

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE OF GOD: ROMANS 9-11

THE CONTEXT OF ROMANS 9-11:

Paul defends himself against the charge that his gospel is anti-Jewish. Paul maintains that in Romans 9-11 his gospel is in line with the OT and that his theology has a central place for the Jewish people.

1. WHO WERE THE CHOSEN PEOPLE OF GOD?

In OT times, the People of God were not merely physical and racial Israelites but those Israelites (and a few others) chosen and predestined by God:

Romans 9:6 For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." 10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

The above passage does not refer to Gentiles, but merely points out that, of the nation of Israel as a whole, in the OT God only chose a few Israelites for salvation.

2. WHO ARE THE CHOSEN PEOPLE OF GOD?

In NT times and today, the People of God are (and will be) all those, Jew and Gentile (non-Jews), English, French, American, Chinese, Indian, Arab, Iranian etc. who trust in Jesus the King-Messiah as their personal Lord and Saviour:

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

3. WHO WILL BE THE CHOSEN PEOPLE OF GOD?

In addition to all (Jews & Gentiles) who trust in Jesus (as in point 2), will there be, also, a future mass conversion of the Jews to Jesus at the time of the Second coming, since Paul says that "all Israel will be saved"?:

Romans 11:25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." 28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, 29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 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. 32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

There are 4 major options about how to interpret Paul's reference to "all Israel":

1. "All Israel" refers to each and every racial Jew down the ages who will be saved by their own religion and keeping the OT Law. *Weakness:* Paul believes that Jews need salvation through faith in Jesus (Romans 10:1-13). This option is clearly wrong since all need to believe in Jesus to be saved.

2. "All Israel" is the Church since Paul in ch 9 says that the saved are those chosen by God not physical racial Israel. *Weakness:* Paul never uses Israel as referring to the church and Romans 11:25-32 is talking about racial physical Jews.

3. "All Israel" refers to all those racial Jews who have believed in their promised Messiah in the history of both OT & NT times. *Weakness:* While possible, Paul seems to be referring to an amazing new thing God will do in the future.

4. "All Israel" refers to the mass of racial national Jews of *only the last living generation* who are converted and see Jesus their King-Messiah at His Second Coming, and so their trust in Him is confirmed and are saved. *Weakness:* Sounds very odd to us today, but ... option 4 may be the one closest to the truth.

Paul sees that God will do something amazing in the future for the Jewish people, (Romans 10:19; 11:11-16) because of God's ultimate faithfulness to

the promises made to Abraham referred to Rom 11:29 probably means more than merely a small number of Jews are saved in history. "All Israel" probably refers to Jews as a whole of the last living generation in their corporate identity and wholeness who are saved even there are some (or indeed many) individual exceptions. The "mystery" in 11:25 probably refers to the fact that the "hardening" (i.e. Jewish resistance to the gospel) of a part of Israel/ the Jews will come to an end since Paul says that "hardening" will last "until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."

The last generation of living racial Jews will be converted because they will be "provoked" to jealousy by Gentiles coming to trust the Jewish Messiah and will want what Gentile Christians have (i.e. faith in Jesus). The truth of the gospel is confirmed for the last generation of Jews by seeing the King-Messiah Jesus come in glory at the Second Coming. Does not mean those Jews who have rejected the promises of God and Christ will be saved, or mean a "second chance" after death, but rather means the mass conversion of the last generation of Jews.

APPLICATIONS:

1. There is no justification for anti-Arab feelings, Christian Zionism or support of Israel's foreign policy from the Bible.
2. We must all (whether we are Jewish, Arab, English, Chinese, Indian, American etc.) believe, trust, and confess that Jesus is our personal Lord

and Saviour, who died in our place for our sins & rose again, in order to be saved.

3. There must be no anti-Semitism or pride on the part of non-Jewish Christians (Romans 11:17-21). We worship the God of Israel. We Trust in Jesus, who is the King of the Jews. We must value the OT. We must value Paul's theology which is very Jewish and not dismiss it as anti-Jewish.
4. Jewish evangelism. We must pray and work for the evangelization of the Jewish people (Rom 9:1-2; 10:1; 11:13-16).

Paul's theology demands a mission to the Jewish people. Provoking Israel to jealousy is no replacement for mission. It is just one possible precursor for mission. The gospel must be preached for it is only the gospel, God's reconciling word, which can make someone a Christian (Rom. 10.17) ... I would maintain that evangelism to Jews is not anti-Semitism; rather to renounce preaching the liberating gospel to Jewish people is anti-Semitism
– Prof. Richard Bell.

To imagine that Jews can no longer be welcomed into the family of the Messiah ... [that] for Paul, would be the very height of anti-Judaism.
– Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham.

5. Glorify and Praise God for the amazing complexity and wisdom of His plan:

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.