

The Nature Of God's People – Rom 9-11

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Romans 9-11 is filled with rich treasures. But they're buried among a field of mines! It's hard to understand in *some* places and hard to accept in others. Add to that the preconceived notions we bring to the text, or the questionable perspectives we've come to accept, and the interpretation gets very fuzzy, very fast.

So I'm going to do my best to explain these chapters by showing the flow of Paul's thought, and highlighting the main points along the way.

The main issue Paul addresses is *the nature of God's people*. Who they are, and why. There are 5 parts to it, starting with this:

1. Ethnic Israel is not true Israel (Rom 9:6-8)

Paul spends the first 8 chapters of Romans pointing out that salvation doesn't come by works, but by the Spirit through faith. And the implication of Rom 9:1-5, is that not very many Jews have embraced that. Even though they have all the privileges and plenty of opportunity to do so.

Look at v2-3 – *I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart* [Paul says]. *3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh*. Paul wishes he could take their place. Implying that *they* are cut off. The Jews.

Which goes hand in hand with Jesus' words in **Mt 8:11-12**, where he says: *I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom* [unbelieving Jews] *will be thrown into the outer darkness*.

And again in **Mt 21:43**. After telling the Jewish religious leaders that they have rejected the cornerstone, the Messiah himself, Jesus said: *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits*. Paul has great sorrow because of that. (Rom 9:2)

➤ Then, Paul says in v6 – *But it is not as though the word of God has failed*. Meaning, just because so many of the Jewish people fail to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and embrace the salvation he offers, doesn't mean that God has failed to deliver on his promises to bless them and make of them a great nation like he told Abraham.

Why? Because *not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel*. V6b. Not all who are part of *ethnic* Israel belong to *true* Israel. Spiritual Israel. Then he says it another way. *And not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring*. You're not a part of the nation, and you're not a part of the lineage.

Abraham was the father of the Israelite nation. Later to become known as Jews. And Paul is saying, just because you're a Jew, doesn't mean you're automatically a part of Israel. *But "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."* He anticipates and answers the question, "How do you become a part of Israel? Who is a child of Abraham?" Which

fortunately, he explains. Because saying it's through *Isaac* that your offspring will be named, isn't necessarily intuitive to us.

V8 – *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring*. Being a part of true Israel, aka being a child of God, depends on God's *promise* to choose and bless those he wants. Just like he did Isaac instead of Ishmael. Being a part of true Israel, being a child of Abraham, being a child of God, doesn't depend on your bloodline.

Rather, as he goes on to explain further, in v9-13, it depends on God's *election*. God's *choice* to save and bless you. Just like he chose and promised to bless Isaac once again, but not Ishmael. And Jacob, but not Esau. Even though they were of the same lineage. Being chosen by God has nothing to do with the blood that runs in your veins.

Or, the *circumcision* Jews practiced. The outward things they did. Like Paul said earlier in **Rom 2:28-29** – *No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter*.

In other words, a true Jew is one whose *sin* has been cut away by the Holy Spirit, not one whose *skin* has been cut away by a doctor, according to the Law. It doesn't come about by a physical action on the *body*, but a *spiritual* action in the *soul*.

So neither the presence of Abraham's blood in your veins, nor the mark of circumcision on your flesh, automatically means that you are a chosen child of God. A true Israelite. That depends on God's sovereign election to choose some, but not others.

Which Paul illustrates in v9-13 with Jacob and Esau, and then defends in v14-23. Saying in v18 – *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills*. And has every right to do so because he's the potter, and we're the clay.

Nor is he unjust in it. V14 – *Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!* God is not sinning or at fault in any way because of his choices in election based solely on his will, and not our lineage or works.

The point being, once again, that just because the majority of Jews have refused to believe in Jesus, doesn't mean God's promise to bless them has failed. Because God's purpose and plan doesn't *include* every ethnic Jew. It didn't in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant, and it doesn't in the New Testament under the New Covenant. Ethnic Israel is not true Israel because God hasn't chosen all of them.

