

The Doctrine of the Remnant and the Salvation of Israel in Romans 9-11

Steve Lewis, M.A., M.Div.
High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Introduction

Romans chapters 9-11 have a significant place in the overall argument of the apostle Paul in the book of Romans. These chapters deal with the important issue of the apparent failure of God's Word concerning His people Israel. This passage of Scripture is permeated with the doctrine of the "Remnant of Israel," describing its current implications for believers as well as its eschatological implications for the nation of Israel. The present study will focus on a contextual and grammatical analysis of Romans 9-11 in order to provide a consistent interpretation of the different aspects of God's plan for the salvation of Israel. Special attention will be focused on Romans 11:25-26 regarding the eventual salvation of Israel on a national scale.

The Apparent Failure of God's Word and its Initial Defense by Paul (9:1-6)

In the previous chapter (Romans 8), Paul had just celebrated the sovereignty, omnipotence, foreknowledge, and faithfulness of God and His Word. The first five verses of Romans chapter nine describe the privileges given to Israel, while at the same time describing the apparent failure of the Word of God in regard to His chosen people as a nation. Barrett comments that, "The introductory paragraph (vv. 1-5) has sharpened the problem. Since God has so clearly given Israel a position of unique privilege, does not Israel's defection mean that God's intention has broken down? The word of promise has been proved false by history. God's foreknowledge (8:29) has been shown to be in error."¹ It is clear that a detailed response to this issue would be of utmost importance to Jews and Gentiles alike. Romans 9:6 is a crucial verse in this passage because it explains Paul's purpose for including chapters 9-11 in this epistle: "It is not as though the Word of God has failed." Paul is intent on demonstrating that the Word of God can be trusted completely, even though it may look as if it failed in regard to the nation of Israel. Morris explains Paul's logic in the following words:

Paul begins by denying that God's purpose has failed. *God's word* here means all God's promises to Israel. It is not often used in this sense in the New Testament (being more commonly a way of referring to the gospel), but there can be no doubt as to the meaning here. Paul has earlier said that 'the promise' is by faith and that it is sure to all Abraham's seed, not only those 'of the law' but also those 'of the faith of Abraham' (4:16). He has something of the same thought here. *God's word* has not failed because those to whom that *word* was directed were not simply physical Israel.²

When Paul says that, "It is not as though the Word of God has *failed*," he uses the verb *εκπιπτω*, which means "to fall out of, to fall off, to fall from something, or to lose something." Godet describes the implications of this word in Romans 9:6 -- "The verb *εκπιπτειν*, *to fall from*, denotes the non-realization of the promise, its being brought to nothing by facts. And it must be confessed that the present rejection of Israel would be a giving of the lie to the divine election, if all the individuals composing the people of Israel really belonged to Israel, in the profound sense of the word. But that is precisely what is *not the case*, as the apostle declares in the second part of the verse."³

1 C. K. Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 168.

2 Leon Morris, The Epistle to the Romans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 352.

3 Frederic L. Godet, Commentary on Romans. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), 346-347.

In the second half of Romans 9:6 Paul provides the evidence for the truth of his assertion that the Word of God has not failed: “For (γὰρ) not all those of Israel are Israel.” This verse contains Paul’s first statement of the doctrine of the remnant as it applies to the apparent failure of God’s Word regarding the salvation of Israel. Mills describes the reasoning of the apostle Paul in this statement:

Because a number, no matter how great or small that number may be, of the people of Israel and their leaders have not accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah, does not nullify or abrogate the Word of God. The faithlessness of those who reject Jesus the Messiah does not mean that the Word of God has failed. In the history of Israel there has *never* been a time when the whole nation has believed God, His Word, His prophets or His promises; in fact, God’s faithful ones have *always* been a remnant.⁴

Paul is affirming that there has always been a *true* Israel within the nation of Israel as a whole. As Mills goes on to say, “There always has been a faithful remnant in Israel. To paraphrase verse 6 of Romans 9 it would read thus, ‘For not all who are of Israel are Israel; there is a true Israel *within* the nation Israel, namely, the remnant.’”⁵ This distinction is extremely important in light of the apparent failure of the Word of God regarding the nation of Israel.

