

# The Jews and Jesus

The Quandary of Israel in  
God's Plan of Salvation

# I. INTRODUCTION

- The Jews as God's Chosen People
  - Has often not set well with the rest of the world
  - Why would God create a chosen people?
    - Fairness?
    - Reward? (Deut. 7.6; 9.6)
    - Privilege?
    - Plan? (Gen. 12.1-3; Isa. 49.6)
  - The Sovereignty of God over the Plan of Salvation

- “How odd of God / to choose the Jews”

-- William Norman Ewer

- “But not so odd as those who choose / A Jewish God but spurn the Jews.”

-- Cecil Browne

- “Not odd of God/  
Goyim annoy ‘im.”

-- Leo Rosten



## II. DOES GOD KEEP HIS PROMISES?

- Why does Paul write Romans 9-11?
  - Seems like a jarring change of gear from the soaring language of Romans 8.31-39
- Paul agonizes over the rejection of Jesus by a substantial percentage of the Jews of his day
  - 9.2 : “great sorrow and unceasing anguish”

- He worries over their eternal fate:
  - 9.3 : “I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen by race.”
  - 10.1 : “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.”
- This is not a hypothetical problem.
- And it raises a huge theological conundrum.

- Aren't the Jews God's chosen people after all? Hasn't God provided them with all sorts of advantages for salvation? Paul lists:
  - Sonship
  - Glory
  - Covenants
  - Giving of the Law
  - Worship, promises, patriarchs
  - The Christ, from their lineage

- Yet the Jews are now rejecting their Messiah, whom God has sent them. What went wrong?
- Is God not able to save them? Is He not willing? Is He rejecting them after all, and turning to another people?
- And if His promise to Israel is not secure, then how can those embracing the gospel trust that the grand promises made to them in Romans 8 are secure? Might God harden the hearts of Christians as He has those of the Christ-rejecting Jews?

- Paul's argument in chapters 9-11 is a defense of the faithfulness of God in spite of how it looks right now. God has a master plan which He is sovereignly unfolding.
- 9.6 – “it is not as though the word of God has failed.”

# III. GOD'S WORK OF ELECTION

- Paul's first argument is that God's saving promises apply not to all physical descendants of the patriarchs, but only those whom He has chosen from their midst.
- God is fully sovereign in the domain of human salvation.
  - 9.6b “For not all Israel is (true) Israel.”
  - 9.7 “Through Isaac shall your descendants be called.”

- Not the children of the flesh, “but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants.”
  - Isaac, not Ishmael, was the child promised to Abraham and Sarah by divine intervention.
    - Jews might say, “Well, of course, Isaac was the right descendant, because he was the offspring of both Abraham and Sarah, while Ishmael was Abraham’s son through an Egyptian slave woman.”
  - Paul continues with the lineage of Isaac and his wife Rebekah, demonstrating God’s electing call between the twins born to them, Jacob and Esau.

- Twins from the same parents. According to the “right of primogeniture” (see Dt. 21.17), the firstborn is given pride of place and a double portion of the inheritance over other offspring.
- Even though this is prescribed in Scripture, God sets aside this rule of preference when it comes to His electing purpose and chooses Jacob rather than firstborn Esau to continue the line of the people of God.

- The choice has nothing to do with their inherent qualities or moral actions, because God made this decision before they were born:
  - **“In order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of His call” (9.11)**
  - “The elder will serve the younger” (9.12)
  - “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.” (9.13)
- As the second-born son in my family of origin, I’ve always loved the Greek term *elasson...* (younger, lesser)
- God in His sovereignty answers to no one for His choices. He offers mercy as He sees fit.

- 9:15 Paul affirms through God's declaration to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion' that God's electing choices belong to Him alone and cannot be traced any further back for a human rationale.
- "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy." (9.16)

- Even those whom God has raised up to oppose Him perform a function serving God's glory:
  - In Pharaoh's case, he serves as a powerful foil against which God publicly manifests His overwhelming might so as to display His glory to all the earth, not just in saving the Hebrew people but also in crushing their oppressor. (v 17)

- Paul concludes this section with the double predestinarian statement in v. 18: “So then He has mercy upon whomever He wills, and He hardens the heart of whomever He wills.”
- Thought this raises huge questions about free will, Paul doesn’t engage them other than to bat them aside with the query, “Who are you, a man, to answer back to God?” (v. 20)

- Utilizing the image of a potter and his creation, Paul asks, “Does not the potter have the right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?” (v. 21)
- So God has created vessels of wrath made for destruction, and vessels of mercy “prepared beforehand for glory.”