➤ Which means, among other things, that the political nation-state of Israel then and now has nothing to do with the true Israel of God. Granted, some of those that God has chosen may live there, and in fact do by virtue of their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. But beyond that, there's no link and no significance.

So things like "A Night to Honor Israel" that focuses on the advancement of the nation *state* of Israel, and the return of ethnic Jews to the "land," has no more spiritual significance than a night to honor Zimbabwe. Because ethnic Israel is not true Israel. *Not*

all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. (Rom 9:6b-7a)

2. True Israel includes both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 9:24-26)

At the end of Paul's defense of God's right to choose some for salvation and not others, and his righteousness in doing so, he asks a rhetorical question in v22-24 as a way to reason with us. He says: *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory?*

What if God has ordained and endured the rebellion and unbelief of *some* people – people destined for wrath due to their choice and his election – in order to show his glory and mercy to others? What if he's been patient with sinners in order to save the elect? That's one explanation Paul says, for why God might choose some and not others.

And what if those *vessels of mercy*, v23, include lots of ethnicities? *Even us whom he has called [v24], not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*

What if God has chosen to include *Gentiles* among his vessels of mercy, and even considers *them* a part of his people? *As indeed [v25] he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" [26] "And in the very place [Israel and beyond] where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"*

Shocking! At least to those in Paul's day. It's one thing for God to choose or not choose *Jews*, but it's a whole new ball game to include *Gentiles* among those he calls. And Paul applies the OT prophecy from Hosea here, to say that's *exactly* what's going on. That some *Gentiles*, who previously were *not* his people and *not* loved by him, are now just the opposite – beloved children.

So when he says in v8 that *it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring*, he has in mind *Gentiles* who have been chosen and elected and promised salvation. So *true* Israel includes both *Jews and Gentiles*.

➤ And Paul's not the only one to say it, nor is this the only place he says it. Peter says the same thing to the church at large in **1 Pet 2:10**: *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* Sound familiar?

And Paul reiterates his own thoughts in **Phil 3:3** where, speaking to the Gentile believers in Philippi, he says: *We are the circumcision [the real people of God], who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.*

And again in **Gal 3:7** he says: *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.* Not those of descent, but those of faith.

And **Gal 3:13-14** says: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us . . . [14] so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [being a part of God's people] might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

And then last, in **Gal 3:29** Paul says: *If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

All of which means, that the people of God are those he calls to himself, regardless of lineage or ethnic background. And therefore, true Israel, God's people, includes both *Jews and Gentiles*.

3. But only a remnant of Jews will be saved (Rom 9:27-29; 11:1-10)

That's what Paul drives home in v27-29. By applying Isaiah's prophecy to the situation now. Look at what he says. V27 – *And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.* A small portion.

After confirming that God's word has not failed because Jews that are chosen are still a part of God's people, he says in no uncertain terms here that it's only a remnant, a *small* group compared to the whole. *Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved. (27)*

➤ One of the reasons for which, is that the Israelites of old applied the Law incorrectly. That's v30-32 – *What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; [31] but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law [living up to it]. [32] Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.*

The Israelites of old thought they would be right in God's eyes if they just crossed their t's and dotted their i's apart from faith in their hearts. Faith that God would forgive, save, and lead, not because of what they did, but because of his promises. So one reason that only a remnant of Jews will be saved, is because many of them pursued righteousness by works.

In addition to that, per v32-33, they have now *stumbled* in their pursuit of righteousness or salvation, because they have rejected Christ. That's a second reason that only a remnant of Jews will be saved. *They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, [v33] as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

Jesus Christ and him crucified *was* the stumbling block. And is. Many Jews still won't believe in him. Demonstrating they're still not a part of the remnant.

➤ Then, after mentioning his desire to see them saved in the first few verses of ch10, he reiterates that it's by faith, or belief, not works. So that, in 10:13 – *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Not just Jews, and not just Gentiles, but everyone. *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.* Rom 10:12.

Salvation is available to *all* peoples if they will only believe and call on Jesus. The problem is, many Jews haven't and won't, because they are disobedient and contrary. That's his conclusion in 10:21, and a *third* reason that only a remnant will be saved.