The doctrine of the remnant is clearly a key component of Paul’s argument in this section of the book of Romans, so it is important to clearly define and understand this doctrine. Fruchtenbaum defines the doctrine of the remnant in the following words: “The doctrine of the remnant means that, within the Jewish nation as a whole, there are always some who believe and all those who believe among Israel comprise the Remnant of Israel. The remnant at any point of history may be large or small but there is never a time when it is non-existent. Only believers comprise the remnant, but not all believers are part of the remnant for the remnant is a Jewish remnant and is, therefore, comprised of Jewish believers. Furthermore, the remnant is always part of the nation as a whole and not detached from the nation as a separate entity. The remnant is distinct, but distinct within the nation.”⁶ Regarding the introduction of the concept of the remnant in Romans 9:6, Barrett comments:

Paul’s blunt negative answer to this question, which is so evident to him that he does not stop to state it, is supported by an analysis of the meaning of *Israel*. If the word Israel is understood in a mechanical sense it cannot be disputed that the majority of Israel have, to all appearance, set aside God’s word, which has accordingly (at least for the present) failed. But Israel is not a term like Ammon, Moab, Greece, or Rome. ‘Israel’ cannot be defined in terms of physical descent, or understood simply on the human side (v. 5); it is created not by blood and soil, but by the promise of God, and therefore exists within the limits of God’s freedom. If he were bound by physical descent, he would be unfree, and no longer God. But he is not so bound, as Scripture itself proves.⁷

Godet further states that, “*They who are of Israel* denote all the members of the nation at a given moment, as descendants of the preceding generation. By the first words: *are not Israel*, Paul signalizes among the nation taken *en masse*, a *true* Israel, that elect people, that *holy remnant*, which is constantly spoken of in the OT, and to which alone the decree of election refers, so that rejection may apply to the mass of *those who are of Israel*, without compromising the election of the *true Israel*.”⁸ This is a key point because the doctrine of the remnant guarantees that God’s promises to *Israel* will never fail, since they are intended for the elect remnant within the nation as a whole. Morris explains this idea:

‘Not all those who are of Israel, these are Israel.’ His compatriots were in error in holding that the promise of God applied to the whole of physical Israel. Paul is denying that it was ever intended to apply in this fashion. If descent from Abraham was what mattered, then the Ishmaelites and Edom were in the same position as Israel. But *Israel* was not ethnic Israel. Whatever

4 Sanford C. Mills, A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans. (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1968), 296.

5 Mills, 297.

6 Arnold B. Fruchtenbaum, Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology. (Tustin, California: Ariel Ministries, 1989), 601.

7 Barrett, 168-169.

8 Godet, 347.

might happen to ethnic Israel, the promise to *Israel* stood; the falling away of some, who were not true Israelites, had no bearing on the issue....This was clear in Old Testament days, with the emergence of the concept of the *remnant*; it had long been obvious that the nation as a whole was not responding to God's leading. It was a smaller group within the nation that was really God's people. It was stupid to think that, since the whole nation had not entered the blessing, the promise of God had failed. The promise had not been made to the whole nation and had never been intended to apply to the whole nation.⁹

The Absolute Sovereignty of God in Choosing "Some" (9:7-26)

Moving on to the next section, in Romans 9:7-8 Paul goes on to provide Scriptural proof for his claim that not all of the physical descendants of Abraham are considered to be *children of promise*. "What the apostle is saying in verse 7 is that the rightful heir, the child whom God will recognize as the one who will inherit the blessings that He promised, is Isaac and not Ishmael....It was not up to Abraham to choose the son who would be the recipient of God's blessings. Man cannot and does not dictate to God. Our God is a sovereign God who chooses upon whom He will bestow His blessings."¹⁰ Not all of Abraham's seed are true descendants from the perspective of God's eternal purpose and sovereign election. Morris emphasizes this aspect of God's free choice in determining who will inherit the blessings He promised to Abraham:

Paul is showing that more than physical descent from Abraham is required if one would inherit the promises. Every Jew must agree with this, else he would be admitting Ishmael and the sons of Keturah to the same status as the Jew. It is possible to have impeccable outward descent from Abraham and yet not to belong to Abraham's children. On the contrary Paul can cite Genesis 21:12 to show that it is only the descendants through Isaac that constitute the seed (here used of the true successors of Abraham). It would perhaps be true to say that the Jews would have regarded this as meaning that God was bound, bound to Isaac's descendants, whereas Paul understood it to signify that God is free, free to choose Isaac and reject Esau.¹¹

This is also a key point which emphasizes the complete freedom of God. God is not constrained by lines of physical lineage, because Abraham's seed are "not all children." In Romans 9:8 Paul goes on to explain what he means by *children*: not children of flesh, but the children of promise are reckoned (λογίζομαι) the true seed. "They are regarded as Abraham's offspring. It is only the fact that God so reckons them that makes them significant. Physical descent from Abraham is not enough."¹² Furthermore, in the subsequent verses of chapter nine Paul continues to emphasize the sovereign, free choice of God in bestowing His blessings on whomever He desires.

