 11:33–36), we should be prepared to recognize a mystery beyond our comprehension.

In the diatribe style that he had adopted frequently in Romans, Paul himself asks the question that he knows will be raised by his insistence on the sovereignty of God in election: *is God unjust?* This inference Paul emphatically rejects and again cites the Old Testament to support his viewpoint (Rom. 9:15) (Guthrie, 1970:417). But the text Paul cites – Exodus 33:19 appears simply to reiterate God's free and sovereign activity rather than to explain why that activity is just. But perhaps this is Paul's point: that God's actions can be 'judged' by nothing beyond his own nature as revealed in Scripture. Paul again states that what follows from God's freedom is that *it* (*i.e.* God's election to salvation; cf. Rom. 9:11–12) does not depend on man's desire or effort (Richardson and Chamblin, 1963:96).

Romans 9:17–18 provide further support for this denial that God's acts are based on human decisions and actions, but now from the 'negative' side (cf. 'Esau I hated' in Rom. 9:13b) (Louw, 1979:100). The Apostle Paul then presented his *third* illustration, the Egyptian *Pharaoh* of the Exodus. Pharaoh's role in the history of salvation was a matter of God's determination. It was God who brought Pharaoh on to the stage of history (*'I raised you up'*; cf. Ex. 9:16) and caused his heart to be hardened.²² What is said in the OT about Pharaoh applies, of course, to his role in the history of salvation and not to his personal destiny. But, as in Romans 9:10–13, Paul suggests in Romans 9:18 that God's working in Pharaoh illustrates the way in which God works in people generally: as He has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy (Rom. 9:15–16; cf. *'Jacob I loved'* in Rom. 9:13a) (Boers, 1994:139; cf. Horton, 1990:59) so He hardens

²² Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1985.

whom He wants to harden (Rom. 9:17; cf. *'Esau I hated'* in v. 13b) (Chapbell, 1992:91). Neither the bestowal of God's mercy nor his hardening are based on human actions (although it should be remembered that God acts on people who are already lost in sin and that His exclusion of some from salvation is in some sense simply a confirmation of the choice they have already made). It should also be remembered that God's decisions on these matters are not disclosed to us and that they are not meant in any way to cause despair. The Scriptures make plain that God will never refuse to accept, or cast away, those who diligently seek Him.

The very question Paul now poses is exactly the one that we are tempted to raise at this point also: "How can God blame people for rejecting Him if He Himself, by choosing some and 'passing over' others, in some sense causes that very rejection?"²³ In Romans 9:19-23 Paul answers to objections against this theology of God's freedom, and affirms it as a necessary implication of His being the creator of all and of our being created by Him.²⁴ Paul's response reveals that he himself has no logically satisfactory answer to this question. He has earlier in the letter made it plain that people are fully responsible for their rejection of the truth of God (Rom. 1:20–2:11), and he will make the point again with respect to Israel (Rom. 9:30–10:21). But Paul does not mention this as a way of avoiding the issue that he now raises. He thereby implies that God's sovereignty in rejection and man's responsibility for that rejection are to be maintained as two complementary truths, truths that must not be used to detract from one another. Here Paul simply contests anyone's right to stand in judgment over the ways of God. He is the potter, who has full right over the vessels that He creates (see Jeremiah 18; Wisdom of Solomon 12:3–22; 15:7). According to Walvoord and Zuck (1985), in response Paul reaffirmed the reality of God's sovereignty and the effrontery of such questions. "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (cf. Isa. 45:9) Man, the created one, has no right to question God, the Creator (Louw, 1979:100). Paul then quoted a clause from Isaiah 29:16: "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, why did you make me like this?" Drawing an analogy between the

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Klaus Haacker, 2003:83

sovereign Creator and a potter, Paul asked, “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes (lit., ‘one vessel [pot or vase] unto honor’) and some for common use? (lit., ‘unto dishonor’)” (Boers, 1994:135). Obviously a potter from the same pile takes some clay to form a finely shaped and decorated vase and takes other clay to make a cooking pot (cf. Jer. 18:4-6). And the clay has no right to complain! The sovereign Creator has the same authority over His creatures, especially in light of man’s origin from dust (Gen. 2:7).²⁵

