

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

Excursus: The Gospel And Israel

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Romans 9-11

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Romans 9. Romans 9-11 form an excursus of sorts in the flow of Paul's letter. Bible scholars note that in terms of the forward flow of Paul's thought you could easily move right from the end of chapter 8 to Romans 12:1 without missing anything in the flow of the argument. Chapters 9-11 then are an excursus¹ – that is an extended sidebar discussion about the Gospel as it relates to Israel. The reason for this is rooted in the history of the church in Rome. The original members of the church had been almost exclusively Jewish, scholars tell us that the church there was likely founded by pilgrims who had been converted at Pentecost under Peter's ministry and then supplemented by Jews displaced by the persecution of the church in Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 8:1. This church had a thoroughly JEWISH foundation. But by the time of Paul's writing that was starting to change. Most of the new members were Gentiles and Jewish enthusiasm for the Gospel was beginning to wane. One of the facts of history that we have to remember when reading New Testament documents is that from AD 30 – AD 70 the

¹ **excursus** plural of ex-cur-sus (Noun)

Noun: A detailed discussion of a particular point in a book, usually in an appendix.

church was almost exclusively Jewish but after AD 100 it was almost exclusively Gentile. Paul was writing into the turning tide. Questions were being asked: “How is it that this Jewish Gospel, delivered as it was through the Jewish Apostles of a Jewish Messiah has become so unattractive to the Jewish audience? How is it that the Israel of God has become the Gentile Sanctuary?” Those were good questions and so Paul stops the “G – Train” between points 3 and 4 – between salvation by GRACE and the logical response of GRATITUDE - and provides an excursus; an extended discussion of the Gospel with respect to Israel. Paul surveys the historical relationship of the Jews to the Gospel, he assesses their present status and he ends by looking forward to the consummation of God’s Gospel purposes with respect to “all Israel”.

Given that you have been reading these texts in your RMM devotional plan over the last few weeks, we will not re-read them in their entirety this morning but will rather hit the main transitions in Paul’s argument as we walk through his discussion of the Gospel with respect to Israel. Turn your attention first of all then to Romans 9:1-5:

A Historical Survey Of The Gospel With Respect To Israel:

¹I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ²that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my ⁴countrymen according to the flesh, ⁴who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises; ⁵of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5. NKJV)

What Paul is lamenting here is a fact that is well known to many Christian parents:

➤ Special blessing does not always result in saving faith

How many of you know that from painful experience? How many of you know that despite the fact that your son or your daughter grew up in a Christian home, despite the fact that he was taken to Sunday School, despite the fact that he grew up in a free country with freedom to worship, freedom to read the Bible, freedom to enjoy and to worship God, that son or daughter rejected Christ and has given himself over to the lusts of the flesh? Special blessing does not always result in saving faith. Good parenting does not always ensure that in adulthood your children will walk with Christ. Paul here sounds like a loving father who says that if he could he

would give his own soul in exchange for the salvation of the Jewish nation. Many fathers in this room would strike that same bargain, I know. Paul goes on to say in verse 6:

For **they are not all Israel who are of Israel**,⁷ nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “*In Isaac your seed shall be called.*”⁸ That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. (Romans 9:6-8. NKJV)

Paul says:

➤ **Salvation has always been about election not ethnicity**

It has never been enough simply to declare that you are a child of Abraham. Ishmael was a child of Abraham but he was rejected. Esau was of the line of Abraham and he was rejected also.

¹³As it is written, “*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.*”¹⁴ (Romans 9:13. NKJV)

To be Israel is not about the flesh; it is about clinging to the promises of God. Salvation is not about ethnicity, it is about election and election reveals itself in the response of the individual towards the promises of God in Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to say that:

➤ **Mercy is always undeserved**

Look at verses 14-15:

¹⁴What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, “*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.*” (Romans 9:14-15. NKJV)

Some people complain that the doctrine of election is fundamentally unfair. Why did God elect Jacob and not Esau? That’s not fair! Paul says: “Fairness has nothing to do with it. If you want fair then everyone goes to hell – JUSTLY. That is fair. But God is more than fair. He is just and merciful. And he will show mercy to some who are under just condemnation and he will do it in a way that does not compromise his holiness.” Paul goes on to say that as fallen creatures justly under the wrath of God we are really in no position to question God’s methods. God’s justice and mercy does not sit under our scrutiny.