Paul spoke of differences in Israel, and in verse 7 of differences in Abraham's descendants; now he sees differences in Isaac's posterity. Nothing human binds God. A case could be made for justifying the choice of Isaac and not Ishmael, for Isaac was the son of Abraham's wife, Ishmael the son of a slave girl. But Jacob and Esau had the same father and mother and were of the same pregnancy....The case of Ishmael had shown that birth from Abraham does not ensure acceptance; now that of Esau shows that works do not.¹³

In Romans 9:11 Paul stresses that it is the "according-to-election purpose of God" that will stand -- not based on human effort but centered solely in Him who calls. In Romans 9:16 Paul leaves no room for doubt when he says, "So then none of this depends on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on the One having mercy, that is, God." After presenting additional Scriptural evidence for this, Paul concludes, "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (Romans 9:18). The entire illustration of the Potter and the clay (9:19-24) emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God, even in the choosing of some of the Gentiles as "vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand for glory" (9:23-26).

9 Morris, 352-353.

10 Mills, 298-299.

11 Morris, 353.

12 Morris, 354.

13 Morris, 355.

Only the Remnant Will Be Saved (9:27)

Romans 9:27 is an important point in Paul's line of reasoning regarding the salvation of Israel because he quotes an Old Testament passage that connects salvation directly to the remnant: "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved.'" Morris comments:

From the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God Paul turns to passages which speak of the exclusion of all but a remnant of Israel. Most of the Jews of the day did not believe in Christ, and they might well feel that this of itself showed that Paul must be wrong. 'If Jesus were the Christ, would not the people of God accept him?' would have been their reasoning. So Paul goes on to show them from their own Scriptures that in other days this had been much the situation. The prophets speak of a remnant only as being saved, and that necessarily means that most of the Jews to whom the message was directed had failed to respond. The situation in Paul's day was typical rather than novel.¹⁴

Godet remarks that, "The article *το*, *the*, before the word remnant, characterizes this remnant as a thing known; and indeed one of the most frequent notions of the Book of Isaiah is that of the holy remnant, which survives all the chastisements of Israel, and which coming forth purified from the crucible becomes each time the germ of a better future....In the context, both of Isaiah and of the apostle, there is a contrast between the innumerable multitude which as it seemed ought to form Jehovah's people and which perishes, and the poor remnant which alone remains to enjoy the salvation."¹⁵ Morris concurs when he states that, "'As numerous as the sand by the seashore' is a proverbial expression for a very large number; in the Old Testament it is usually employed, as here, for the number of the Israelites. But a large number of Israelites does not mean that the saved will be correspondingly numerous: only the remnant will be saved. The promise of God never meant that all, or even most, Israelites would be saved. The doctrine of the remnant is important."¹⁶ Regarding Paul's use of the quote from Isaiah 10:22, Mills makes the following significant points:

This passage in Isaiah (10:22) is part of a section (10:20-23) that constitutes the promise of the restoration of Israel. However, Isaiah 10:20-23 from the Septuagint version is considerably shorter than the Hebrew, and is, therefore, incomplete. The phrase 'in that day' in Isaiah 10:20 is prophetic. The Rabbis of old claimed that this phrase in Isaiah, and the phrase 'in that time' in Jeremiah 50:20, speak of the time when the Messiah will come. Since 'in that day' is a phrase in Isaiah 10:20, it is clear that Romans 9:27 presents the truth that only a remnant in Israel will return to God and accept God's promised Messiah. This return of the remnant will occur at the end of the Tribulation when the nations of the world will muster their forces in the vain attempt to destroy Israel from the face of the earth (Joel 3; Zechariah 12:2-11). This stupendous event is the great moment in prophecy when Israel reaches her extremity and turns to God and accepts the Messiah whom they have pierced and rejected in ignorance (Zechariah 12:9, 10; Acts 3:17). But it is only a remnant that God pardons (Jeremiah 50:20). This saving of the remnant is what Paul states in verse 27.¹⁷

Paul's clear intention is to prove that the ultimate, eschatological salvation of Israel will be according to God's sovereign choice of the elect remnant. This fact will be very important when considering the interpretation of Paul's statement in Romans 11:26a that "All Israel will be saved." Paul is making the connection between the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and those chosen few who will actually experience the promised blessings by faith.