The apostle Paul in Romans 9:22–23, relates this freedom of God to his willingness to bear patiently with those objects of his wrath which are prepared for destruction. The ‘objects’ Paul here has in mind are probably unbelieving Jews, who are now playing a role in salvation-history something like that played by Pharaoh at the time of the exodus (see Rom. 11:12–15). As in Pharaoh’s case, the stress lies on their historical role at the present time (although their destiny is nevertheless clear: wrath and destruction). But God’s ultimate purpose is not wrath but mercy and glory. According to Klaus Haacker, “the example of Pharaoh is not quoted in Rom. 9:17 in order to teach that God created him to go to hell, but only that his part in history was that God created him to go to hell, but only that his part in history was that of an enemy of Israel and that therefore his fate was to be defeated, sadly enough.”²⁶ For the main point of Romans 9:22–23 is how God expresses His concern with the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory.²⁷ Now Paul’s insistence on God’s absolute freedom and on His independence of human reactions²⁸ certainly demands an acknowledgement in all humanity that God is really free to act like that.

4. Israel’s Failure Deplored

The aim of Romans 10 is threefold: to explain the rejection of Israel as based upon her ignorance of the way of salvation and refusal to accept Jesus; to show the need of faith, in contrast with works, as the way of salvation; and to focus attention upon the message of the

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Klaus Haacker, 2003:83-84

²⁷ Walvoord and Zuck, 1985

²⁸ Romans 9:11-12

gospel as applicable to all men, if they are to exercise faith (Richardson and Chamblin, 1963:103-104). According to Klaus Haacker, in Romans 10 the specific Christian perspective of Paul comes to the fore: Christ is the source of righteousness for all believers (Rom. 10:4), and saving faith centres on His resurrection and lordship (Rom. 10:9).²⁹ Paul took no delight in the spiritual predicament of the Jews. This fact he proved by prayer for their salvation. But there were obstacles hindering the fulfillment of his prayer – their ignorance and wrong conception of the way to be saved. Paul says “I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness” (Rom. 10:2-3). The testimony or witness of verses 2 and 3 belongs with the “case for the prosecution”. He makes this serious charge against his fellow Jews, that they have “a zeal for God that is sincere but not guided by spiritual insight” (Boers, 1994:136).

The key word in this chapter is “righteousness.” “God’s righteousness” is that which God demands of His people (Richardson and Chamblin, 1963:102). The Jews wanted righteousness, but tried to obtain it in the wrong way. Like the Pharisees described in Matthew 23:15, the Jews expended energy in securing a right standing with God, but their deeds were done in ignorance. “Religious people” today are no different; they think that God will accept them for their good works. The Bible speaks of two kinds of righteousness: “works righteousness,” which comes from obeying law; and “faith righteousness,” which is the gift of God to those who trust His Son. The Jews would not submit to faith righteousness; their racial and religious pride turned them from simple faith to blind religion. They rejected Christ and clung to the Law, not realizing that Christ was the very one for whom the Law had been preparing the way, and that He Himself had ended on the cross the reign of the Law. The Mosaic Law is no longer God’s basis for dealing with mankind; He deals with us at the cross, where Christ died for the world. Righteousness by the Law is described in Leviticus 18:5; faith righteousness is described in

²⁹ Klaus Haacker, 2003:84

Deut. 30:12–14.³⁰ According to Richardson and Chamblin (1963:105-107), after it was quite clear to Paul that his fellow Jews were ignorant of God’s plan of salvation as they thought that they can win salvation by legalism and ritualism, Paul spelled out how salvation is won. He amplifies it in Romans 9: 9, 10 and 13 in the following way.

Firstly, to win salvation the sinner must say honestly, Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). The word Lord is the divine name which means Jehovah. The Jesus of the New Testament is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. When we call Christ “Lord” it means we rank Him with God. It gives Him the supreme place. It means that Christ is worthy of our reverence and worship. Before Him we say with Thomas, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). To be a Christian, to win salvation, one – whether Jew or Gentile – must confess the Lordship or Godhood of Christ. This confession expresses what is deepest in Christianity: Christ is Lord. It also means we have no other Lord – “One Lord, one faith” (see Eph. 4:5).