By the way, that little truth needs to be restated in the so-called church of today. On September 21st the movie “Hellbound?” will be released in theatres across North America. It is a movie put out by emergent church producers that questions whether a loving God would really send people to hell. This is the popular media outworking of the ideas Rob Bell introduced in his book *Love Wins*. The movie argues that it wouldn’t be fair for God to send people to hell. They go on to conclude that the God of Reformed Christianity – that’s your God by the way – is a moral monster. This is a live issue my friends. The emergent church – the neo-liberals of the 21st century – want God to be fair. The Bible says that the last thing we want is for God to be fair. Fair means everyone goes to hell. God says: “There is no battle between my love and my holiness. Love doesn’t “win”, “holiness” doesn’t win. I win. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy”. God elects and his election unto mercy is always undeserved.

➤ **Human beings are without excuse**

Paul has already said this in Romans 1 – remember this is not a new Gospel, this is the same Gospel specifically explicated with respect to the people of Israel. Paul said in Romans 1:

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:20. NKJV)

Paul says that no one can say: “I guess I am not saved because God didn’t choose me. I am not one of the elect, therefore I will just go off and sin a little bit more since I am going to hell anyway.” No! This is not fatalism, that is not how the Sovereignty of God works. Paul uses a well known historical illustration to explain how God is Sovereign and yet people are truly responsible. He says in 9:17-18:

¹⁷For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “*For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*”¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (Romans 9:17-18. NKJV)

Paul says that God’s Sovereignty today works just like it did back in the days of the Exodus. When God delivered the Jews out of Egypt he Sovereignly used the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart. Pharaoh’s heart was hard. He was proud. He thought himself god. So God hardened Pharaoh’s

heart. He did not take a nice humble God-fearing man and turn him into a megalomaniac despot – he pushed Pharaoh further into the pit he had chosen for himself. God is a like a judo player who uses the natural momentum and energy of the opponent to throw the opponent further in that same direction. You go where you meant to go but there is no question who is Sovereign over that journey. God is Sovereign in such a way that we are still morally responsible and utterly culpable. I realize that this is tough stuff. This is one of the hardest things in the Bible to understand. Your grandparents wrestled with this one too. I mentioned last week the old Baptist Confession that has fallen somewhat out of use in the last 100 years. I find it interesting sometimes to look back and check in with how our grandparents spoke of issues like this that they encountered in God’s word. They wrestled with this one; to be sure, let me read to you how they came out on it:

God has decreed in Himself from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things which shall ever come to pass.

- Yet in such a way that God is neither the author of sin nor does He have fellowship with any in the committing of sins, **nor is violence offered to the will of the creature**, **nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.** (Baptist Confession of Faith, Section 3)

Did you hear that? God decrees all things that shall ever come to pass. God wins. God works out his plan but never in such a way that he does violence to the will of the creature. He does not make you sin. He does not make you reject Christ. You do those things all on your own. The liberty of second causes – that’s you and me by the way; God is the first cause of everything and you and I are the second causes of everything and we are morally responsible creatures – neither is the liberty of second causes taken away, but rather established. God holds us responsible for our decisions. Our decisions are real. That’s not new teaching when we meet it in Romans 9. What’s new is that Paul applies it to the rejection of Christ by Israel. God will hold you accountable for that decision, Paul says, even though it serves his eternal decree.

➤ **Salvation has always been with respect to a remnant**

Look at verses 27-28:

²⁷Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel.[£]

“Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea,

The remnant will be saved.

²⁸ *For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,
Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.” (Romans 9:27-28. NKJV)*

The Apostle Paul points out that God has always been saving a remnant WITHIN ISRAEL. The shadow of the elect community has always been larger than the reality of the elect community. Not all who call themselves Israel are really Israel. Not all who call themselves Christians are really Christians. The authors of the Old Testament said that, and the authors of the New Testament say that. Matthew records Jesus saying:

²¹“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21. NKJV)

The reality of the elect community is always smaller than the number of those who profess to belong. You know this if you ever talk to people who call themselves Christians. I have the bad habit of taking people at their word when they tell me they are a Christian and so I start to talk about faith and the Bible and very often about 5 minutes into the conversation I discover that something has gone horribly wrong. I’ve said something bad somehow. There is that look on their faces – do you know that one? The: “I can’t believe that you believe that” look. “What do you mean that Jesus is the only way to heaven and that Muslims go to hell? What kind of a crazy person are you? What do you mean that the Bible dictates how we practice our sexuality? What kind of a cave man are you?” Do you know that look? I get that a lot. And you think to yourself: “How can you be a Christian and not take the words of Jesus seriously? How can you call yourself a Christian and disagree with the God of the universe?” Paul reminds us that the reality of the elect community is always smaller than its shadow. God does not read the 2011 Census report to find out how many Christians he has in Canada. God is at work within the remnant that he saves from within the larger husk of the confessional community. That’s how it has ALWAYS been, Paul says.