The Failure of National Israel (9:28-10:16)

In the next section, Paul gives the reason why the multitude will be excluded. In Romans 9:28-10:3 the apostle explains Israel's mistake: they pursued righteousness by their own self-effort rather than by faith. They

14 Morris, 371.

15 Godet, 366.

16 Morris, 371.

17 Mills, 325-326.

stumbled over the *stumbling stone* by seeking to establish their own works-based righteousness rather than seeking righteousness in the way He established. Subsequently, in Romans 10:4-15, Paul makes clear God's prescribed way to obtain righteousness. True righteousness is not based on human obedience to a set of rules -- true righteousness is based solely on faith (10:6). In this section, Paul cites numerous Scriptures which prove that this is the case, and he carefully outlines the sequence of steps to salvation by faith alone.

Israel's problem is introduced in 10:16 with a strong adversative expression: ' Ἀλλ' οὐ πάντες ("BUT NOT ALL obeyed the gospel"). Godet describes Israel's situation by saying, "Thus Israel, blinded by the privileges bestowed on them, sought only one thing: to preserve their monopoly, and for this end to perpetuate their law (ver. 4). They have hardened themselves, consequently, against the two essential features which constituted the Messianic dispensation, a free salvation (vv. 5-11) and a salvation offered to all by universal preaching (vv. 12-17)."¹⁸ He goes on to explain Israel's response to God's way of salvation that was freely offered to all by faith:

The word *ἀλλὰ*, *but*, contrasts strongly what has been produced (by the fact of Jewish unbelief) with what should have been the result, faith and the salvation of Israel first of all. *πάντες*, *all*, denotes the totality of those who hear the word; and the exception indicated by the *οὐ πάντες*, *not all*, applies in the context to the mass of the Jewish people who have formed an exception to the general faith which the gospel was finding in the world. The term: *have not obeyed*, reminds us of that in ver. 3: *have not submitted themselves*. There is disobedience in not accepting what God offers... Isaiah in this passage proclaims the unbelief of the people of Israel in regard to the Messiah, giving a description of His entire appearance in His state of humiliation and pain. He well knew that such a Messiah would not answer to the ambitious views of the people, and would be rejected by them.¹⁹

In order to avoid confusion, it is important to understand what Paul did *not* say. He did not say, "All Israel did not obey" — rather he said, "Not all obeyed," which affirms that some did obey, namely the remnant.

God Has Always Worked With The Remnant (10:17-11:6)

In the subsequent section (Romans 10:17-11:6), Paul shows that Israel is without excuse, since they did indeed have an opportunity both to *hear* and to *know* of God's salvation by faith. But "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (11:2). The ones foreknown by God are clearly linked to the elect remnant in this section of the book. Specifically, Romans 11:5-6 states, "In the same way (as in the story about Elijah), therefore, in the present time a remnant has come into being according to the election of grace. But if by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." Godet remarks that, "This verse applies the case of the seven thousand to present circumstances. The *remnant*, of whom the apostle speaks, evidently denotes the small portion of the Jewish people who in Jesus have recognized the Messiah. The term *λειμμα*, *remnant*, is related to the preceding verb *κατέλιπον*, *I have reserved to myself, kept*."²⁰ Barrett also observes that, "It is impossible to bring out in the English the fact that the Greek word for *remnant* (*λειμμα*) is cognate with the verb *to leave* (v. 4, *κατέλιπον*); in the translation, the word *such* is introduced in order to make the connection. The body of Jewish Christians, exceptions to the general unbelief of their race, form a group analogous with the 7000 who refused to worship Baal."²¹ Mills provides additional comments on the parallel between the remnant in Elijah's day and in Paul's:

Just as God had a faithful remnant in Elijah's time, God also had a faithful remnant in Paul's time, and we have a faithful remnant out of Israel today. God has always had a faithful remnant of true followers in Israel. There never was a time during this present dispensation, or in any other dispensation, that God has not had a faithful remnant in Israel.... This fruit, this remnant, this handful of faithful souls out of the great host of the twelve tribes, are the saved ones 'according to the election of

18 Godet, 390

19 Godet, 387.

20 Godet, 393.

21 Barrett, 193.

grace.’ ...It was by the grace of God that the remnant of Israel was reserved. What the apostle is implying in verse 6 is that in spite of Israel’s national disobedience, stubbornness, and sinfulness, resulting in the rejection of the Messiah, God had and still has a remnant out of this nation that He elects for Himself and by Himself.²²

The important truth here is that the remnant of Israel exists solely because of God’s selection or choosing of these individuals, and God’s election is based completely upon His sovereign grace. Barrett elaborates on this concept in the following words:

[Paul is] emphasizing his primary contention, that God’s dealings with men are based not upon works but upon grace. The remnant was based on a gracious act of election (literally, according to election of grace, *κατ εκλογην χαριτος*). The existence of a remnant - a nation within a nation - can be due only to an act of choice (*εκλεγεσθαι*), and the choice (*εκλογη*) must therefore have sprung from God’s freedom, or grace. Thus *remnant* is a word that spells grace, as the distinction between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, spells mercy. In itself the remnant is not better than the rest of Israel, any more than Isaac was better than Ishmael, or Jacob than Esau; but it consists of the ‘vessels of mercy’ (9:25), whom God chose as the vehicles of his glory.²³

Mills provides an excellent summary statement that outlines the facts as Paul has presented them thus far in Romans 11:1-6 -- “The first six verses of chapter 11 add up to the conclusion that God is not through with the Jews; that He has not cast them off as a nation; that there is still a faithful remnant in Israel and that there always has been and will continue to be; that this remnant has been reserved by God in this age; that there will be a remnant reserved by God through the Great Tribulation for the Millennial Kingdom (Jeremiah 50:20); that this remnant has been reserved by the pure grace of God; and, lastly, that this salvation is a gift of God by His grace, and He bestows this gift through His own choosing on whomsoever He wills.”²⁴

God’s Electing Purpose: Some are Chosen, Some are Hardened (11:7-24)

As he begins this new section in Romans 11:7 Paul asks, “What then?” as he introduces the logical conclusion from the previous statements. He says, “What Israel is seeking it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened.” This verse explains the operation of God’s electing purpose: some were *chosen* and the rest were *hardened*. Paul goes on in 11:8-10 to cite Scriptural testimony for this hardening, and he identifies the one who hardens as God Himself. This comes as no surprise in view of Paul’s statement in 9:18 that God has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. As Paul describes the failure of Israel in Romans 11:11-12, he opens the door to a future hope for their salvation: there *will be* a fullness or future fulfillment for Israel.

For the present, however, Paul’s hope was to save some of his kinsmen (11:13-14). Cranfield comments that, “While Paul may indeed have expected his Gentile mission to disturb the Jewish nation as a whole, he clearly expects it to result in the conversion of only some individuals out of it....Such conversions of individual Jews, though few in number, are a precious foretoken of the salvation referred to in v. 26.”²⁵ The chosen remnant of Israel in Paul’s day were the ones that he desired to reach with the gospel, because he knew that some would believe in their Messiah at that time. It is not as if Paul thought his efforts in his day would usher in the final eschatological salvation of Israel. Morris effectively clarifies Paul’s expectations for his own ministry:

My own people is more literally ‘my own flesh’, a very unusual way of referring to Israel (though cf. 1 Cor. 10:18) but one that brings out Paul’s sense of identification with his own nation. With all of his deep conviction that the Jews of his day had

22 Mills, 360, 361.

23 Barrett, 194.

24 Mills, 362.

25 C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 561.

for the most part gone hopelessly astray, Paul never forgets that he, too, is an Israelite. His deep longing is that he might save *some* of them. *Save* is the general term for the deliverance Christ brings. It is generally used in the passive; when it occurs in the active God is usually the subject (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:21; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5), and of course this is implied when the passive is used. Paul makes no exaggerated claims for himself. His aim is to save *some of them*. He looks for ‘all Israel’ to be saved ultimately (v. 26), but he is not claiming, as some exegetes have suggested, that he will initiate the process that brings about the End. Some take it as axiomatic that Paul expected the End during his own lifetime and that his own labors would usher in the last happenings. But there is evidence that Paul expected that he would die in due course (1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14), and the present passage shows that he thought of his own work as making no more than a modest contribution. As Harrison puts it, ‘The word *some* is important. It is a clear indication that he does not expect his efforts to bring about the eschatological turning of the nation to the crucified, risen Son of God, when all Israel will be saved (cf. v. 26). This belongs to the indefinite future.’²⁶

The end of this section (Romans 11:15-24) contains several allusions to the eschatological perspective on Israel’s salvation that Paul envisioned for his people in the future. The illustration of the wild olive branches grafted in with the cultivated olive branches teaches many truths, but Paul certainly incorporates hints of the future salvation of Israel: “What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (11:15) “And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again...How much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?”

