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THE OLD TESTAMENT IN ROMANS 9-11

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- I. The problem of the Old Testament in Romans 9-11 is bound up with the whole purpose of the letter itself. It is my contention that these chapters are an integral part of the letter, and, in spite of the fact that there are natural breaks at each end of the section, that it cannot be removed without damaging it. I see chapters 9-11 as having a direct relationship to 1-4, and indeed, it might almost be argued that chapters 5-8 are more of an interpolation than 9-11. However, the point is that these are a part of the purpose of the letter, and that this purpose is bound up with Paul's own situation. Romans is not a great treatise on systematic theology but a missionary document. It arises directly out of Paul's missionary experience, and is written, we can be sure, during the part of his career when, as we know from Acts, it was consistently his practice to go to the synagogue first and only later to the Gentiles. So the rubric that stands over *all* of Romans is: 'to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles'. This is crucial. The treatment of the 'Jewish problem' in Romans is not incidental; it is central to the whole purpose of his writing, and comes out even in chapters 12-15 when he deals with the ethical problems created by the fact that there are Jewish-Christians. However, when this problem comes to the forefront, as it does in chapters 2-4 and 9-11, and in Galatians, it is natural for Paul to turn to the Old Testament to investigate it for the light which it might shed on a solution.
- II. In chapters 9-11 we find twenty-eight Old Testament quotations, and a number of allusions, so that in these three chapters we have thirty per cent of the Pauline quotations from the Old Testament. These are distributed as follows: fifteen from Isaiah, eleven from the Pentateuch, four from the Psalms, four from other prophecies besides Isaiah, three from the historical books, and one from the Writings. Of the explicit quotations eight agree with the LXX (either together with or against the Massoretic Text) plus six more which vary only in word order; one agrees with the Hebrew against the LXX (from Job, a very strange case). That is, fifteen agree substantially either with the LXX or the Massoretic Text, but thirteen vary from either of these two sources, and these comprise the most interesting group, for there is no clear evidence that Paul follows any given text tradition. Rather he selects the variation which he might have found in a text unknown to us, or else he invents a variant reading to suit the context. We shall look at this point again.
- III. We have outlined the basic materials with which Paul works from the Old Testament. What is his method? First we should note his introductory formulae. There are five kinds. 'As it is written . . .' or the like (in 9: 13, 33; 10: 5; 11: 8, 26f). 'Scripture says . . .' (in 9: 17; 10: 11; 11: 2). 'So and so says . . .', Isaiah, Hosea etc. (in

9: 25f, 27f, 29; 10: 5, 16, 19, 20; 11: 9f). This is unusual in Paul's writings, it appears elsewhere only three times. 'God says . . .' or the next best thing (in 11: 4; 9: 15, and 10: 21 almost). Other miscellaneous ones.

In each case the quotation is given great authority by virtue of his introduction and the message it conveys. Then we may note that Paul often quotes verses in isolation as his argument proceeds, or else he merges quotations together or strings them into a chain quotation. We find merged quotations in 9: 25f (=Hosea 2: 23+1: 10); in 9: 33 (=Isaiah 8: 14+28: 16); in 11: 8 (=Isaiah 29: 10+Deuteronomy 29: 4); in 11: 26f (=Isaiah 59: 20+27: 9); and in 11: 34f (=Isaiah 40: 13+Job 41: 11). In each case there is a special key-word or idea which accounts for his doing this: thus in the first case it is *laos*, 'people', in the second it is *lithos*, 'stone', in the third it is *ophthalmous*, 'seeing' (or really, here, 'unseeing'), in the fourth it is the idea of deliverance from sin which is expressed similarly in the Hebrew as the 'sin of Jacob', and in the last it is the idea of the inscrutability of God.

'Chain quotations' are even more numerous, so we note: 9: 12-15 where *laos* is again the key-word; 10: 5-8, 11-13 where *pas*, 'everyone', could be a key-word; 10: 19-21 where the contrast Gentiles/Israel is central; and 11: 8-10 where 'seeing' is again the word. This latter method is a device of the Rabbis in which they often specifically cited Old Testament texts from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, in that order. Paul sometimes does this, e.g. in 11: 8-10, but his approach is looser and he never specifically says that he is doing so.

There is one other aspect of method that must be noted, a type of interpretation called *Midrash Peshar* which is found clearly in the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly in the Commentary on Habbakuk and the Commentary on Nahum, probably also in John and Matthew, and here in Paul. The essence of this method is a kind of selective interpretation. Thus often, as we noted, Paul diverges sharply from either the Greek or the Hebrew Old Testament text with which he was familiar, and creates an *ad hoc* rendering of his own, or else takes over another non-canonical text form, such as an Aramaic targum—and then he bases his exegesis on this. For example, in 10: 11 he adds *pas*, 'everyone', to the Old Testament text, whereas in 9: 33, citing the same verse, he does not. He changed the citation to fit his purpose which demanded the sense 'everyone'. Another example would be 11: 26ff where he follows the LXX instead of the Massoretic Text because it agrees with his purpose, although it is clearly an inferior text. Then again, he changes person and number, as in 10: 19, where he adds 'you' and changes 'them' to 'you', in order to fit the argument. The method here is to make the quotation subordinate to the purpose, or, better perhaps, to decide what the Old Testament is saying, and then to select the text and alter it appropriately. (In this respect it is somewhat similar to the custom prevalent in preaching to-day in which the translation which best

suits the point to be made is chosen. The difference is that Paul, we may assume, knew what was the *best* text, since he knew Hebrew, and where he diverges from this he has some 'ulterior' motive.)