Secondly, to win salvation the sinner must believe in his heart that Christ is risen from the dead. In Romans 1:4, Paul had declared that Jesus Christ was designated the Son of God with power “by the resurrection from the dead”. The resurrection of Christ is not an optional matter. It is a fundamental article of Christianity that He rose bodily. Of course the Christian believes that Christ lived. He fills pages of history. We must go even further and believe that on the third day after His crucifixion He was raised from the dead and continues to live (see Matt. 28). This is a part of saving faith. Lord He is; “risen Lord” to be exact.

Thirdly, to win salvation a sinner must confess with his mouth the Lord Jesus. A saving faith is a confessing faith. One who truly believes that Christ is God and that He has been raised from the dead, must never be ashamed or unwilling to confess such a belief before the world. The lines are sharply drawn here, by confession with the lips. We must from the heart give witness to which side we are on. Loyalty cannot be hidden; and confession with the lips is a mark of loyalty to Christ.

³⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

Lastly, to win salvation one must invoke the Name of the Lord Jesus (see Matt. 16:16). The requirement is that we must call for mercy. We must not be too proud to ask for it. “For whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13; Joel 2:32). According to Longenecker (1984:36-37) “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is the Lord of all and is generous to all who call on his name” (Rom. 10:12; cf. Gal. 3:28) (cf. Nissen, 1999:104). If one does not call upon the Lord for Salvation, he cannot expect it. To secure the benefits of salvation certain conditions are necessary. Three of the conditions are as follows:

Firstly, people cannot call upon Christ unless they believe in Him.

Secondly, they cannot believe in Christ unless they have heard of Him. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). People cannot hear about Christ unless someone preaches the Gospel to them. People must have proclaimer with a message. People must respond to the divine message that is delivered by human agents.

Thirdly, no one can preach the Gospel unless he is sent from God. It is God who calls and sends preachers to deliver the Gospel of salvation (Eph. 4:11, 12). Therefore, those to whom this divine message is entrusted should deliver it clearly and deliberately. The church must never be a trumpet with an uncertain sound.

5. God’s Faithfulness Revealed

According to Walvoord and Zuck, Paul’s transition from chapter 10 is seen in the repetition of his rhetorical clause “I ask” (Rom. 10:18-19). “I ask” then is literally, “Therefore, I say.” The apostle’s question is, “Did God reject His people?”³¹ In Greek the question is asked to elicit a negative reply: “God did not reject His people, did He?” This is reinforced by Paul’s characteristic negative ejaculation, “By no means!” (μή; γενοίτο).³² Paul insists that the disobedience of the Jews is not equivalent to God’s rejection. To Paul

³¹ Walvoord and Zuck, 1985

³² McReynolds; Paul R., *Nestle Aland 26th Edition Greek New Testament with McReynolds English Interlinear*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997

the idea that God had totally rejected Israel was unthinkable (Boers, 1994:136). God has not cast away every Israelite. He preserves the elect remnant. He categorically denies the implication, for he himself is number one proof to the contrary.³³ He had responded by faith to Jesus Christ and had received God's provided righteousness, and yet he was *an Israelite* (cf. Phil. 3:5) and of *the tribe of Benjamin*³⁴. Though small, Benjamin was a significant tribe (Saul, Israel's first king, was from Benjamin). If God could save Paul (Acts 9; 22; 26), He certainly could save other Jews (1 Tim. 1:15-16). Then he positively declared, "God did not reject His people (quoted from 1 Sam. 12:22; Ps. 94:14), whom He foreknew³⁵. God had chosen Israel as His covenant people from eternity past and entered into a relationship with them that will never be destroyed (cf. Jer. 31:37).³⁶ Paul's disclaimer in Romans 11:2 is a tacit quotation from 2 Samuel 12:22, where Samuel affirms the faithfulness and forgiveness of God after the Israelites had demanded the establishment of a kingdom according to the model of neighbouring countries.³⁷

Paul's second proof that God has not rejected His people was taken from Israel's history during Elijah's ministry. The prophet was deeply depressed, having fled for his life from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:3) (Walvoord and Zuck, 1985), and despairs of his whole mission and thinks that he alone has remained faithful to the Lord, while the rest of the people have turned to the cult of Baal (1 Kings 19:10, 14) (Olyott, 1979:130). In reply, the prophet is told that no less than 7,000 men have remained faithful, too (1 Kings 19:18).³⁸ God was not limited to one fearful, depressed prophet; He had reserved for Himself a godly remnant in Israel that numbered 7,000. The preservation of the faithful remnant was a work of God. The nation as a whole had failed to measure up to God's requirements, but His

³³ Richardson and Chamblin, 1963:113

³⁴ Paul might as well have chosen to mention some Jewish Christians who lived at Rome, as the greetings in Romans 16:3, 7, 11 show. But to mention the tribe of Benjamin fits well into the story which Paul is going to tell in chapter 11. According to Judges 20-2, his tribe had once been reduced to 600 men, but recovered again from this tragic blow (Klaus Haacker, 2003:88).