Of Israel he says [God does; 10:21], “*All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.*” As opposed to many Gentiles whom God is saving as he reveals himself to them, the Jews by and large are rejecting him. True then, and true now.

And it's not because they haven't heard or understand, like he says in 10:16-20. They *have* heard, they *do* understand. So they are without excuse. And yet they continue to reject him.

So let's retrace the flow of thought so far. After establishing in chapter 9 that ethnic Israel is not true Israel, and that true Israel, God's people, is comprised of both Jews *and* Gentiles, he then says that it's only a *remnant* of Jews that will be included, only a remnant saved. Because they pursued righteousness wrongly, they rejected Jesus, and they're disobedient and contrary.

➤ All of which causes Paul to ask in 11:1 – *Has God rejected his people?* Has God *rejected* the Jews? Is that why they're not turning to Christ?

By no means! he says. After all, *I'm* a Jew, and *I'm* saved (1b). V2 – *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.* Those he has chosen or elected for salvation.

Then he goes on to say that just like God preserved a remnant against all odds in Elijah's day – *So too* [v5] *at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.* He reiterates what he said in 9:27. That only a *remnant* of Jews will be saved. And then confirms it in v7 – *What then? Israel* [ethnic Israel] *failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.* And then describes that hardening in v8-10.

The point being, here in the first 10 verses of ch11, is that all is not lost. Yes, many Jews have *rejected* the Messiah, but God has preserved a *remnant* who believe in faith like Abraham. But *only* a remnant. The rest were hardened.

The purpose for which, #4, is to offer salvation to the Gentiles, and . . .

4. To form *one* people of God, not two (Rom 11:11-24)

That's one of the main points of 11:17-24 and the olive tree analogy. Notice there are not *two* trees, representing *two* people of God – the Jews and the church as some people advocate – but *one* tree and *one* people of God

It's what some people would call Replacement Theology. The church has *replaced* Israel as God's people. And in a sense that's true, even though it's most often used in a derogatory way.

But it would be *more* accurate to call what Paul lays out here, “Addition Theology.” Where New Testament believers are *added* to Old Testament believers to form *one* people of God.

And Paul lays out a very specific process for it, starting in 11:11. It looks like this:
**Jewish unbelief → Gentile blessing and salvation → Jewish jealousy and salvation
→ More Gentile blessing . . .** and so on.

According to Paul in v11-15, that's the process by which God has been adding New Testament believers to the Old Testament olive tree, to form one people of God. It's the process by which God *has* been saving, and will *continue* to save, his elect. His elect, once again, from both the Jews *and* the Gentiles.

➤ Let me try to show it to you, starting in v11. *So I ask, did they stumble* [unbelieving Israel] *in order that they might fall?* Altogether *fail* in their pursuit of righteousness and God's favor? Is *that* the purpose for their unbelief and disobedience?

By no means! Rather through their trespass [their sin of unbelief] *salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.* [12] *Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles* [two ways of saying the same thing], *how much more will their full inclusion mean!* [Their salvation and inclusion in God's family.]

In other words, if the unbelief of *ethnic* Jews means blessing and spiritual riches for *non-Jews*, how much more blessing will result as the *full* number of the elect Jews believe?

I think that's what *their full inclusion* means at the end of v12. The “full number of the *elect* Jews.” Because that's consistent with what he's been saying throughout about only a remnant being saved.

And just to make sure, he clarifies it almost immediately. In v13-14 – *Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry* [14] *in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.*

Some of the Jews will be saved due to jealousy over Gentile inclusion. So the Jew's full inclusion in v12 can't mean *all* Jews.

But the main thought he's trying to convey here in v11-15, is that Jewish unbelief serves a greater purpose than just their punishment, their fall. It leads to the process by which God is saving both Jews *and* Gentiles.

➤ And then, to illustrate how that process happens, and what it looks like, he brings in the olive tree analogy. (11:17-24). Starting in v16 with an illustration. *If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.*

In other words, if you're a part of God's people, the *lump* in this case, you're good. If you're connected to the *root*, the promises made to the Patriarchs of old, you're justified in God's sight; with a bright future. But you have to be connected. By faith.

