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A PARTIAL HARDENING HAS COME UPON ISRAEL:  
DIVINE HARDENING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS  
FOR JEWISH EVANGELISM

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Travis Arin Laney  
December 2009

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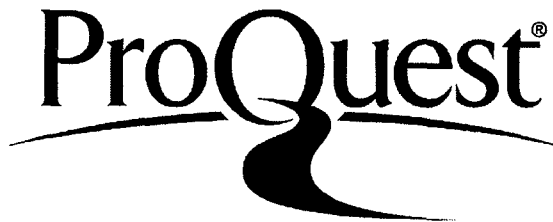
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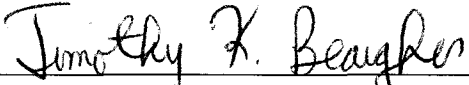
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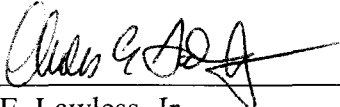
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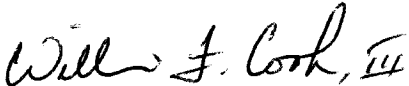
A PARTIAL HARDENING HAS COME UPON ISRAEL:  
DIVINE HARDENING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS  
FOR JEWISH EVANGELISM

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Date October 26, 2009

To Allison,

for your constant love, prayers, and encouragement

as I completed this project

and to

Ben, Luke, and Ty,

may Christ always be your greatest treasure

and to

English Baptist Church and Florida Gardens Baptist Church,

for allowing me to pursue this time-consuming degree

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the NT</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Biblical Sacra</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
HNTC	Harper's NT Commentaries
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>ISBE</i>	G. W. Bromiley (ed.), <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , rev.
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
MNTC	Moffatt NT Commentary
NAC	The New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
TNTC	Tyndale NT Commentaries
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

## PREFACE

The origins of this work extend to the early days of my Christian walk. I am extremely thankful to Eric Ball, my high school youth pastor, who first planted in my mind the notion of pursuing a doctorate by challenging me to pursue education to the highest levels the Lord allowed. I am also indebted to the various educators who in invested in my life by instilling a love for learning and thinking in my soul. Furthermore, I have great respect and admiration for my main research professor, Tim Beougher, who encouraged me to engage this topic concerning Jewish evangelism. Last, I am also thankful for the mentoring of other faculty members at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who displayed to me a wonderful balance between theological scholarship and pastoral ministry.

To the two churches that I served while researching and writing, I offer my warmest appreciation. English Baptist, a rural church in Carrollton, Kentucky, showed me much love, grace, and encouragement as I both shepherded them and attended Southern for my M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees. Florida Gardens has also extended to me much latitude as I completed this project. Both of these churches have godly saints whose prayers and encouragement kept me pressing ahead when I grew discouraged.

I am also immensely thankful to the Lord for my family. My parents have always believed that I would accomplish whatever I put my mind towards. This work is one way I have tried to honor them as my parents and demonstrate that their hard work in raising me has borne much fruit.

I wish also to acknowledge my wife's role in making this dream a reality. She has sacrificed much while I pursued higher theological education. Our marriage of ten years has not known a day when I was not a student. Words of thanks will never suffice for the times she acted as both a mom and dad to our three boys, for her willingness to carry out my responsibilities around the home so that I could study and write, for her editing eye as she proofread paper after paper, and for all the nights she went to bed alone while I devoted myself to the task of writing. Allison, the Lord has blessed me tremendously with you as my help met in school, ministry, and marriage.

Last, I am eternally thankful to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has shown me mercy, has taken my hardened heart of stone and given me a heart of flesh, and has grafted me into the olive shoot. I pray that my love for Christ and his redemption on my part will not only be a shining example about the greatness of Jesus to our three sons, Ben, Luke, and Ty, but that the heavenly Father will also use my salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as a means to make my Jewish friends and neighbors jealous for the redemption which is theirs in Christ Jesus. I join Paul in praying that the Jewish people would be saved and I long for the day when the hardening, on which this paper focused, is lifted and they turn to Christ and are saved!