³⁵ People whom God had a meaningful relationship with (cf. Amos 3:2; and Rom. 8:29).

³⁶ Walvoord and Zuck, 1985

³⁷ Klaus Haacker, 2003:89

³⁸ *ibid*

election rescued a portion for salvation (cf. Rom. 9:27).³⁹

After the historical illustration Paul drew a conclusion for his day in Romans 11:5, “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace (lit., ‘a remnant according to the election of grace has come to be’)” (Horton, 1990:45). Paul added that this choice is totally by God’s grace (cf. Eph. 2:8-9) and he emphasized the antithesis between grace and works (cf. Rom. 4:4-5; 9:30-32). Paul then discussed what “a remnant chosen by grace” out of Israel meant for the people as a whole (Richardson and Chamblin, 1963:113). The situation was ironic. The Jews zealously sought to be accepted by God on the basis of works and the righteousness of the Law (cf. 10:2-3) (Boers, 1994:160; cf. Kaizer, 2000:82). However, they were not accepted by God; only *the elect* were, because of God’s sovereign choice by grace. The others were hardened (cf. 11:25). According to Wavoord and Zuck (1985) what it means to be hardened is seen from Paul’s explanatory and supporting quotations. The *first* is taken from both Deuteronomy 29:3-4 and Isaiah 29:10, and indicates that hardening involves spiritual drowsiness, blindness, and deafness (cf. Isa. 6:9-10). The *second* quotation (in Rom. 11:9-10) is of Psalm 69:22-23, which predicts that the very things which should have been the source of nourishment and blessing to Israel (*table* means their blessings from the hand of God, which should have led them to Christ; cf. Gal. 3:24) became the occasion for their rejection of God (a snare and a trap, a stumbling block; cf. Rom. 9:32-33) and God’s judgment (retribution) on them. Because they refused to receive God’s truth (cf. Isa. 6:9-10; John 5:40) *their backs will be bent* under the weight of guilt and punishment forever (Boers, 1994:136).

God’s rejection of the Jews is not ultimate (Rom. 11:11-15). Their stumbling is not final (Louw, 1979:111). Why not? Because God determined to bring it to pass. Paul asks, “Have they stumbled that they should fall?” Once more the answer is “God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy” (Kaizer, 2000:82). What Paul is saying is that the fall was not an end in itself. A larger purpose was involved. Their rejection is temporary. God in His providence knows how to

³⁹ Coetzee J. Christi, *Route Map to the Books of the New Testament. Part 1: The Letters of Paul*. (Orkney: EFJS Printers) 1995:51

turn disaster into a blessing. Because God has granted salvation to the Gentiles Israel is made to see and feel what it has missed. Paul wanted to see a happy ending for his Jewish brethren. He said it would be like life from the dead. He prayed most ardently for it.

The argument concludes with the hope that the hardening of the hearts of Israel was not permanent (Guthrie, 1970:418). It came to pass to serve a useful purpose. It opened a way to the Gentiles (Louw, 1979:111). When this purpose was accomplished this hardness will be taken away. This thought is grounded on God's promises to the patriarchs (Olyott, 1979:142). God will never default on His promises. Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20, 21 to confirm this fact (see Rom.11:26). Isaiah and Paul were clear that in the end the Jews must come in. This, insists Paul, is to be an act of mercy and not due to their worthiness (Richardson and Chamblin, 1963:96-97). They will be saved, like the Gentiles, only by God's sovereign mercy. In Zechariah 12:10 we find a significant passage concerning the future of Israel in the plan of God. "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son" (cf John 19:37). The idea is that the day is coming when the veil will be removed and Israel will mourn and be in bitterness of soul because she will see that she has rejected and crucified her Messiah. Then again Zechariah predicts that these people will look upon Him whom they have pieced and ask, "What are these wounds on your body?" he will answer, "The wounds I was given at the house of my friends." (Zech. 13:6). That will be a great day on earth when these prophecies are fulfilled and the Jews shall see Christ in all His glorious character and in repentance embrace Him.