The problem is, as he goes on to say, *some* branches have been broken off. Referring to unbelieving *Jews*. They've been set aside and are no longer holy. Not saved. Because they're not connected to the root, the promise of salvation.

But other branches have been grafted *in* – *wild* branches. Referring to believing *Gentiles*. In which case they're *holy* in God's sight just like the natural *Jewish* branches that remain by faith; *believing* Jews.

What's more, some of the Jews broken off for their *un*-belief, will be *re*-grafted in if they believe. If they trust Christ as Lord and Savior.

All for the purpose of forming *one* people of God, not two.

➤ Which is a huge issue for people who call themselves Dispensationalists. Like Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins who wrote the Left Behind series. Or Charles Ryrie who wrote the Ryrie Study Bible. Or John Hagee.

They believe that there are two separate people of God. Or two parts to God's people – Israel and the Church. With two plans and two covenants, the Old and the New, for each group respectively.

They also believe that the Church Age in which we live, is an *interruption* in God's primary plan under the *Old* Covenant. A parenthesis if you will. Because the Jews rejected Christ, so God turned to the Gentiles *for a time*.

Therefore the purpose of end times events in their minds, is to get things back on track with God's primary plan for *ethnic* Israel. And he will do so they say, by restoring them as a nation-state and returning to the Old Covenant, complete with sacrifices, works, and a rebuilt temple. A temple in which Jesus will sit and reign during the Millennium. That's traditional dispensationalism.

➤ And while many have softened on some of those things, like Progressive Dispensationalists, they are still forced to diminish or explain away a number of very clear Scriptures about the nature of God's people.

Like **Eph 2:15**. Which says that Christ has abolished *the law of commandments and ordinances* [referring to the Old Covenant], *that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two*.

Or **Heb 8:13** that says – God made the first covenant obsolete. And *what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away*. Ruling out the thought that it will be reinstated, symbolically or otherwise, in the Millennium.

Or **Gal 3:28** which says – *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*. There's only *one* covenant, not two; and only one people of God.

So ethnic Israel is not true Israel. True Israel includes both Jews *and* Gentiles. But only a *remnant* of Jews will be saved. To form *one* people of God, not two.

5. And fulfill his promises to the elect (Rom 11:25-33)

That's the last main point Paul makes in Rom 9-11 regarding the nature of God's people. He will fulfill his promises to the elect.

Which starts in 11:25-27 where he re-caps the entire argument with this conclusion. And it's very, very important to keep the entire context of ch9-11 in mind when interpreting the next few verses.

V25 – *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*. "A partial hardening," referring to a disposition of unbelief. A spiritual blindness. Like he talked about in v8-10.

A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Or until all the elect Gentiles are saved. It's the same word used for the *full inclusion* of the Jews in v12. Referring in both places to the elect. Because not all Gentiles will be saved, just like not all Jews will be saved.

V26 – *And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written [in Isaiah 59], "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; [27] "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."* The *covenant* being the New Covenant. The very salvation we enjoy right now. A covenant that resulted from Christ's coming, as our *Deliverer*, to take away our sins. That's the covenant Isaiah was talking about, by which Jews and Gentiles are saved.

But the sticky part is the *first* part of v26 – *In this way all Israel will be saved*. It's the most controversial phrase of the entire 3 chapters. Especially the *all Israel* part.

But let's start with *in this way*. *In this way*, refers to the ongoing process of Jewish unbelief, leading to Gentile salvation, leading to Jewish jealousy and salvation, leading to *more* Gentile blessing and salvation, and so on. (See the graphic on the previous page.)

In that way, all Israel will be saved. Referring to the remnant. The entire number of elect Jews whom God has chosen for salvation.

All of which is happening through the covenant of forgiveness found in Christ, just like Isaiah said it would 700+ years earlier, and to which Paul refers in v27.

➤ Now, that seems clear enough, but some would advocate based on the phrase *all Israel will be saved*, that most or all *ethnic* Israelites, who are alive at the time of Christ's return, will somehow be saved. But that's contrary to both the text *and* the context. For at least 6 reasons.