Travis A. Laney

Lake Worth, Florida

December 2009

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For many pastors, it is enjoyable to stand in the pulpit and proclaim passages that reveal God's desire for the salvation of his creation. The Bible is full of such texts from which they may choose their sermon. For example, a pastor may select Ezekiel 33:11, which says, "Say to them, as I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, if looking for a New Testament selection, he may choose John 3:16, which says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Additional passages speak even more directly to the desires of God in relationship to an individual's salvation. For example, 1 Timothy 2:4 proclaims that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." In addition, 2 Peter 3:9 teaches that "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Bible verses quoted in this dissertation are taken from the English Standard Version.

In these passages, and other passages like them, a pastor would be right in his proclamation to tell others that God desires the salvation of sinners and that faith and repentance in Christ are necessary for this salvation to be genuine.

The difficulty arises, however, when one examines a passage that implicitly or explicitly reveals God's part in hindering individuals so that they will not believe the gospel and thus not come to faith in Christ. For example, in Mark 4:11, Jesus told the disciples, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that 'they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.'" Without question, Mark 4:11 and its synoptic parallels are difficult texts.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the correct exegetical conclusion from this passage seems to be that the parables serve the purpose of keeping those "outside" from repenting and believing in Christ. William Hendriksen spoke to the irony of such a passage:

But how can that be? Isn't this shocking? Can it be true that the kind and merciful Savior, the very One who was constantly extending tender invitations, would take great pains to prevent people from perceiving and understanding the truth? That he would actually go out of his way to keep men from turning to God and being forgiven?<sup>3</sup>

Even more difficult to grasp are those passages that specifically mention that God hardens the heart of individuals so they will not obey.<sup>4</sup> The most common way of explaining such a passage stems from a passion to protect God and defend his desire for

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<sup>2</sup>See Matt 13:14-15, Luke 8:10 and John 12:37-41.

<sup>3</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Mark*, Baker's New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 [CD-ROM] (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2004), 10-12.

<sup>4</sup>Although not intended to be an extensive list, some of these passages include Matt 21:42, Rom 9:18, 11:7-10, 11:25, 1 Pet 2:8.

sinner to repent. One who approaches such a text with integrity, however, cannot escape the fact that God hardens the heart of an individual. The typical explanation given to this conundrum is that a sinner's own unbelief is the reason for the hardening by God.

Continuing with Hendriksen's thought, he interpreted the issue in Mark 4:11 by saying, "When, of their own accord and after repeated threats and promises, people reject the Lord and spurn his messages, then he hardens them, in order that those who were not willing to repent will not be able to repent and be forgiven."<sup>5</sup> In other words, God hardens the hearts of sinners because they hardened their own hearts first.

The conclusion that God's hardening is a result of man's initial hardening is indeed the proper interpretation, at least in some texts. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul revealed that those who are perishing spiritually "refused to love the truth and so be saved" and instead chose to follow the deceptions of the lawless one (2 Thess 2:10). As a result, Paul wrote that "God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess 2:11-12). One may rightly conclude from this text that God did harden their hearts, but only *after* they first rejected the truth about God. John Calvin acknowledged that the delusion from God, which does not allow the sinner to believe what is true, is due to the sinner's own rebellion against truth and salvation:

Lest the wicked should complain that they perish innocently, and that they have been appointed to death rather from cruelty on the part of God, than from any fault on their part, Paul shews [*sic*] on what good grounds it is that so severe vengeance from God is to come upon them—because they have not received in the temper of

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<sup>5</sup>Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, 10-12.

mind with which they ought the truth which was presented to them, nay more, of their own accord refused salvation.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, Hebrews 3:7-8 explicitly says that the hardening of a heart is the act and responsibility of man. The author of Hebrews said, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness.’”

Is this response the best conclusion, however, regarding hardening as an overall theology from the Bible? More specifically, is this the best explanation regarding the hardening by God on the people of Israel mentioned by Paul in Romans 9 and 11? Three times in those two chapters, Paul mentioned the doctrine of the hardening of men by God. In Romans 9:18, Paul, speaking of God’s role in the salvation of individuals, said, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” Again, in Romans 11:7-8, Paul said, “What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.’” Last, in Romans 11:25, Paul stated that “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

These three passages deal specifically with the issue of salvation as it relates to the Jewish people. Based on the previously mentioned conclusion that the hardening of God is a response to man’s own personal hardness of heart, is it correct to conclude that Israel’s hardness to the gospel is a result of the rejection of Jesus independent of any

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<sup>6</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* in *The John Calvin Collection* [CD-ROM] (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2000), 30-31.



action on God's part? Acts 2:36 says, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Thus, is this hardening of the Jewish people by God in response to the rejection and crucifixion of his son by certain Jewish individuals? On the other hand, was Paul stating in Romans 9-11 that God is doing something else to Israel in which the Jewish peoples' hardening is not precipitated by their rejection of Jesus but is instead ordained by God and serves a greater purpose? Is it biblically and theologically correct to claim that God has initiated and caused the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish people? Is an individual right to argue that the hardening of the heart of the Jewish people is not a result of their own doing but is instead the initial and purposeful work of God? If this conclusion were indeed the right interpretation, what would this mean for the practice of Jewish evangelism?