God's rejection of the Jews should serve as a warning to the Gentiles.⁴⁰ "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches" (Rom. 11:7-8a, cf. 11:11) (Champbel, 1992:88). The Gentiles are tempted to develop a haughty attitude toward the Jews because they have been received by faith into God's family. Paul warns that the Gentiles must not glory over themselves as the olive's

⁴⁰ Romans 11:16-24

branches. They should rather be cautious and grateful (Louw, 1979:112). Had there been no Judaism there would be no Christianity. The branches are supported by the root and not the root by the branches. “Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either” (Rom. 11:20-21) (Johnson, 1989:120; cf. Boers, 1994:138). Here in this argument Paul explains that the people do not overlook the fact that there is a severity in God as well as goodness. God holds His people responsible for their privileges. God can exercise strict justice as well as kindness. His severity fell on Israel and has continued to this day. Since God punished the Jews, the natural branches, do not presume on His goodness. Paul in this argument Paul explains that the natural branches once cut off can be grafted back into their own olive tree. If Israel will repent and believe the Messiah God is able to graft them in again.

According to Richardson and Chamblin (1963:116-117) God’s purpose must be interpreted in the light of the fullness of both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 11:25-32). God still has a purpose for Israel. Paul is ready to share with his readers his information concerning God’s secret plan. It is called a “mystry,” which means a secret known only to those who have been initiated into it. It refers to something hidden in the past but is now revealed openly. Here it is new light upon the problem of Jewish unbelief. The partial blindness and hardness which have come to Israel are to continue, until the great multitude of Revelation 7:9 is complete (Chambell, 1992:92). Paul indicates that there will not be much responsiveness to the presentation of the Gospel while the Gentiles are being inducted into the Kingdom. Once the full number of the Gentiles has been completed, God will bring in the Jews in larger numbers (Kaizer, 2000:77, 82). The phrase “and so all Israel shall be saved” is not to be interpreted as all the Jewish people as a race, but all believing Jews and all unbelieving Gentiles who come to repentance and faith (Boers, 1994:208).

So one day Israel will be saved, and Paul’s prayers will be answered. A happy end and that’s it? No, by no means. We should remember that Paul’s concern was not only compassion with his compatriots but the question of God’s faithfulness and the reliability of His word (Romans 9:6). Therefore, the goal of Romans 9-11 has not been reached with the prophecy of Israel’s salvation in Romans

11:26, but only in the proclamation of the basis of this hope in Romans 11:29: “for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable”. This is a confession of faith in God’s promises as the decisive words of God which eventually will outweigh everything that speaks against their coming true. As an answer to the doubts of concerning Israel’s future, Paul could have quoted the oracle of Balaam on Israel from Numbers 23:19 which says, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”

This assurance of God’s faithfulness is the basis both of belief in the Gospel and of trusting the abiding election of Israel (Coetzee, 1995:50). The majority of Jews were enemies of the message that Paul was proclaiming.⁴¹ But this attitude does not invalidate the love of God towards His people.⁴² After all, Paul is convinced that this – temporary – role of opposition to the Gospel has been allotted to Israel by God Himself.⁴³ Obviously, the voice of God’s love which speaks so powerfully through the death of Christ for our sins⁴⁴ is not quenched by periods of error and alienation on the side of His people.

6. God’s Mercy as the Mystery of History

The conclusion ends up in a reflection on the strange and unpredictable ways of God with His chosen people, on one hand, and the rest of humankind, on the other. There was a time when Israelites were the only people to whom the will of God had been revealed, so that they alone could steer clear of sin (see Gal. 2:15 ‘non-Jews are sinners by definition’). But with the coming of Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel things seem to have reversed: the majority of Jews did not respond to the Gospel, resisted the ‘righteousness’ of God as revealed in the Gospel, and failed to perceive its consistency with the previous revelation of God as attested in the Old Testament (see Rom. 10:1-4). However, this change of roles is not to be final since – strangely enough – it had been arranged by God Himself. *For what reason?* In order to show mercy to all, “Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of

⁴¹ I Thessalonians 2:15-16

⁴² Romans 11:28

⁴³ Romans 11:7, 11-15

⁴⁴ Romans 5:8; 8:31-39

their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." (Rom. 11:30-32). The final message of the book of Jonah – God's compassion with all of His creatures – becomes the key to the meaning of all history, and this meaning turns out to be identical with the meaning of the name of God as interpreted in Exodus 33:19 (quoted in Rom. 9:15): "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Horton, 1990:46). Viewed from the end which Paul in Romans 11 is teaching us to envisage, the two elections (of Israel and of believers in Christ)⁴⁵ turn out to be complementary.