The Limits of Israel’s National Hardness (11:25)

In Romans 11:25 Paul seems to put aside his formal style of discourse or diatribe, and he is overtaken by a revelation from God for the Gentiles to whom he had been called. Sanday & Headlam describe this transition in the following words:

Now he seems to see all the mystery of the Divine purpose unfolded before him, and he breaks away from the restrained and formal method of argument he has hitherto imposed upon himself. Just as when treating of the Resurrection, his argument passes into revelation, ‘Behold, I tell you a mystery’ (1 Cor. 15:51); so here he declares not merely as the result of his argument, but as an authoritative revelation, the mystery of the Divine purpose.²⁷

Paul shares this revelation for a specific purpose: so that Gentile believers will not be wise in their own estimation, or so that they will not be puffed up with pride over their position before God as contrasted with the present status of the nation of Israel. The mystery that Paul reveals is, “That a hardness has happened in part to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and so all Israel will be saved.” Paul was confident that an understanding of this truth would keep the Gentile believers from the sin of boasting over Israel. Each part of Paul’s mystery will now be examined to determine the implications for the salvation of Israel.

The middle portion of Romans 11:25 could be translated, “That a hardness in part to Israel has happened.” The first point of interest is to determine how the phrase *in part* (ἀπο μέρος) is to be rendered. Dunn states that,

As in its other occurrences in Paul ἀπο μέρος should be taken adverbially, that is, with πῶ ρωσις rather than Ἰσραηλ – so ‘partial hardening or blindness’ rather than ‘part of Israel.’ It is not unimportant that Paul still retains a concept of Israel as a unified whole: the people suffering partial blindness, rather than only part of the people suffering blindness...The perfect tense denotes the continuing state which has afflicted Israel since the new age was brought in by Christ.²⁸

The first part of Dunn's statement is confusing because an adverbial phrase will always modify the verb, whereas Dunn has it modifying the noun πῶ ρωσις (rather than the verb γέγονεν). While it may be true that

26 Morris, 409-410.

27 William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895), 333-334.

28 James D. G. Dunn, Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 28 - Romans 9-16. (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 679.

Paul “retains a concept of Israel as a unified whole,” this cannot be demonstrated by an incorrect assignment of the adverbial phrase. Cranfield assigns the phrase correctly when he states that, “The phrase ἀπό μέρους is adverbial, and modifies γέγονεν; it refers to the fact that not all Jews were hardened (cf. vv. 5, 7, 17).”²⁹ Morris goes so far as to say, “That about which Paul does not want his readers ignorant is that Israel has experienced a hardening in part. Most [scholars] agree that it is not partial hardening but part of Israel that is meant.”³⁰ Hodge confirms this interpretation: “Blindness *in part* [is] partial blindness; *partial* as to its extent and continuance, because not all the Jews were thus blinded, nor was the nation to remain blind forever. The words ἀπό μέρους are not to be connected with πῶς ῥωσίδς, nor with τὸ Ἰσραηλ; but with γέγονεν. Blindness has partially happened to Israel. The reference, however, is not to the degree, but to the continuance of this blindness.”³¹ Lenski follows suit by saying, “*In part* refers to numbers; it is the same *meiosis* as that used in v. 17: *some* of the branches were broken off, and it purposely avoids saying how great the part is.”³² Godet concurs when he asserts, “*in part*, ἀπό μέρους is explained, as it seems to me, by the expression of ver. 7: ‘the rest were hardened,’ and by the term *some*, ver. 17. Hence it follows that we must here give the word *in part* a numerical sense. Judgment has not fallen on the totality of Israel, but on a part only; such is also the meaning to which we are led by the antithesis of the *all Israel* of ver. 26.”³³ And finally, Hendriksen agrees when he declares,

In verse 25 the apostle states that the hardening has come upon part of Israel...The divine hardening (in punishment for human hardening) affects part of the people in any period of history...With respect to Israel this partial hardening began already during the days of the old dispensation (Rom. 9:27; 10:16, 21; 11:13), was taking place in Paul’s own day, and will continue until the close of the new dispensation...It is obvious that if, in every age, some Israelites are hardened, it must also be true that in every age some are saved.³⁴

The context of this passage also confirms that the hardening referred to only part of the individuals who compose the nation of Israel. “This truth was dealt with in verses 5, 7, 17, of this chapter. Only the *remnant*, the elect of Israel, is being saved now. Only *some* branches, not *all*, were broken off the good olive tree. This condition prevails in Israel today. The hardening process is affecting only part of the nation.”³⁵ The implication of Romans 11:1-10 is that only some of the people were hardened as evidenced by the fact that individual Jews were indeed being justified by faith in their Messiah, such as the apostle Paul who was “an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (11:1).