The Present State Of Israel With Respect To The Gospel:

From the historical review of the Gospel with respect to Israel Paul now states plainly the status of Israel with respect to the Gospel. He says plainly:

➤ **Israel is lost**

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law ^{of} righteousness. ³²Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, ^{by} the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. (Romans 9:30-32. NKJV)

Paul says that Israel has rejected the Gospel because they were offended at the suggestion that they needed to be saved. People of privilege do not like to be told that they are sinners in need of salvation. Have you noticed that? That is why so many people today want to present the Gospel without first telling people that they are sinners. We talked last week about the 5 G's of the Gospel according to the Apostle Paul: A true Gospel starts with GOD – with God as Creator who is Sovereign over his creatures. A God who has the right to dictate the design and standard for all human life. If you don't start with that God and those facts, then you don't have the Gospel. The Gospel then moves on to guilt. You have to tell people that they are not right with that God. They are guilty. They are sinners. They have fallen short of the glory of God. It is only when people know that there is a God to whom they must give an account; it is only when people know that they are guilty before that Holy God that they are ready to receive the grace of the Gospel! That's Paul's Gospel, but it is not the Gospel of Christian Television and it is not the Gospel of Christian concerts and that's a problem. Everybody wants the grace without confronting the guilt. And Paul wouldn't let the Jews off the hook and he was not unique in that. When a Jewish audience asked Peter what they needed to do to be saved, Peter did not pull any punches:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38. NKJV)

That is the Gospel and the Jews in Paul's day, increasingly, were offended by it and so the grace of God passed them by and they were lost. They were lost and therefore, Paul says:

➤ **Israel needs the Gospel!**

Paul's response to their initial rejection of the Gospel is not to hate them, it is not to get angry at them, it is to be concerned for them and to be motivated to bring them the Gospel. The Jews now, in Paul's mind, were in the same place all lost people are in: in need of the Gospel! In 10:12 he says:

¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For “*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*” (Romans 10:12-13. NKJV)

This may sound obvious but in fact it is not. The Apostle Paul looked at Israel in rejection of Christ and said: “These people need the Gospel!” but many Christians today do not come to that same conclusion. Many people today, even so called Evangelical Christians look at the Jewish people and say: “We Gentiles need the Gospel but the Jews can be saved by keeping the covenant that God gave to them.” Many in the hyper-dispensational crowd see such a distinction between Israel and the church that they also see two ways of salvation; one for Jews and one for Gentiles but Paul sees no such distinction. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is over all and whoever calls on the name of that Lord shall be saved. Let me be very clear. If a Polish person wants to get saved, they better look to Jesus. If an Italian person wants to get saved, they better look to Jesus. Not the Pope mind you, but JESUS! If an Egyptian person wants to get saved, they better look to Jesus. And if a Jewish person wants to get saved **THEY BETTER LOOK TO JESUS**. For there is no other name on heaven or on the earth by which men can be saved, is that still true? It was true in Paul’s day too. There is one way of salvation and it is the way of Jesus Christ.

What should we do then? Paul has diagnosed the problem but how can we get the solution to the problem? The same way we always have, the only way there ever will be. Israel’s problem is not unique and the solution isn’t either:

➤ **Israel needs Gospel preaching from the Word of God**

Paul says in Romans 10:14ff:

¹⁴How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who [£]preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”[£]*

¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “*LORD, who has believed our report?*”[£] ¹⁷**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.** (Romans 10:14-17. NKJV)

I love that Paul does not conceive of a special solution for this special problem. No! He says, “this problem of lostness will be solved the same way every other problem of lostness will be solved. We will trust the word of God to do the work of God as ever we were called to do.” Would that the modern day church had the same unchanging game plan! Every time we see a new problem we invent a new solution. Every time we meet a lost person with a unique story we invent a new Gospel. Every time culture changes we invent new models for doing church in response. Paul says: NO!!! Gospel preaching from the Bible is still the answer. Boy I bet you that sounded dumb in his day. I know it sounds dumb in our day. Do you know how many times people have told me that you can’t get people today, whose brains have been all mushed by T.V. and video games to come and listen to a sermon where one guy talks and reads from an old book while everyone else sits quiet and listens? Do you know how many times I’ve been told that? And yet the longer our sermons get the more this church grows, have you noticed that? Why is that? Because the Word of God does GOSPEL WORK in the hearts of lost men and women and that’s been happening for a very long time.

The Apostle Paul says, “the present state of Israel is that they are lost. The solution is Gospel preaching from the word of God.” Amen. He turns his attention now to Israel’s future.

