

## 4. God's Choice of Israel (Rom. 9.1-11.36)

### a) Romans 9-11 as a coherent section

- Does this section belong to the argument of Romans or not? (The flow from 8.39-12.1 doesn't necessarily require it).
- It depends what you think the letter is for. If it is a meant to be a doctrinal treatise, then Romans 9-11 is superfluous. But if it is an attempt to argue for Paul's own mediating position in a mixed Jew-Gentile church, then it becomes a central part of the letter.
- Reading what Paul wrote – rather than what we would like him to have written!

Richard B. Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (T.&T.Clark 1996) writes (p.412):

The entire letter to the Romans circles around two basic issues:

- *Is the grace of God extended to Gentiles who do not observe the Torah?* Paul answers emphatically yes: the righteousness of God is now revealed in Jesus Christ, apart from the Law. The gospel of "the power of God for salvation" is for "the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1.16).
- *If God receives Gentiles by grace without requiring circumcision and adherence to the Law, does that mean that he has broken the covenant with Israel?* This question, which is the focus of Romans 9-11, Paul answers even more emphatically than the first: ...by no means!...A major purpose of Romans is to offer an impassioned defense of the faithfulness of God to Israel, despite that people's manifest unfaithfulness (3.3).

#### **Dealing with a tricky passage: how do you go about it?**

- *Read the whole passage in one go. Try to sense the flow, the gaps and the structure.*
- *Isolate the units. Spilt it up into blocks of thought.*
- *Try to sum up the theme of each block in a single sentence.*
- *Now expand your explanation.*

### The Spectrum between 'law-free' and 'subject to law':

Law-free-----Subject to Law

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Christians who see no role for the Law or Hebrew Scriptures</b></li> <li>• 'Anything goes – Christ has set us free!'</li> <li>• Predominantly Gentile</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Paul's mediating position</b></li> <li>• the Law as a diagnostic tool which identifies sin</li> <li>• Jesus has dealt with sin, but standards of ethical behaviour are required as a means of witness, reflecting the character of God</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Christians who see Jesus as fulfilling but not setting the Law aside in any way</b></li> <li>• circumcision and food regulations are still required to serve God</li> <li>• Predominantly Jewish (Pharisees?)</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

Richard Hays in another book suggests that Romans 9-11 is 'broadly analogous to the structure of a lament psalm' (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Yale University Press 1989) p.64.) This is a helpful observation – a good example of a lament Psalm is Psalm 44 (quoted in Romans 8.36).

Can you see a parallel between it and Romans 9-11, as outlined below?

**Psalm 44**

<sup>1</sup> We have heard with our ears, O God,  
our ancestors have told us,  
what deeds you performed in their days,  
in the days of old:  
<sup>2</sup> you with your own hand drove out the  
nations,  
but them you planted;  
you afflicted the peoples,  
but them you set free;  
<sup>3</sup> for not by their own sword did they win the  
land,  
nor did their own arm give them victory;  
but your right hand, and your arm,  
and the light of your countenance,  
for you delighted in them.  
  
<sup>4</sup> You are my King and my God;  
you command victories for Jacob.  
<sup>5</sup> Through you we push down our foes;  
through your name we tread down our  
assailants.  
<sup>6</sup> For not in my bow do I trust,  
nor can my sword save me.  
<sup>7</sup> But you have saved us from our foes,  
and have put to confusion those who hate  
us.  
<sup>8</sup> In God we have boasted continually,  
and we will give thanks to your name for  
ever.  
  
<sup>9</sup> Yet you have rejected us and abased us,  
and have not gone out with our armies.  
<sup>10</sup> You made us turn back from the foe,  
and our enemies have taken spoil for  
themselves.  
<sup>11</sup> You have made us like sheep for slaughter,  
and have scattered us among the nations.  
<sup>12</sup> You have sold your people for a trifle,  
demanding no high price for them.  
  
<sup>13</sup> You have made us the taunt of our  
neighbours,

the derision and scorn of those around us.  
<sup>14</sup> You have made us a byword among the  
nations,  
a laughing-stock among the peoples.  
<sup>15</sup> All day long my disgrace is before me,  
and shame has covered my face  
<sup>16</sup> at the words of the taunters and revilers,  
at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.  
  
<sup>17</sup> All this has come upon us,  
yet we have not forgotten you,  
or been false to your covenant.  
<sup>18</sup> Our heart has not turned back,  
nor have our steps departed from your way,  
<sup>19</sup> yet you have broken us in the haunt of  
jackals,  
and covered us with deep darkness.  
  