### **Thesis**

The purpose of this dissertation is to seek answers to the questions regarding who caused the hardening and what the implications are if the answer is that God is the initial cause of the hardening. The dissertation contains two distinct sections. The first section will explore in detail the issue of divine hardening as it relates to the Jewish people and their rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially taking into consideration Romans 9-11. The goal of this section is to arrive at a theological understanding of the hardening, especially the cause and purpose of the act. Then, in the second section, the focus will shift to examine the implications of these findings as they relate to evangelizing the Jewish people by entities and churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The thesis of this dissertation is that God has temporarily hardened the hearts of many of the Jewish people. This hardening is not a result of Israel's disobedience and rejection of Christ. Furthermore, this temporary hardening serves a specific purpose; mainly to glorify God by demonstrating his sovereignty and power in bringing about the salvation of the nations (Rom 11). Even though the Jewish people are experiencing this hardening in regards to the gospel, God has ordained that even at the present time there is an elect Jewish remnant who is responding by faith upon hearing the gospel. Second, this dissertation will contend that even though the Jewish people are experiencing a hardening, there is a day coming when the hardening will be lifted and numerous Jewish individuals will turn to Christ in faith and will be saved. In the meantime, since there is no way to determine who is divinely hardened and who is in the divine remnant, it will be the position of this dissertation that individuals and churches associated with the Southern Baptist Convention should follow Paul's example by seeking to engage the Jewish people with the gospel. The goal of such engagement should be to see Jewish individuals come to faith and develop into fruit-bearing, Christ-exalting disciples.

### **Personal Background**

Two major discoveries in my life have led to my interest in this specific topic regarding the hardening and subsequent salvation of the Jewish people. First, my interest in the salvation of the Jewish people originated while I was an undergraduate student at The Florida State University. My degree was in religion, and it was during this time that I gained my first real exposure to Judaism. While taking classes on Judaism, the Old Testament, and biblical Hebrew, I experienced my first interactions with numerous Jewish students. Prior to these classes, I had no concern for anything Jewish. In fact, I

did not even know a Jewish individual. As I sat in these classes, however, I heard for the first time the responses these Jewish students gave regarding their understanding of Jewish history, theology, and soteriology.

Two reoccurring opinions expressed by the Jewish students in these various classes caught my attention. First, many of the students were not religious which in turn meant that they had little, if any, concern for their own salvation. While they grew up in Jewish homes, few actually believed in the truthfulness of the historic Jewish faith. For example, few believed Moses was a real person, that the plagues and the Passover really occurred, or that there was even a God. Second, the few Jewish students who displayed a religious faith repeatedly expressed that their salvation was based solely on either their lineage or good works. They took great pride in being of Jewish descent and found comfort that they were children of Abraham. Even with my limited knowledge of the Jewish people, I was still able to recognize that both of these ideologies were contrary to the revelation of Scripture. Therefore, it was while sitting in those classes and listening to the Jewish students that I began to develop a desire for sharing with the Jewish people their need to believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

The second major discovery in my life surrounded the issue of God's sovereignty as it relates specifically to salvation. My initial Christian background consisted of Baptist churches that articulated that salvation was determined by whether or not an individual chose to believe in Jesus. During my studies in seminary, however, my

theological framework morphed into a reformed worldview.<sup>7</sup> As I worked through the major tenants of this theological system, I began to question divine hardening in relationship to the Jewish people as it is revealed in Romans 9-11. My heart was burdened by the fact that God was sovereign, Jesus was the Jewish messiah, and yet the Jewish people were not displaying faith. I was challenged by Romans 9:18, which said, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills.” My mind struggled over what this passage meant for the Jewish people.