The final phrase of Romans 11:25 could be translated, “Until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.” Regarding the relationship of this phrase to the previous clause, Hendriksen comments, “It is also a fact, as the apostle states here in verse 25, that a definite time-span has been assigned to this hardening. For the people as a whole it will last ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.’”³⁶ Dunn states that, “ἄχρι οὗ certainly suggests a temporal sequence (‘until the time when’), implying that once the full number of the Gentiles has come in, Israel’s blindness will cease...The thought once again is characteristically apocalyptic, expressive of the certainty that events on earth are following a schedule predetermined by God (e.g., Dan. 11:36).”³⁷ Hodge also declares that, “*Until* (ἄχρι οὗ) marks the *terminus ad quem*. This blindness of Israel is to continue until something else happened. There were to be, and have been numerous conversions to Christianity from among the Jews, in every age since the advent; but their national conversion is not to occur until the heathen are

29 Cranfield, 575.

30 Morris, 420.

31 Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1886), 373.

32 R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1936), 720.

33 Godet, 410.

34 William Hendriksen, Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 378, 379.

35 Mills, 383-384.

36 Hendriksen, 378.

37 Dunn, 680.

converted.”³⁸ These expositors affirm that Paul’s use of *until* was for the purpose of marking a future point in the eschatological program of God, at which time the salvation of God’s chosen people will be accomplished. Mills relates this ultimate fulfillment of the salvation of Israel to other Scriptures which refer to that future event:

Israel will not be saved until they go through ‘the time of Jacob’s trouble’ (Jeremiah 30:7). . . . Paul’s statement in Romans 11:25 that a ‘hardening in part hath befallen Israel’ is a hardening which will prevail until ‘they shall look unto me whom they have pierced’ (Zechariah 12:10), and say, ‘Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord’ (Matthew 23:39; Psalm 118:26). These passages from Zechariah and Matthew refer to Israel’s conversion on a national scale.³⁹

As was mentioned previously, Israel’s national salvation will not occur “until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in” (11:25), and it is important to establish the correct interpretation of the phrase *fullness of the Gentiles*. Commentators are almost unanimous in their opinion that this phrase is a numerical reference. For example, Newman and Nida state:

Paul’s belief reflects the thought of Jewish apocalyptic, which assumed that God had not only determined the exact time in which men would be saved but also had determined exactly how many persons would be saved. The *complete number* should not be translated in such a way as to suggest ‘all.’ It is rather ‘the number that should be,’ ‘the determined number,’ or ‘the number determined by God.’⁴⁰

Hendriksen also declares, “By *fullness* the apostle means *full number*. What Paul is saying, then, here in verse 25 is that Israel’s partial hardening -- the hardening of part of the people of Israel -- will last until the full number of elect Gentiles has been gathered into God’s fold.”⁴¹ Lenski agrees when he says that, “The fullness of the Gentiles [is] the number of Gentile believers, all the sheep ‘not of this fold,’ which Jesus will also bring (John 10:16). Here the word refers to number.”⁴² And Morris states, “This is a temporary hardening, taking place while God’s purpose is worked out among the Gentiles or, as Paul puts it, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. The word the NIV renders *full number* is that rendered *fullness* in verse 12. The NIV may well be right in seeing a reference to number. In that case a certain number of Gentiles are to be saved, and God is waiting until that number has been reached before taking action for Israel.”⁴³ The *fullness of the Gentiles*, then, is related to the number of believers which God is calling from among the nations other than Israel. This interpretation does not deny the fact that God is still calling both Jews and Gentiles into the Church during this present dispensation, or that God also counts the elect Jews who are being saved. It actually implies that the full number of Jewish believers will have entered the Church by that point as well. This verse simply states that God uses the non-Jewish believers as a reference point and that when the full number of elect Gentiles has come in, He will resume His work with national Israel which will result in their “fullness” (cf. 11:12). Fruchtenbaum provides an excellent summary statement on the meaning of this phrase:

The Greek word translated as fullness means ‘a full number’ or ‘a complete number.’ In other words, God has a set number of Gentiles that He has destined to come into the place of blessing, the Olive Tree of verses 16-24. After the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, after that set number is reached, then all Israel will be saved. According to Acts 15:14, one of the purposes of the Church Age is to call out from among the Gentiles a people for His name. This calling out from among the Gentiles will continue until the fullness, that set number of Gentiles, is reached. At that time, the Church will be complete and will be removed at the Rapture. Then God will deal with Israel as a nation again, rather than just with Jewish individuals. This national dealing will lead to all Israel being saved (v. 26a).⁴⁴

38 Hodge, 373.

39 Mills, 385.

40 Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973), 226.

