

Romans: Disobedience & Dispossession—Covenant Administered, Part 6

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EXPOSITION: Chapter 9:1-11:36

Chapters 9-11 follow fast on the heels of ch. 8—of Paul’s declaration of God’s predestined purpose for history. We have seen that God, in his sovereignty, has purposed to fill the earth with his glory through the unveiling of his mature sons, the corporate Christ, and thereby liberate creation from its corruption. The apostle now, in these chapters, explains from Scripture how this will be accomplished, how both the Jews and the Gentiles together – all mankind – will worship at the footstool of his feet for aeons to come before history is done.

Far from an excursus or parenthesis, as some claim, when we appreciate the purpose of the epistle as *God’s Manifesto for Paradise Restored* – for the New Heaven and the New Earth – these chapters are the climax of the epistle (see my [Introduction](#) under *Purpose*); in fact, a prophecy, declaring world history as the arena of God’s manifest glory, showing that the Kingdom of God will fully come in the harvest of the world. Chapters 9-11, therefore, consummate God’s purpose for man and the cosmos, which the apostle previously set forth in chs. 5 and 8. They show that Jew and Gentile are not only *definitively* one in Christ now but will also be *consummatively* in the fulness of history—in the future harvest of the world.

Having exhausted his mission in the east – “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16) – and as the mature teaching of his twenty-year apostolic ministry (15:18-19), the apostle now focuses on the hub of the Gentile empire, transmitting to the Romans, and through them to the world, his unique revelation of the Gospel (2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8; Gal. 1:11-24). This is in preparation for his strategic move westward to the larger Gentile world (15:14-24). Operating in his apostolic policy of “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16; 2:9, 10; Acts 26:23), he is now, in view of the Jewish unbelief, “turning [strategically] to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46; 18:6). This is in harmony with Paul’s apostleship, as stated in his introductory remarks to the Romans: “through whom [i.e., Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (1:5).

However, Paul’s revelation of God’s covenant nature and purpose demands an explanation of why that purpose has not, as yet, been fully realised. Surely, the present situation of the Roman believers, not to mention the Jew’s unbelief, and indeed that of the modern twenty-first century, belies the covenant promise to Abraham that his offspring would inherit the world (4:13). These chapters, therefore, provide that explanation. God’s Old Covenant people, Israel, like Adam (Hosea 6:7), have disobeyed the covenant and been dispossessed. He writes a mere fifteen years before the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 when the temple is destroyed, and they are spewed from the land and scattered to the nations. And so, Paul explains how Israel’s present unbelief and imminent judgement, already foreshadowed by Jesus (Matt. 21; 23; 24), is, in fact, God’s administration of the covenant—the execution of its penal sanctions. Furthermore, he must show how the administration of the covenant is such that while their unbelief spells the *inclusion* of the Gentiles, it doesn’t spell their own final *exclusion*. Although contra to many, Paul does not comment on Israel’s land promises, and, hence, territorial rights or statehood. Rather, he must show, so that God’s own character is not libelled, that the promise to the fathers – when rightly understood – is fulfilled already in the Gospel and the future harvest of the world.

Paul’s argument from chs. 1-8 that salvation is by grace through faith, rather than natural privilege, as the Jews had presumed, has created a theological tension that must be resolved. If the Jews have been dispossessed and the door is open to the Gentiles, have the Jews, in fact, been replaced? He must, therefore, demonstrate that the Gospel of God’s grace to the Gentiles is grounded in the fathers, the covenants, and the promises, that is, in the Old Testament Scriptures, and that this Gospel is in no way a novelty. Paul’s appreciation of the flow of redemptive history is evidenced in his defence before Felix when he claims: “I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). He, therefore, asserts the unity of the covenant: the continuity from one administration to another, each renewing the former; and hence, the New reiterates the Old, the latter fulfilling and completing the former. In the words of Augustine’s famous aphorism: “The New is in the Old *concealed*, and the Old in the New *revealed*”. In this way – through the administration of the covenant – the Kingdom of God is advanced. This, therefore, ultimately, does not spell the Jews’ replacement but rather their re-inclusion. Nevertheless, not on the basis of natural birth, but supernatural birth by the Spirit.

Hence, by grace through faith.

Consequently, Romans 8 is incomplete without chs. 9-11. They demonstrate how God's purpose for man and the cosmos is fully accomplished. With the "fulness of the Gentiles" and the regrafting of the Jews, history is now complete.

As to style, Paul continues his use of a rhetorical dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor, posing questions to advance the argument (9:14, 19-23, 30; 10:8, 14, 15, 18, 19; 11:1, 7, 11). Although, in 11:13-32 the imaginary dialogue shifts to a real audience as he rebukes Gentile arrogance toward the Jews. However, as we indicated at the beginning of this commentary, Paul's Roman audience is both Jewish and Gentile Christians. He is carefully arguing a case in chs. 9-11 designed to reconcile both in the one body of Christ as a functioning community. Whereas in ch. 2 Paul addresses the Jews directly, in chs. 9-11 he addresses them in the third person (9:3-5, 27, 31-32; 10:1-3, 14-19, 21; 11:11-24, 28, 20-31). The epistle is clearly addressing a community of both Jew and Gentile.

As to structure and outline, the body of chs. 9-11 is framed by an opening personal lament (9:1-5) and a closing doxology (11:33-36), while the content between can be divided into four sections with the first (9:6-29) asserting that the word of God has not failed, a possible implication from vv. 1-5. By redefining true Israel not according to birth but according to election, the argument then builds progressively with each section beginning with a rhetorical question. Each new section builds on the previous, answering and amplifying, appealing to Scripture, issues it raised.

The outline is thus:

Part 6a: Covenant Predestined

9:1-5—Introduction of the problem: Israel's unbelief and refusal of the Gospel (vv. 1-3), which begs the question as to the value of their privileges and the promise of God to them (vv. 4-5).

9:6-29—Defence of the proposition that God's word has not failed (v. 6a) by showing that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel" (1:6b, NKJV), demonstrating, through the example of Jacob and Esau, that the promise was never according to natural birth (vv. 6b-13) but by divine election (vv. 14-23), which can consequently apply equally to Jew or Gentile (vv. 24-29).

Part 6b: Covenant Continued

9:30-10:21—Flowing from 9:6-29 with the rhetorical question "What shall we say, then?" Paul explains how the Jews have stumbled by misconstruing the relationship of Law and Gospel as an antithesis – a discontinuity – between *works* and *faith*. By abstracting the *law of God* from the *God of the law* they have sought righteousness autonomously, that is, *by works*. Whereas, righteousness is *by faith* only and, hence, the Gospel has gone out to the Gentiles because there is "no distinction between Jew and Greek" (10:12).

Part 6c: Covenant Consummated

11:1-10—Flowing from 9:30-10:21 with the rhetorical question "I ask, then...?" Paul summarises Israel's situation from the previous two sections, not only explaining their penal blindness but also affirming the election of grace, demonstrated in a believing remnant.

11:11-32—Flowing from 11:1-10 (esp. v. 7a) with the rhetorical question "So I ask...?" Paul shows that Israel's hardening and exclusion is neither total nor permanent, prophesying not only the "fulness of the Gentiles" but also the re-inclusion of the Jews.

11:33-36—Doxology in awe of God's wisdom and ways in his dealings with man, as outlined in chs. 9-11.

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