This dissertation is an attempt to bring both of these issues together. On the one hand, it is my firm conviction that the Jewish people need to be saved and that the church is instructed to seek their salvation. In fact, I agree with Jim Sibley that the church should not seek the conversion of the Jewish people as if they were any other people group in the world, but that they should have a priority in our evangelistic efforts.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the Bible clearly tells us that as a whole, the Jewish people will not respond to the gospel because God has hardened them. Thus, the goal of this dissertation is to bring together the issue of divine hardening with regard to the Jewish rejection of Jesus and the implications of this reality for Jewish evangelism.

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<sup>7</sup>Two other names commonly associated with Reformed theology include the “Doctrines of Grace” and “Calvinism.” Reformed theology argues that man is dead in his sins and trespasses. Because of this deadness, he is unable nor does he desire to respond positively to the gospel. Only individuals whose hearts are regenerated by God alone will respond affirmatively to the gospel. This monergistic act occurs only in the hearts of those to whom God elected before the foundation of the world. For a good introductory book discussing the Doctrines of Grace, see James Montgomery Boice, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 1-256.

<sup>8</sup>Jim Sibley, “Christianity Vis-à-Vis Judaism,” *Southwest Journal of Theology* 44 (2002): 25.

## A Brief History of Research

Numerous scholars have taken up the subject of the Jewish people as revealed in Romans 9-11. During the period of my seminary courses, I wrote many papers that focused on these three chapters as well. What I found was that the majority of scholarly work in this area focused on answering one of three weighty questions. While much work has gone into offering opinions about these three questions, for purposes of this dissertation, I will give only a brief synopsis of the issue and provide a resource that will allow for further study regarding each question. Then, after a short discussion on these three questions, I will show how my topic will further the discussion regarding the theme of the Jewish people's salvation as discussed in Romans 9-11 by addressing a fourth question.

The first question many scholars have addressed regarding the Jewish people is whether, according to Paul's work in the book of Romans, the gospel is relevant to the Jewish people and their salvation. On one side of the spectrum are many evangelical scholars and groups like Jews for Jesus and Chosen People ministries who argue that the Jewish people must demonstrate explicit faith in Christ in order to be saved.<sup>9</sup> For example, Albert Mohler, a leading voice in the evangelical community, has consistently argued that the New Testament is clear not only about the need of the Jewish people to believe in Christ in order to be saved but also about the responsibility of the church to bring the gospel to them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>See <http://www.jewsforjesus.org> and <http://www.chosenpeople.com/main>.

<sup>10</sup>R. Albert Mohler, "Do Jews Really Need Christ? Controversy over Jewish Evangelism" *Fidelitas* [on-line]; accessed 4 March 2008; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/FidelitasRead.php?article=fidel033>; Internet.

On the other end of the spectrum, one finds those who argue that the Jewish people do not need to be saved. Two separate groups espousing very different views regarding the status of the Jews agree that sharing the gospel with Jewish persons in order to convert them is of no salvific value. The first group often argues that since the Jewish people rejected Jesus, God has now rejected them (Matt 21:43).<sup>11</sup> All of the promises that were for the Jewish people are now given to the church. According to Sibley, this view, known as replacement theology, is “most often associated with Covenantal (or Historic) Premillennialism or with Amillennialism.”<sup>12</sup> According to Sibley, the conclusion that is drawn by some replacement theologians is that because the Jewish people have been replaced, they are cut off from salvation and have no need of the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

The other group in this discussion believes that the Jewish people are already saved via God’s covenant with Abraham and thus do not need the gospel for salvation. This position is called Two-Covenant or Dual Covenant theology.<sup>14</sup> Much of modern day ecumenism and open dialogue between the mainline denominations and the Jewish people affirm this belief. For example, the official position of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican Council II has been that the Jewish people have no need of Jesus as

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<sup>11</sup>Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* (Leicester: Intervarsity, 2004), 1-298.

<sup>12</sup>Jim Sibley, “‘Hear O Israel’: Spiritual Obduracy and the Jewish People” (paper presented at the 51<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA, 17-19 November 1999), 1.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>For a great article tracing the history, development, and implications of the two-covenant or dual-covenant theology, see Mitch Glaser, “Critique of the Two-Covenant Theory,” *Mishkan* 11 (1989): 34-53.

their Messiah.<sup>15</sup> Any effort to convert them is proclaimed as being anti-Semitic.