- Paul understands the purpose of the vessels of wrath to be so that the vessels of mercy might better appreciate the riches of God's glory granted to them though no merit of their own.
- In 9.24ff, Paul now introduces the idea that the vessels of mercy (i.e., the elect people of God) are composed of both Jews and Gentiles.
- But the saved Jews are here referred to as a **remnant**.

## IV. THE REMNANT

- True to His faithfulness, God has always maintained a remnant of His people, even in their times of rebellion as He executed His wrath upon them:
  - “If the Lord of hosts had not left us children, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah.” (9.29).
    - Paul quotes here the LXX version of Isa. 1.9; the Hebrew text reads instead of “children/seed” *sareed cheemat* = “a few survivors/ small remnant”

# V. JEWS MISREAD THE LAW

- A wrong understanding of the Law led Jews to reject Jesus as their Messiah. (9.31 - 10.4)
- They pursued righteousness based on the Law but did not succeed in fulfilling that Law because they didn't pursue it through faith (in the Christ promised in the Law) but **as if it were based on works.**

- Paul commends them for their zeal, but contends that their zeal is without knowledge – they are ignorant of God’s righteousness (through faith in Christ) and instead try to establish a righteousness of their own, not understanding that Christ is the “end of the law.” (Greek word *telos* can mean goal or completion).

- Paul affirms that anyone who puts faith in Christ will be justified (10.4), and in subsequent verses (vv. 9-13) declares that all who confess and believe in Jesus and who call upon His name will be saved – whether Jew or Greek (see v. 12)
- However, people need to hear the good news so they can respond to it. Have the Jews had such opportunity?

- Absolutely, Paul says (10.18-21).
  - Ironically, the Gentiles who by and large were not seeking after God, have nonetheless found God through the preaching of the gospel.
  - But the Jews are running from the arms of God:
    - “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” (quoting Isa. 65.1-2)

# VI. GOD HAS NOT REJECTED ISRAEL

- It would be easy to conclude that God has washed His hands of this stiff-necked people.
- But Paul rejects that notion. Instead, God has great plans for Israel that are yet to unfold.
- Evidences that God hasn't rejected Israel
  - Paul himself – a Jew who embraced Jesus
  - A remnant of other Jews like him in the first C. Church.

- 11.2 "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew."
  - Example of Elijah whose pity party God crashed by informing him that he was not the only faithful Israelite left alive during Ahab and Jezebel's massacre.
    - "I have kept for myself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal." (11.4)
- "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace." Election is by grace, not by merit, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (v. 6)

- Greater Israel failed to obtain the life with God they sought, although Lesser Israel (the elect) did.
- The majority were hardened in their hearts against God. (vv. 7-10)
- Does their stumbling mean a fall from which Israel won't be able to recover? (v. 11)
- By no means! God forbid!

- But through their stumbling, God has opened the door to the rest of the world, which has responded enthusiastically.
- This, in turn, God will use to make the Jews increasingly jealous so that in the last days they will turn to Christ in massive numbers. But right now Paul hopes that by magnifying his success in reaching the Gentiles for Christ, he may cause at least some Jews to soften their hearts. (11.14)

# VII. THE TEST OF ELECTION IS FAITH

- The elect stand fast only through faith. In this section using the imagery of a vast and ancient olive tree, Paul warns Gentile believers against pride and unbelief (the same sins that led Jews to be pruned from the tree of salvation). (11.17-24)
- "Branches were broken off because of their unbelief, and you wild branches were grafted in...but you stand fast only through faith."

- You can easily be broken off and discarded if you become proud and self-assured. And if the natural branches that were cut off do not persist in unbelief, they can be grafted back into the tree.
- In the end, we see that there is one people of God, rooted in the patriarchs and in God's promises made to them for the benefit of the whole human race.

# VIII. FINAL FULFILLMENT

- Paul summarizes his message of Romans 9-11 in 11.25-26:
  - “Understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved.
  - Israel’s return *en masse* to the Lord will come as the Deliverer (the returning Messiah) turns their hearts back to him and clears away their sins.

- Paul concludes his argument by highlighting again God's faithfulness – He has not forgotten His election promises to Israel's patriarchs; God's gifts and call are irrevocable (11.29).

- God's pattern for salvation is clear:
  - The Gentiles from their disobedience have now received mercy; the Jews, having become disobedient, now as a result of God's mercy to the Gentiles will themselves receive mercy.
- God consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all. (11.32)
- No one reaches heaven apart from God's mercy!

# CLOSING DOXOLOGY

- The sovereign wisdom of God in His plan for saving humanity is beyond human discerning. All we can do is marvel and sing His praises.
- **O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?” For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory for ever. Amen. (11.33-36)**