- IV. As far as the technical aspects are concerned, little more than the above need be said on the purpose, materials, and methods of Paul's use of the Old Testament quotations. Yet it is incomplete in that it has not yet helped us to see where Paul arrives after he has gone through all this. We shall examine briefly the way he turns and shapes his argument in 9-11. It should be noted at this point that the summary given in F. F. Bruce's commentary on *Romans* is very helpful, as well as being concise and accurate.*
- V. Often it is stated that the argument in Romans 9-11 has no unifying factor, and that Paul deals in turn with predestination (9), freewill (10), and universalism (11), without ever connecting them. However, I believe that there is rather more unity in these chapters than this suggests—a unity that is to be discerned in the fact that it arises out of his missionary task. Thus, in grappling with the question of the apparent rejection of Jesus by the Jews, Paul first asserts the universality of the Gospel (in 9), then sets out the argument for the obligation to preach this gospel to all nations, and then, in chapter 11, he tries to deal with the problems which have arisen as a result of this preaching to the Gentiles and what he understands to be God's solution. It is shot through with concern for missions. I would support this interpretation by reference to what is clearly a conclusion to his argument in these three chapters in 11: 28-32, where it is clear that questions of election and retribution play little part. The whole emphasis is on God's gospel, His grace, His calling, and His mercy.
- VI. In 9: 6 there stands out as almost a title to the whole 'not all of the children of the Patriarch Israel are really Israel'. His first Old Testament quotation (in 9: 7) substantiates this theme through the illustration of the choice of Isaac by God. This was connected with a promise (quoted in 9: 9 with some changes) to Sarah, and therefore only children of that promise are seed. In this case there was a selection between what was promised and what was not promised, and there follows in 9: 12, 13 a chain quotation from the Law and the Prophets on the idea that God's choice was selective, between older and younger, between Jacob and Esau. But this last is substantiated from Malachi, where the concern is a national one, involving Judah and Edom, not the two persons. In any case, Paul has established that God discriminates, but this discrimination is a mark of God's freedom, and this is the principle with which Paul is really concerned. In 9: 15 his quotation is aimed to show that God is free, and can deal with whom He pleases (this is an exact quotation from the Septuagint of Exodus 33: 19). Thus the principle is established not so much that God's choice is selective, but that God is free to go beyond the normal

or doctrinaire orders of priority. This is the real point of the section. This purpose is confirmed by 9: 17 with the quotation about God's name being spread through all the earth; and thus we reach a preliminary conclusion in 9: 18: He shows mercy on whom He wills.

VII. His next quotation in 9: 25, 26 is a variant quotation which involves quite a re-application of the original sense. In Hosea the verse spoke originally of a coming unity between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms—both still a part of God's people—but Paul re-applies this Northern Kingdom reference to Gentiles as partaking of the designation 'my people'. This is followed in 9: 27f by a quote to show that God's mercy will still rest upon Israel in spite of their present hardness (a use conforming closely to the original sense), and then in 9: 29 by a quotation of which the implication is that Israel will *not* be cut off and destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. 9: 33 is a good example of a merged quotation; it originally applied to God, here to Jesus. The way Paul uses it, it becomes a mixed metaphor, the same stone both trips and builds up. 10: 5-8 is difficult both in the way the writer alters the quotations (especially verse 5), and the way he historicizes them by applying what is not a prophecy to the historical Jesus. But in 10: 11-13 comes an important conclusion to the first half of his argument (and it should be emphasized that the argument is divided into two and not according to the three chapters): 'everyone who believes (adding *pas*) will not be ashamed and will be saved'. By emphasizing universality in this first half, by showing that the Old Testament has looked forward to such events, he makes this tremendous assertion on which the whole of his missionary preaching is based: 'there is no distinction between a Jew and a Gentile'. This is the *theoretical* result of his argument to this point.

VIII. He follows on from 10: 14 to the end of 11 with the *practical* result, which is to preach the Gospel to everyone. The rest of 10, with its many quotations, reinforces this from the Old Testament. There are many changes in wording and context from the originals, the most notorious being 10: 20, 21 where he splits what applied to one group into two pieces and applies one half to Jews and one to Gentiles. The key quotation in this part is 10: 19, 'I will provoke you', which he picks up again at 11: 12. Between these two points he affirms strongly that Jews will not be let go, an assertion proved by Old Testament quotations. God will save some, and even though the result of his own preaching is the hardness of many Jews who hear and do not respond, still he develops the idea that, because the Gentiles believe, the Jews will be provoked into belief out of jealousy for the Gentiles receiving the good news of God. He sees much hope in these promises of God, and, in my opinion, he expects that Jews will be turned to belief in great numbers because Gentiles are believing in God through Jesus Christ. (Paul seems to expect this in his own lifetime.) Thus he can affirm at the close, in 11: 26, 27, that 'all

Israel shall be saved' (by which he means not the sum of all individual Jews, but in some sense the godly Jews; i.e. there is a distinction between Jew and Israel in the New Testament), because, as he quotes, 'a Deliverer shall come (and has come) to remove their sins'. The purpose of God in this great problem concerning the unbelief of the Jews is that men be saved. If it was necessary for Jews to not believe so that Gentiles could be given a chance, then that does not mean that Jews are rejected. Rather, by the very fact that Gentiles believe, God will convert His own people. They are still His special people, though Gentiles can now be grafted into them. This is how Paul understands the missionary situation in the Early Church, and the point of his own preaching. But he does not consider himself infallible, and so he concludes with a tremendous paean of praise to God—'Who has known the mind of the Lord . . . '—to which, it seems, Paul wants to add, 'I cannot be sure that I have fully fathomed it, but this is the extent to which I have understood it'.

Note: For the factual material in II, III, we have depended upon E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Oliver and Boyd) 1957.

*F. F. Bruce, *Romans, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Tyndale Press) 1963, 64.