A second major question scholars have devoted attention to in the area of Romans 9-11 studies is seeking to answer what Paul meant by his statement “all Israel will be saved” in Romans 11:26.<sup>16</sup> Speaking to this issue, Douglas Moo stated, “The first clause of v. 26 is the storm center in the interpretation of Romans 9-11 and of NT teaching about the Jews and their future.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, scholars have given much thought to this question in an attempt to arrive at a proper conclusion as to who Paul had in mind when he uses the word “Israel.” For some, Paul’s use of “Israel” is a direct reference to ethnic Jews who are alive at the end of the age.<sup>18</sup> A second possible translation is one that John Calvin expressed in his commentary on Romans. He argued that “all Israel” refers to all of the elect Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Christ throughout the history of man.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the third option offered as to how to understand “all Israel will be saved” is that Paul’s use of “Israel” is speaking about a compilation of Jewish

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<sup>15</sup>For the Catholic position regarding Jewish Evangelism, see “Reflections on Covenant and Mission” [on-line]; accessed 29 October 2007; available from [http://www.bc.edu/research/cj/metaelements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs\\_usccb120802.htm](http://www.bc.edu/research/cj/metaelements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs_usccb120802.htm); Internet.

<sup>16</sup>For two recent dissertations that dealt specifically with this question, see William Chi-Chau Fung, “Israel’s Salvation: The Meaning of ‘All Israel’ in Romans 11:26” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004), 1-256; Matthew William Waymeyer, “The Identity of ‘All Israel’ in Romans 11:26” (Ph.D. diss., The Master’s Seminary, 2003), 1-175. Additionally, see John F. Walvoord, “Eschatological Problems V: Is the Church the Israel of God?” *BSac* 101 (1944): 403-16.

<sup>17</sup>Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 719.

<sup>18</sup>Michael G. Vanlaningham, “Romans 11:25-27 and the Future of Israel in Paul’s Thought,” *Masters Seminary Journal* 3:2 (1992): 159.

<sup>19</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* in *The John Calvin Collection* [CD-ROM] (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2000), 339-40.

believers from every generation that comprises the Jewish remnant.<sup>20</sup> While scholars have attempted to answer this question elsewhere, this question will be discussed in this dissertation from the context of what will happen to the Jewish people when the hardening of God is removed.

A last major question scholars have examined regarding Romans 9-11 is how and when the Jewish people will be saved. For those who believe the Jewish people must believe in the gospel to be saved, three positions have been offered about the nature and timing of this redemption. Those who affirm traditional Dispensationalism believe the salvation of the Jewish people will occur after the church is raptured.<sup>21</sup> The second position states that the Jewish people will come to faith in large numbers just before the end of the age.<sup>22</sup> The third opinion, known as the Sonderweg position, believes that the Jewish people will be saved by hearing the gospel. The difference, however, is that they will hear the gospel directly from Jesus himself. Again, this question is a significant issue and will receive attention in this dissertation in the chapter that explores the

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<sup>20</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 381. See also Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 106; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 699; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 187.

<sup>21</sup>For a good summation, see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Eschatology and Jewish Evangelism," *Mishkan* 32 (2000): 32-42.

<sup>22</sup>A sampling of scholars advocating this interpretation include Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 202; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 575-77; David Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Church: A New Perspective on History and Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1995), 50-53; Bruce Longenecker, "Different Answers to Different Issues: Israel, the Gentiles, and Salvation History in Romans 9-11," *JSNT* 36 (1989): 95-123; Moo, *Romans*, 723; John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 25; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 615; Rob Richards, *Has God Finished with Israel?* (Milton Keynes, England: Word, 1994), 94-113; Vanlaningham, "Romans 11:25-27 and the Future of Israel in Paul's Thought," 141-74.



implication divine hardening has for evangelism. The answer surrounding this question is important because it provides insight into what sort of engagement that Christians should have with the Jewish people with regard to the gospel.<sup>23</sup>

What my initial research has found is that few scholars have given significant attention to the relationship between the hardening in Romans 9-11 and the practice of engaging Jewish individuals with the gospel. Little research has been produced that specifically seeks to explain the overall nature, author, and purpose of the hardening of which Paul spoke in Romans 9-11. Those few scholars that did focus on the issue of divine hardening, however, wetted my desire to seek further answers. For example, Jim Sibley examined the blindness of the Jewish individuals as explained in Romans and made the connection to the hardening revealed in the book of Isaiah. A major benefit of his work that this dissertation will advance is the implication of this hardening in relationship to the Jewish people's need to be saved.<sup>24</sup> In an older article, Henry C. Thiessen also examined the extent and nature of Israel's rejection.<sup>25</sup> Speaking about their hardening, he noted, "That in all this divine action there has been a purpose deeper and wiser than man can altogether understand (11:26-36)." This statement will coincide with chapter four in this dissertation explaining the purpose of the hardening upon the Jews. That chapter will flush out the divine purpose for this hardening of God's people towards God's Messiah.