6 reasons "All Israel" does not mean every living Jew, or most Jews, sometime in the future:

1. Paul is explicit about only a *remnant* being saved.

You can only advocate that *all* ethnic Jews will be saved if you lift this verse out of the context of the passage, where Paul has spent the last 3 chapters making the point that God has only preserved a *remnant* of Jews for salvation. So *all* can't mean all ethnic Jews.

2. If *all* means most, which some advocate, why didn't Paul say it?

Nor is there a qualifier in the surrounding context to *indicate* that it only means most.

3. This saving process isn't limited to the future, because it's going on *now*. That's what he says in 11:30-31 – *For just as you [the Gentiles] were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience [the Jew's disobedience], 31 so they too [the Jews] have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you [the Gentiles] they also may now receive mercy.*

The saving of *all* elect Israel is going on *now*. And has been since Christ died and rose again. It's not just a future thing.

4. The future tense of Isaiah's prophecy that Paul quotes in 11:26-27, doesn't mean that the salvation of *Israel* is future.

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Christ at the cross. It's only in the future tense because the cross *was* future for Isaiah, and Paul is simply quoting him.

5. If all Israel means all ethnic Jews, then *the reconciliation of the world* in v15 has to mean *all Gentiles*. After all, the world is the world. Which is obviously not the case, either biblically *or* experientially.

6. The phrase "*In this way*" in 11:26 is not indicative of the timing, but the process. The verse does not say, "At that time" *all Israel will be saved*. Or, "Then" *all Israel will be saved*. But *in this way*. Indicating a process, not a time.

But some people infer a timing, because that's what normally follows an "until" statement, like the one found in v25. *A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*. We normally expect such a statement to be followed by "then" or "at *that* time" such and such will happen. And if it *did* in this case, it would absolutely imply a future-only salvation for Israel's elect.

But it doesn't. It doesn't *say* then, and it doesn't imply it. Because it says something entirely different. It says, *in this way*. Once again, referring to the process of Jewish hardening or unbelief, leading to Gentile salvation, leading to Jewish jealousy, etc. *In this way* is not indicative of the timing, but the process.

6 reasons for why v26 does *not* mean that most or all ethnic Israelites who are alive at the time of Christ's return, will somehow be saved. Such a conclusion is contrary to both the text and the context.

➤ Rather, *all Israel will be saved* refers to all the *elect* of Israel. The remnant. And we see it in the text. Because v28 says – *As regards the gospel, they [ethnic Israel] are enemies of God for your sake*. Speaking to Gentiles. They're enemies because they don't believe. They reject him. And it's for our sake, because that unbelief resulted in God extending his promises of righteousness and inclusion as part of his people, to the Gentiles.

But as regards election [the choosing of some for salvation], they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. [29] For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

In other words, because God loved the Jewish patriarchs, *their forefathers*, to whom he made massive promises of blessing and salvation, he's going to keep on *choosing* some of

their lineage to be his children of promise, just like he's done up to now. Because the *gifts*, the promises, and *the calling of God are irrevocable*.

Those whom God has chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world, *will* be saved according to the purpose of his will (Eph 1:4-5). He's not changing that.

So the word of God has *not* failed, 9:6. Nor has he *rejected* his people, 11:1. Rather, God has preserved a *remnant* of Jews for salvation, who *are* being saved, and will *continue* to be saved, in order to fulfill his promises to the elect. The elect Jews, and the elect Gentiles, to form one people of God.

Summary

1. Ethnic Israel is not true Israel. (Rom 9:6-8)
2. True Israel includes both Jews *and* Gentiles. (Rom 9:24-26)
3. But only a remnant of Jews will be saved. (Rom 9:27-29; 11:1-10)
4. To form *one* people of God, not two. (Rom 11:11-24)
5. And fulfill his promises to the elect. (Rom 11:25-33)

If that makes your head hurt, you're in good company. Because Paul himself ends all this by saying in Rom 11:33 – *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable [unknowable] his ways! Amen.*