

Lesson # 66 Romans 9-11 Has the Church Replaced Israel?

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No study of the Millennial Kingdom & its relationship to Israel would be complete without looking at Romans 9-11. Romans 9 is a well known (infamous) chapter which many people hate, but very few have actually read, and fewer still have ever studied it in context because of its teaching on the greatly feared and often hated doctrine of election. What is often missed because of this neglect of these chapters is the embedded application to Israel as a nation. Many use this as an argument against personal election to salvation & see the sole purpose for Romans 9 as a discussion of national election, but that is too simple and too shallow a position that is easily refuted. Most would not see these 3 chapters as a cohesive argument for a Premillennial Kingdom – “kingdom” is not even mentioned, but according to C.H. Dodd, *“these chapters are...a studied attempt by the apostle to vindicate God’s dealings with men from the standpoint of justice...the divine purpose of history.”*ⁱ

S. Lewis Johnson adds, *“the central theme of the OT is the coming redeemer and His purpose through the Abrahamic, Davidic & New Covenants to confer in grace eternal salvation on His chosen people Israel, and the gentiles.”*ⁱⁱ

Romans 9

Having made grand promises of salvation & the assurance of it to a gentile church in Rome, in chapters 3 – 8, Paul is immediately faced with a potentially strong argument against what he has just finished explaining. “Didn’t Israel have the same promises, only it looks like the promises were removed from Israel? How can anyone trust that their salvation will last?” **Romans 9:6** – *“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.”* is the key verse in chapters 9-11, and from this verse, Paul begins the meat of his argument. To see the context – turn to **Romans 9 & read v. 1-6.**

Here in v. 6, A-Mils immediately seize on what they believe is a very strong argument for their position that the church has replaced Israel to receive these unfulfilled covenant promises. Their argument is this; “Paul is referring to an Israel that transcends the limits of ethnic Israel and a spiritual Israel thus exists which now encompasses all believers, including Gentiles.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Herman Ridderbos claims, *“Even the distinction Paul makes within national Israel between who is and who is not a Jew, between Israel and those who are of Israel (Rom. 2:28ff & 9:6) tends to a usage that denotes the believing gentiles as well, and therefore the Christian church as such is Israel.”*^{iv}

However, not even all A-Mils agree with this assessment; John Murray, in his commentary on Romans says that this verse means that there is “an Israel”

within ethnic Israel”^v, IOW, Paul is not here saying that believing gentiles are now part of Israel, but that believing Jews are true Israel. The promises to Israel are going to be fulfilled in Israel, even if some or even most of the physical descendants of Abraham are cut off from those promises.

I mean, read v. 6 again. Where do we see gentiles in this verse? It says, “not all **who are descended from Israel** are Israel”. The division here is not between Jews and Gentiles, but within ethnic Israel itself. This same argument can be used to refute a similar A-Mil claim at Rom. 2:28-29, and 4:12.

In Rom. 9-11, the term ‘Israel’ is used 12 times. Five times in Romans 9, twice in Romans 10 and 5 times in Romans 11. In none of these occasions for the use of the word does it mean anything other than national Israel (ethnic Israel). It never means “the church.” Paul sets the tone for who Israel is to him in **Romans 9:4** , as it is clearly stated that the great sorrow that Paul has in his heart is for “my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh”. Paul is a Jew who was converted to Christ, so his kinsmen are Jews. Read also **v. 5**. He is not referring to the church, to whom he has just penned chapter 8. This can only refer to the ethnic group Israel and **v. 27** falls within the same sense, and **v. 31** refers to the nation of Israel’s failure to find justification by faith.^{vi}

Romans 10

In Romans 10, both appearances of the word “Israel” are clear references to ethnic Israel, **v. 19** citing Deut. 32:21 and **v. 21**, rebellious Israel is distinguished from those who have responded in faith in a quote from Isa. 65:1-2.^{vii} ②

Romans 11

“Israel” appears 5 times in Romans 11 & again cannot (without manipulating the text) mean anything but ethnic Israel. In **vv. 1-11**, it appears 3 times and is obviously about Israel as a nation or ethnic group.

Move forward to 11:25-26 but we won’t read them just yet. These 2 verses come right on the heels of **vv. 13-24**. Note “my fellow Jews” in v. 14 – who are they? Israelites, not elect gentiles by any stretch of the imagination, where Paul argues regarding the olive tree and root (Abraham) where some branches are taken out (Jews) and other branches (gentiles) are grafted in. Some see this as describing “supercessionism (the church replacing Israel), but in vv. 23-24, which lead up to our final mention of Israel by Paul in v. 26, it is obvious that Paul’s point is that Israel will be grafted back in. Natural branches; their own olive tree? Church or Israel?

Now, look at vv. 25-26. Is there any reason after seeing 11 uses of the word “Israel” in the previous 3 chapters to come to the 12th one and say “this means the church” composed of elect gentiles and Jews?! Well, some here take “all Israel” in v. 26 to mean, *“the mystery is that in every age elect Jews will be*

saved by grace until “all Israel” is saved.^{viii} John Calvin saw “all Israel” as the church, citing Gal. 6:16 as a support text. Another view is that “all Israel” means just that, every single Israelite from an as yet unborn generation, and I used to hold that position. However, a better way to see it is that it means Israel as a whole, not necessarily every individual Jew, just as a whole the nation rejected Christ, yet not every single Jew did so^{ix}. It obviously does not include every Jew or even Jews as a nation throughout history as most Jews in the age between Christ’s 2 advents until the Tribulation period die unsaved. While there is always a remnant being saved (Paul’s very argument in Rom. 11:1-5), this remnant is not what Paul has in mind as “all Israel”.