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<sup>23</sup>Vanlaningham, "Should the Church Evangelize Israel? A Response to Franz Mussner and Other Sonderweg Proponents," *TrinJ* 22 (2001): 197-218.

<sup>24</sup>Sibley, "Hear O Israel," 4.

<sup>25</sup>Henry C. Thiessen, "The Place of Israel in the Scheme of Redemption: As Set Forth in Romans 9-11 Part 2," *BSac* 98 (1941): 203.

An additional scholar whose work is especially helpful in the study of the divine hardening in Romans 9-11 is John Piper. First, during a sabbatical study while in academia, Piper devoted himself to the examination of the words of Paul in Romans 9. The fruit of this labor is a book detailing God's work in both hardening and showing mercy towards individuals.<sup>26</sup> Second, while serving as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Piper preached through Romans 9-11 and gave specific attention to the issue of divine hardening and its implications for Jewish evangelism.

It was after reading some of his sermons regarding divine hardening that my perspective changed regarding God's role in the hardening of the Jewish people. Before Piper, I would have sided with those individuals who argue that God hardened the Jews as a response to their own rejection of Christ. It was after reading his work in Romans 9-11, however, that my mind found the strength of his argument. For example, in a sermon entitled "The Hardening of Pharaoh and the Hope of the World," Piper argued that one must learn from God's hardening of Pharaoh to understand God's work of hardening in the lives of the Jewish people. He said, "God is free in hardening whom he hardens and does not base his decision who to harden on anything a person does."<sup>27</sup> The reason, Piper argued, is just like God freely hardened Pharaoh to demonstrate his power and glory, God is even now freely hardening the Jewish people to demonstrate his power and grace in the salvation of both Gentile and Jews alike. Thus, it is this argument by Piper that is the

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<sup>26</sup>Piper, *The Justification of God*, 1-245.

<sup>27</sup>John Piper, *The Hardening of Pharaoh and the Hope of the World*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

foundation of this dissertation. This dissertation will show that God hardened the Jews of his own free will for the purpose of displaying his glory and grace to all.

### **Methodology**

Chapter 2 begins by arguing for the purpose and place of Romans 9-11 in the context of the whole of the epistle. Then, the chapter focuses on Paul's belief that God's promises to the Jewish people have not been thwarted or revoked. The chapter will argue that Israel's failure to demonstrate faith in Jesus as the Messiah fits into the overall plan of God for the redemption of both the Jews and Gentiles. The chapter will conclude that even though a partial hardening has come upon Israel, God's word has not failed. Instead, the partial hardening was always God's plan. It was part of a mystery previously hidden but is now being manifested for all to understand.

Chapter 3 will delve into the cause or source of this hardening. Specifically, the chapter will seek to determine whether the ultimate reason a hardening has come upon Israel is due to the Jewish people's own obstinacy or if God is the sole cause. The chapter will seek to answer this issue by first defining the meaning of the word *hardening*. Then, the chapter will explore the usage of the word in passages throughout the Bible. The purpose in this section of the chapter will be to determine from Scripture if hardening is something man himself always causes or if God is ever revealed as the author sovereignly ordaining the event. Then, the chapter will close by examining the connection between how Paul saw the hardening of the Jews in Romans 9-11 with the hardening of Pharaoh in Exodus.

Chapter 4 will address the purpose behind the hardening of the Jewish people. The chapter begins by refuting the idea that the hardening of the Jewish people is a form

of punishment by God for the rejection of Jesus. Included in this section is a refutation of the idea that God has replaced the Jewish people with the church. The chapter will then explore three reasons Paul gave for the hardening upon Israel. Included in these three positions is the idea that the hardening is a means to develop a jealous attitude among the Jewish people towards the Gentiles and their faith in the Jewish Messiah. Second, the chapter will argue that the hardening is a means to allow the grafting in Gentiles into Israel's lineage. Third, the chapter will expound on the idea that the hardening of the Jewish people is really an act of mercy by God towards all of creation. The hardening of the Jewish people by God is really a means to display his glory and power, as it was displayed in the hardening of Pharaoh and the events that followed.