41 Hendriksen, 378.

42 Lenski, 720.

43 Morris, 420.

44 Fruchtenbaum, 785.

The Ultimate Salvation of National Israel (11:26a)

Romans 11:26a declares that at that time, “All Israel will be saved.” The eschatological nature of this statement is explained by Hodge:

The apostle [predicts] a great and general conversion of the Jewish people, which should take place when the fullness of the Gentiles had been brought in, and that then, and not until then, those prophecies should be fully accomplished which speak of the salvation of Israel.... This idea is presented in various forms; and practical lessons are deduced from it in such a way as to show that he contemplated something more than merely the silent addition of a few Israelites to the church during successive ages. It is evident that Paul meant to say, that the Jews were to be restored in the same way in which they were then rejected.⁴⁵

The nation of Israel *as a whole*, being composed of every Israelite without exception, has been set aside by God during the present dispensation. He is currently working only with the few members of the believing remnant of Israel who are entering the Church. Regarding the nation as a whole Godet comments that, “This is the people which should have introduced all the other peoples into [the kingdom]; and for their punishment the opposite is what will take place, as Jesus had declared: ‘The first shall be last.’... Πας Ισραηλ, *all Israel*, evidently signifies Israel taken in its entirety. It seems, it is true, that the Greek expression in this sense is not correct, and that it should be Ισραηλ ολος. But the term πας, *all* (every), denotes here, as it often does, every element of which the totality of the object is composed.”⁴⁶ Does this mean that every Israelite who has ever lived will ultimately be saved? Fruchtenbaum clarifies the meaning of *all Israel* by saying, “When Paul stated *all Israel*, he meant all Jews living at that time, not all Jews of all time.... The Bible speaks of *all Israel*, the whole congregation of Israel, coming out of Egypt at the Exodus. Of course, not all Jews who ever lived came out of Egypt, but every Jew who lived at that time did come out of Egypt. This is the same way verse 26a should be interpreted. It means that every Jew living at the time will be saved.”⁴⁷

At that future time, God will again work with every individual member of the nation of Israel. But how is it possible for God to bring every living member of the nation to salvation in Christ without violating His established practice of receiving only the believing remnant, as was evident throughout Romans 9-11? Does not Romans 9:27 plainly state that, “Only the remnant will be saved?” Since this is clearly the case, what can be inferred is that no unbelieving Israelite will survive the ‘time of Jacob’s trouble,’ the time of the Great Tribulation -- that the entire nation of Israel at the Second Coming of Christ will be composed of believing Israelites who are looking for the soon return of their Messiah. In this regard, Newell identifies the *all Israel* of Romans 11:26a as follows:

This is the real, elect, spared nation of the future – ‘those written unto life’ (Dan. 12:1; Isa. 4:3). The mystery comprehends this fact, for the salvation of national Israel was impossible except on purely grace lines. God had given them the Law that was necessary to reveal sin. But they utterly failed. Now comes in the fullness of the Gentiles -- by grace; and so, after that, and on the same grace line as were the Gentiles, all Israel shall be saved! Most of that earthly nation will perish under Divine judgments and the Antichrist; but the Remnant will be ‘accounted as a generation.’⁴⁸

Fruchtenbaum remarks that, “This is not a contradiction if it is understood in the context of Israel’s national salvation. As Zechariah 13:8-9 has pointed out, two-thirds of the Jewish population will be destroyed in the persecutions of the Tribulation. This will include the entire non-remnant so that only the remnant will survive, the *escaped* of Isaiah 4:2; 10:20; 37:31-32; Joel 2:32; and Obadiah 17.”⁴⁹ This is a plausible explanation for

45 Hodge, 371, 372.

46 Godet, 410, 411.

47 Fruchtenbaum, 785.

48 William R. Newell, Romans Verse by Verse. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1938), 432-433.

49 Fruchtenbaum, 789.

how the Lord can work only with the believing remnant and yet save every living individual from the nation of Israel in those last days.

Conclusion

In examining Romans 9-11, the present study has shown that God's Word has not failed regarding Israel, because God's promises were always intended to apply only to the believing remnant within the nation (9:6). This remnant exists solely as a result of God's sovereign choice of some individuals within the nation as a whole. God is not bound by anything in His creatures, including blood lines and human works. Even the Old Testament Scriptures declared that only the elect remnant will be saved (9:27). In the last days, after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, there will be some Israelites who were previously hardened and "broken off from the olive tree" who will be *unhardened* and "grafted back into their own tree." They will exercise faith in their Messiah whom they had previously rejected. The phrase "all Israel will be saved" indicates that the entire population of Israel left alive during those final days will consist of believing Jews who also make up the remnant. At that time, the nation and the elect remnant will finally coincide.