The Future Of Israel With Respect To The Gospel

The first thing he says is that:

- **Israel’s temporary blindness with respect to the Gospel serves the end of evangelism among the Gentiles**

Look at Romans 11:25:

²⁵For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. (Romans 11:25. NKJV)

Now when Paul uses the word mystery he uses it in a different way than we use it. We use it to talk about things that are hidden that need to be ferreted out – like a murder mystery. Bible writers use mystery to talk about things that are there in plain sight but that require Holy Spirit illumination to understand. Paul is saying that what seems confusing to you is actually clear in

the Word of God. The remnant of the old is always the nucleus of the new. That was the case in the OT wasn't it? Wasn't it the remnant of Israel that went into exile in Babylon that came back under Ezra and Nehemiah to form the reborn people of God? So here, Paul says! The remnant of the old Israel has indeed been saved, the small inside the large, and it is this remnant that has been the nucleus of the new community of God that has grown to encompass people from diverse tribes, tongues and nations. It will keep growing until Gentiles from every tribe, tongue and nation are brought to it.

This by the way is not the unique hope of Paul, it is also the vision of the Apostle John:

⁹After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of **all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10. NKJV)

It was verses like these that motivated your grandparents to take the Gospel into every nook and cranny of Africa and Asia. The Bible itself promises that the first cause of God's election and the secondary agency of Gospel preaching from the Word of God will surely result in people from every tribe, tongue and nation being gathered around the throne of God in eternity singing the praises of the Lamb who was slain. You would have to have been a fool to get on those ships leaving England and New York and Toronto headed for Africa and China if these promises were not in the Bible! But they are in the Bible. God has his people everywhere on this earth and we just need to go get them. We just need to let the Word of God do the work of God and we will watch the kingdom of God grow up around us like wheat unto harvest.

And Paul says, in some way, the darkness of the Jews towards this Gospel, for now, serves that end. He does not say how so. We can guess. It may well be that had the church stayed dominated by Jews it would have been less attractive to Gentiles. They would have always felt like late comers and second class citizens. That may it. You don't meet a lot of Mexican Hindus do you? Not so much. You don't meet many Scandinavian born Sikhs. Why is that? Because religions that are associated almost exclusively with one ethnicity tend not to grow beyond that ethnicity. Whatever the reason, Paul says this blindness is only temporary and it has never been total. There have been and always will be a salting of Jews among the Gentiles that make up the Israel of God. Paul says in Romans 11:26:

➤ **All Israel will be saved**

²⁶And so all Israel will be £saved (Romans 11:26. NKJV)

What does he mean by that? He is already told us that they are not all Israel who are of Israel (9:6) so what exactly does he mean? There are three main suggestions:

- i. He means that the full elect, Jew and Gentile, will all be gathered in according to God's perfect will.

That by the way was the position of John Calvin and has had a great deal of support throughout Christian history. I haven't counted, but it appears to me that this has been the majority interpretation for most of our history. Paul has made a full circle. Not all who are of Israel are truly Israel but, in the end all Israel will be saved, meaning, all the elect of God according to the promise will be gathered in, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. God knows those who are his and he will get them all.

- ii. He means that all the elect from ethnic Israel will be gathered in.

Many scholars throughout the centuries have taught this as well. Paul is thus saying that just as the fullness of the Gentiles will come in – which doesn't mean every Gentile will be saved, but rather all the elect from among the Gentiles will be saved, so also all the elect from within ethnic Israel will be saved. Many people have taught that too.

The third option has been taught almost exclusively in North America and only in the last 100 years.

- iii. He means that shortly before the return of Jesus the Jewish people en mass will turn to Christ

Now in truth, because of Christian T.V. and radio this option would win the straw poll among most Christians sitting in the pews today but in fact it has the least amount of scholarly support and is the least likely meaning given the context. It would be very odd for Paul to have said all he just said about election rather than ethnicity, remnants rather than large national institutional bodies and then to say: but in the end all of ethnic, national Israel will be saved. That is to offer a

conclusion that is at complete odds with the flow of your argument. This is where people get heated and I have no interest in stirring up controversy just for the fun of it. The Bible does seem to suggest in other places, namely Zechariah 12 -14, that there will be a great future harvest among the Jewish people, I'm just not sure that is what Paul is saying here. The point we can all agree on is that whoever it is that gets saved, they all get saved in exactly the same way. The key words in verse 26 are not really "all Israel", theologically speaking, the key words are "and so" which are a translation of the Greek words *kai houtos* which means "in just such a manner". The real point is that in just such a manner as the Gentiles will get saved – by hearing the Gospel in the preaching of the Word of God – so too will come the salvation of the Israel of God, however you wish to define that. There is only one way of salvation, for Jews, for Gentiles, for Italians, for Mexicans and for Canadians. We are all equal with respect to the Gospel.

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

³⁴ *"For who has known the mind of the LORD?
Or who has become His counselor?"*[Ⓢ]

³⁵ *"Or who has first given to Him
And it shall be repaid to him?"*[Ⓢ]

³⁶For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.