Chapter 5 will explore what will happen when the hardening of God is lifted from the Jewish people. At this point in the work, the three traditional positions regarding what Paul meant by the term "all Israel will be saved" will be explored both for their strengths and for weaknesses. The chapter will end by arguing for the position that the idea of numerous Jews turning to Christ is the best interpretation of Paul's words in Romans 11 as well as the whole of Romans 9-11.

Chapter 6 will take the work from chapters 2 through 5 regarding the nature, purpose, and result of the lifting of the divine hardening of the Jewish people and provide implications for Jewish evangelism. The chapter will begin by examining whether Jewish evangelism is something that is even necessary. Then, after demonstrating from Paul's own example that Jewish evangelism is something the church should be engaged in today, the chapter will show what the Southern Baptist Convention has done in the past in seeking to reach this people group. The chapter will then transition into examining

what the entities associated with the Convention can do in the future to proclaim more effectively to this lost group of people. The chapter will examine national, state, and local opportunities that are possible for equipping Christians to share their faith with Jewish persons.

A brief concluding chapter will provide a summary regarding the material presented in the dissertation. The chapter will also provide three issues that arose through the study of this topic that were not addressed in this work but that could use additional research in future studies. The first issue mentioned is why God hardened the Jewish people at all. Second, the question as to when the hardening occurred needs further thought. Last, the reason for research questioning what should be done with a Jewish person who comes to faith in Christ will also be mentioned.

### **Limitations**

Some biases and limitations in this work need acknowledgement. First, this dissertation is primarily seeking to demonstrate that the hardening the Jewish people are currently experiencing is due to a work of God. It is not an attempt to enter into the debate between dispensational or covenantal theology regarding the Jewish people.<sup>28</sup> While at times one position or the other may be expressed, especially as the issue of what happens when the hardening is removed is discussed, the primary focus of this paper is not to argue for one position over the other. For the purposes of this work, the focus seeks to stay specifically on the topic of the hardening of God upon the Jewish people.

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<sup>28</sup>Richard P. Belcher, *A Comparison of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Columbia, SC: Richbarry Press, 1986); Craig Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Bridgepoint, 2003); John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991); Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965).

A second limitation in this dissertation will occur in the chapter on implications for Jewish evangelism. I am a Southern Baptist student attending a Southern Baptist seminary and I have served Southern Baptist churches my entire life. Therefore, the ideas for possible implementation this dissertation will propose will be focused directly on entities within the Southern Baptist context. This statement does not mean that the ideas proposed are incapable of being modified to fit into other denominational structures. Nevertheless, chapter 6 will have specific implications for Southern Baptists.

## CHAPTER 2

### GOD'S WORD HAS NOT FAILED: REASONS FOR ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF JESUS

The placement, meaning, and purpose of Romans 9-11 have spurred discussion in scholarly circles through the years. Should one read these three chapters as if Paul took a break from his central message regarding the necessity of justification by faith in Christ for salvation in order to address a personal concern, mainly the lack of faith in Christ by his Jewish kinsmen. C. H. Dodd interpreted these three chapters as a temporary diversion in Paul's overall theme of Romans. He said, "Chaps. IX-XI form a compact and continuous whole, which can be read quite satisfactorily without reference to the rest of the epistle."<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce also commented on the potential for confusion regarding the purpose and placement of these three chapters. He said, "To many modern readers chapters 9-11 form a parenthesis in the course of Paul's argument. Had he proceeded straight from 8:39 to 12:1, we should have been conscious of no hiatus in his reasoning."<sup>2</sup>

The popular view regarding the theme and purpose of Romans 9-11, however, is that these chapters significantly advance Paul's argument about God's work of the redemption of his creation as described in the previous eight chapters. Tom Schreiner noted that while some scholarship may have seen these chapters as a parenthesis, most

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Harold Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (New York: Harper, 1932), 148.