<sup>20</sup> If we had forgotten the name of our God,  
or spread out our hands to a strange god,  
<sup>21</sup> would not God discover this?  
For he knows the secrets of the heart.  
<sup>22</sup> Because of you we are being killed all day  
long,  
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.  
  
<sup>23</sup> Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?  
Awake, do not cast us off for ever!  
<sup>24</sup> Why do you hide your face?  
Why do you forget our affliction and  
oppression?  
<sup>25</sup> For we sink down to the dust;  
our bodies cling to the ground.  
<sup>26</sup> Rise up, come to our help.  
Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast  
love.

For more on lament psalms see <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/psalms-of-lament.aspx>.)

a) 9.1-31 – has the word of God failed?

- (i) 9. 1-5 - *Paul's sorrow (prologue)*
- (ii) 9.6-18 - *has the word of God failed?*
- (iii) 9.19-29 – *the inscrutable ways of God*
- (iv) 9.30-33 – *striving for righteousness (bridge)*

b) 10.1– 10.21 – God, Israel and Gentiles

- (i) 10.1-13 – *the same Lord is Lord of all*
- (ii) 10.14-21 - *how is God heard?*

c) 11.1-36 – has Israel been abandoned?

- (i) 11.13- 16 - *how Gentiles should respond*
- (ii) 11.17-32 – *the mystery and paradox of God's actions*
- (iii) 11.33-36- *doxology (conclusion)*

What's the advantage of seeing this passage as a lament psalm?

**b) 9.1-31 – has the word of God failed?***(i) 9. 1-5 - Paul's sorrow (prologue)*

- Paul caught between strong factions. His unmistakable anguish - lament.
- Romans 1.16-17: the headline. The righteousness of *God* is at stake – before Paul has looked at the righteousness of humans.
- The messiah who is 'over all'. The Lordship of Jesus.
- Pressure to compartmentalise God. 'If Jesus is not Lord of all, then he is not Lord at all.'  
Christ and Caesar

*(ii) 9.6-18 - has the word of God failed?*

- Romans 3.1-6: unfinished business?
- Looping back to Abraham (chs. 3/4) – righteousness by faith (trust), not what you do or who you are – children of the promise
- Is God unjust? A serious question.

*(iii) 9.19-29 – the inscrutable ways of God*

- Whose rules here? All is grace to be received. (Not a great argument for post-Enlightenment thought!)
- God chooses who to use.

*(iv) 9.30-33 – striving for righteousness (bridge)*

- Summary statement: faith, not works (doing) matters
- You can't strive for righteousness, it comes as a free gift

c) 10.1- 10.21 – God, Israel and Gentiles

(i) 10.1-13 – *the same Lord is Lord of all*

- vv. 1-4 – a summary statement which sums up much of Romans in a short space.
- vv. 11-13 – Lord of all – the logic is that God *cannot* just be the God of Israel (note change to Israel) – he must be 'Lord of all', a universal claim – cf. Gal. 6.16 – *true* Israel is all who believe.

(ii) 10.14-21 *how is God heard?*

- vv. 14-21 - Is Israel's the only revelation? v.18 – the natural creation? (Ps 19.4) Or the gospel has already been preached? What is the word? Does it need speech?

**d) 11.1-36 – has Israel been abandoned?**

(i) 11.1-6 – *has God rejected his people?*

- No!
- Paul's own feelings.
- The remnant, elected by grace (vv.5-6).

(ii) 11.7-12 – *the stumbling of Israel means salvation for the rest of the world*

- Part of Israel has obtained what was sought. The rest were 'hardened'.
- vv.11-12 – is God's purpose in Israel's stumbling the inclusion of the Gentiles?

(iii) 11.13- 16 - *how Gentiles should respond*

- v.15 is key: their rejection is the reconciliation of the world

(iv) 11.17-32 – *the mystery and paradox of God's actions*

- Don't boast!
- the olive tree analogy
- vv.20-22 – the kindness and severity of God. You stand where you stand because of grace.  
(Does 'faith' help?)

- the mystery of the hardening (v.25)  
“All Israel” is the community of those elected by God in and with Jesus Christ both from Jews and also from Gentiles, the whole Church together with the holy root of Israel will consist in the totality of all the branches finally united with and drawing sustenance from it, in the totality constituted by the remnant continuing in and with the original stem Jesus Christ, by the wild shoots added later from the Gentiles, and by the branches which were cut off and are finally grafted in again. (Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics* II/2, (T.&T.Clark 1957)p.300.)

(v) 11.33-36- *doxology (conclusion)*

- the deepest mystery is the unsearchability of the wisdom of God. Compare with 8.38-39.
- Isaiah 55.6-11.

So – what's Paul's answer in a nutshell? Has he faced the question?