This conclusion is so comforting that it calls for a great confession of admiration for the wisdom behind the ways of God with this world of ours,⁴⁶ partly quoted from scripture.⁴⁷ Its climax in Romans 11:36 teaches that God is not only the source of everything but that He is also active in history and that He will be the consummation of all history. Thus, the 'doctrinal' part of Romans 1-11 ends with a doxology, which teaches us that all thinking about God should lead on to thanking God.⁴⁸ God is to be praised for His unique plan of salvation extended to all mankind (Louw, 1979:119).

Conclusion

In this study we have arrived at three related conclusions.

First of all—Romans 9-11 are not chapters that are appendix to the first eight chapters, a recapitulation of the theme of those eight chapters, nor a delayed conclusion of Romans 3:1-9, but a critical component of the argument of the entire letter. The question about the relation of the church of Israel in the plan of salvation, although discussed most thoroughly in chapters 9-11, underlines the whole argument of Romans from the statement of its theme in Romans 1:16. The Gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" – that is, God judges and redeems impartially, without regard to ethnic or religious background. But the Gospel is also "to

⁴⁵ Romans 8:29-30:33

⁴⁶ Romans 11:33-36

⁴⁷ Isaiah 40:13 in Romans 11: 34 and Job 41:11 in Romans 11:35

⁴⁸ Romans 1:20-21

the Jew first and also to the Greek”, which means that God’s faithfulness to Israel as His elect people is not negated by the inclusion of Gentiles, but is rather affirmed by it. The God who justifies the ungodly, both Jew and Gentile, is the God who may be trusted to keep His promises to Israel.

Second—The conclusion concerns the argument of Romans 9-11. The three chapters, rather than making three separate and mutually exclusive attempts to solve the problem of Israel’s unbelief, are rather a single sustained argument that explains both Jewish unbelief and Gentile faith. The question that elicits Paul’s argument is not only, “Has God’s faithfulness to Israel been nullified by Jewish unbelief?” but also, “Has God ceased to be impartial by calling only Gentiles to Faith?” Divine impartiality and faithfulness remain in dynamic tension for Paul at all three stages of the argument. First, he demonstrates how God elects both Israel and the Gentiles on the same basis – mercifully without regard for human behavior or worthiness (Rom. 9:6-29). Secondly, he shows that the Gospel of God’s righteousness for everyone who believes had produced both Gentile faith and Jewish unbelief. The impartial world-wide proclamation of the Gospel functions to harden Israel so that the Gentiles can be reached (Rom. 9:30-10:21). And thirdly, Paul says this hardening of part of Israel is itself temporary, destined to be removed by the fullness of Gentile faith. The mystery revealed at Romans 11:25-27 makes explicit what has implicitly driven the argument since Romans 9:6 – the interrelatedness of Jew and Gentile in salvation history and God’s back-and-forth dealings with Israel and the nations are the concrete manifestations of Paul’s dual claim that God is both faithful and impartial.

Thirdly—We determined the function of apocalyptic and wisdom traditions in this argument of Romans 9-11. The line of thought is profoundly structured by the apocalyptic categories of eschatological salvation, God’s wrath and wealth of mercy, and the destiny of the people of God. But Paul’s argument also uses sapiential traditions to describe God’s freedom to elect impartially (Rom. 9:20-23), to show how the Gospel is the near Word of God’s wisdom (Rom. 10:6-8), and to reveal a heavenly mystery about God’s saving intentions (Rom. 11:25-27). Because this mystery and the discussion which it brings to a close provide a glimpse into God’s

wise ordering of history and redemption, Paul concludes his argument – and the argument of the letter to this point – with a hymn in praise of God’s wisdom (Rom. 11:33-36).

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