Far from being a parenthesis in Romans, chapters 9-11 are an integral aspect of Paul’s entire argument. Readers and hearers alike will look askance at any promise of salvation and security to gentiles that does not account for answers to the very questions Paul poses and answers in Rom. 9:6, 30-33; 10:18,19; 11:1,11. Paul must address this issue or risk being marginalized by what was obvious in the first century and is even more obvious in today’s arguments among eschatological systems – what about Israel the people that Zechariah 2:8 calls “the apple of God’s eye”?

Notice Paul’s arguments in response to the very questions we know are there. See Rom. 9:6-8 (& the whole idea of God’s sovereignty in salvation); 11:1-5; 11:11-12, 13-29. Paul liberally quotes from OT passages throughout Romans 9-11 – all with the intention of showing that “yes” God had plans for the gentiles He would save, and as the church grew, that was becoming obvious, but Israel was still in God’s future plans too.

We will not the time to peruse all the OT references in these 3 chapters. The point of all of them is Paul’s desire to show from salvation history that God has had a sovereign elective purpose of grace in His dealings with Israel (vv. 6-13). Why is the mass of Israel missing from the elect people of God whose spiritual status has been so marvelously set forth in chapters 1-8? God’s elective purpose is the primary cause. The mention of the gentiles in 9:24 is only incidental at this point. It is the sovereign purpose of grace in the salvation of both Israel and the gentiles – that is the point. IOW, the analogy is not a national or ethnic one, but a soteriological one.^x

Romans 11 – The Future of Israel

Paul makes 3 key points in Romans 11 to prove that Israel has a future apart from the church in God’s salvation plans:

1. Israel’s failure is due to spiritual pride and an attempt to be self-righteous and self-sufficient – 9:31-32
2. The existence of a remnant of believers within ethnic Israel shows that Israel’s failure is not total – 11:1-10
3. Israel still has the oracles of God (3:2) and her failure is not final (11:11-32)

In vv. 11-32, Paul is arguing that Israel's fall is not final. In fact, their fall has led (by God's design) to a concentration of gentile salvation for a time and in vv. 13-15 (especially v. 12) their recovery will result in tremendous world blessings like life from the dead. In vv. 23-24, at the conclusion of the olive tree analogy, it is unquestionable that Paul is saying that Israel in some sense will be grafted in again as a nation – see vv. 25-27 and also note vv. 28-29.

S. Lewis Johnson states, *“Paul has up to this point shown that Israel's restoration in the purpose of God is both possible (faith being the one condition) and probable (it is more likely than gentile salvation was, and that has occurred). He now shows that this has even been prophesied. The free citation of vv. 26b-27, taken from Isa. 59:20-21; 27:9; Ps. 14:7 (13:7 LXX) and probably from Jer. 31:33-34 also attests it.”*^{xi}

Here are 8 points regarding Romans 9-11 that demonstrate that Paul is talking about a future restoration of Israel, not just the salvation of a remnant throughout history as he says, “all Israel will be saved.”

1. Chapter 11 especially deals with Israel as a nation, not individuals. As a people they fell away and the large portion of them rebelled and were hardened – 11:7,12,15. “People” and “olive tree” are collective, not individualistic. A reversal of the situation as it stood in Paul's day is an important aspect of the text.
2. There is a concept of the reversal of fortune and a future transformation of the Jews' status before God which does not support the Jews' salvation being a trickle of historical singular salvation experiences. ④
3. If all Paul is talking about in his olive tree analogy is continual grafting in of believing Jews (and obviously, that is occurring), why would the question of 11:1 come up in the first place?
4. Views such as the Dutch View^{xii} don't account for the ‘casting away’ and ‘receiving’, the judicial hardening and then the lifting of it. Why is Paul so concerned about Israel if they're being saved on the same basis of a remnant as everyone else?
5. The concept of a remnant clashes with “all Israel”.
6. In v. 23, Paul says Israel will be grafted in again. If they are a remnant, how were they ever broken off? The grafting in has to be referring to a mass of Israel or them as a whole.
7. Obviously, the elect will be saved, so unless the saving of Israel is unique or different, why the climactic point of “all Israel will be saved,”?
8. Referrals by Paul to **Isa. 59:20-21** & **27:9** (Rom. 11:26-27) are in the context of Christ's return, not His first advent.^{xiii}

Although no promises of the land are found in Romans, the promise of blessings for the nations is obviously there, and the promise of restoration for Israel is there as well, unless one comes to the text with a pre-conceived notion that Israel has been replaced by the church. There is a verse – **I Cor. 10:32** – which

pretty much settles the idea of whether the church and Israel are one and the same.

Now, with pages and pages of background and foundation theology, we are finally ready to look into the text of Revelation chapter 20.

Next lesson – Lesson # 67

ⁱ C.H. Dodd, as quoted in “A Case for Premillennialism”, Donald Campbell, Jeffrey Townsend, editors – Moody 1992, chapter 11, quoted by S. Lewis Johnson on p. 199

ⁱⁱ IBID, p. 199

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Vlach, “Has the Church Replaced Israel?”, B & H Academic, 2010, p. 128

^{iv} IBID, p. 128

^v IBID, pp. 145-146

^{vi} Campbell & Townsend, pp. 200-201, S. Lewis Johnson

^{vii} IBID, p. 201

^{viii} IBID, p. 217, citing William Hendriksen, Berkouwer, Ridderbos & Hoekema as “the Dutch View”

^{ix} This is the position of S. Lewis Johnson (& mine) – IBID, p. 215

^x IBID, p. 209

^{xi} IBID, p. 213

^{xii} The Dutch View states that there is a remnant of elect Jews saved through the centuries by being provoked to jealousy through Gentile salvation & blessing. (p. 217 – Campbell & Townsend)

^{xiii} ibid, pp. 217-219