<sup>2</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 171.

scholars interpret these three chapters as crucial to understanding the whole of Paul's argument in the book.<sup>3</sup> For example John Murray said the themes found in Romans 9-11 "bring to climatic vindication the thesis stated in 1:16, 17, and correlative doctrines unfolded later in chapters 1 to 8."<sup>4</sup> Expounding the connection between the two sections further, C. K. Barrett said, "For chs. i-viii are not so much concerned with an 'experience of salvation' as with the character and deeds of God who is the source of salvation, and chs. ix-xi are not at all concerned with Paul's patriotic sentiments but with the character and deeds of God who elected the Jews and now calls the Gentiles."<sup>5</sup>

It may be an overstatement to say that Romans 9-11 is "not at all concerned with Paul's patriotic sentiments." While Paul's past connection to the Jewish people is not the central theme, his great love and affection for this specific people group and his anguish over their rejection of the gospel is visibly noticeable. Where Barrett is right, however, is in suggesting that the central importance of both Romans 1-8 and 9-11, and thus a major theme that links these two sections together, is the fact that God showed

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 469. For a good overview of the history and individuals involved in the discussion surrounding the placement and purpose of Rom 9-11, see Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11*, SBL Dissertation Series 109 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 110-39. Additionally, an influential work arguing for a reassessment of the purpose and placement of Rom 9-11 was Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199-215. For a small sampling of other scholars through the years who have argued for the connection of Romans 9-11 with the rest of the epistle rather than seeing it as an unconnected section, see C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1957), 175; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), xii-xv; Robert Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 194-95; Eckhard Schnabel, "Israel, The People of God, and the Nations," *JETS* 45 (2002): 35-57; Henry C. Thiessen, "The Place of Israel in the Scheme of Redemption: As Set Forth in Romans 9-11, Part 1," *BSac* 98 (1941): 78-91; Andrew Wakefield, "Romans 9-11: The Sovereignty of God and the Status of Israel," *RevExp* 100 (2003): 65-78; and Ben Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 237.

<sup>4</sup>Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, xii.

<sup>5</sup>Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 175.



unbelievable mercy and grace by making salvation possible for both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>6</sup>

In Romans 9-11, Paul used rhetorical questions to advance his argument. His tactic was to address logically the underlying questions that he believed would develop in the minds of his readers as they reflected on the content of the previous eight chapters and sought to reconcile it with the response, or lack thereof, by the Jewish people towards Christ as savior. Ralph Gade noted that these chapters have been called “The Jewish Problem” where “the problem was not with the Word of God, nor the apostle Paul, but in the minds of Christian men and women.”<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Glancy is correct in stating, “The problem confronting Paul is that he cannot deny either God’s ancient election of the people Israel or the present call of the Gospel. However, even as he tries to maintain these premises, he contends daily with Israel’s rejection of the Gospel.”<sup>8</sup> Franz Leenhardt’s thoughts on the potential questions in the minds of the readers of the epistle are insightful:

The question forced on Paul is whether the promises are still valid, since they were made to a people now repudiated. The whole security of the promise is thus challenged, and thus the whole doctrine of justification by faith. At the same time the continuity and unity of the people of God, of which the apostle wishes to convince the readers, becomes insecure. How could the young church feel conscious of belonging to the old trunk of which Abraham is the stem, if the new dispensation develops outside the framework of the elect people of God?<sup>9</sup>

In other words, if the Jewish community was not convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, or if the Jewish people were not included in God’s plan of redemption as it

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<sup>6</sup>That salvation in Christ alone is available to both Jews and Gentiles is a common Pauline theme. He emphasized this point most clearly in Eph 2:11-22 and again in Eph 3:1-6.

<sup>7</sup>Ralph M. Gade, “Is God Through with the Jew?” *Grace Journal* 11 (1970): 21.

<sup>8</sup>Jennifer Glancy, “Israel vs. Israel in Romans 11:25-32,” *USQR* 45 (1991): 191.

<sup>9</sup>Franz J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), 242.

related to Jesus, why should the Gentiles be convinced?<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the answer Paul needed to give in these chapters was how someone could truly believe that it was God's plan to justify both Jews and Gentiles simply by placing faith in Jesus' substitutionary atonement while at the same time explaining why the Jewish people consistently rejected Jesus as the Messiah and his death as having any sacrificial merit.

How should one interpret the majority of the Jewish people rejecting Christ as a fulfillment of God's plan as revealed in the Old Testament? Many scholars have noticed this issue as a serious concern. E. P. Sanders proposed, "How could God have willed the election and ultimately the redemption of Israel and have appointed Jesus Christ, whom most Jews were rejecting, for the salvation of all without distinction?"<sup>11</sup> As well, Moo pointed out, "Did not he promise to send his Messiah to *Israel*, to glorify his people *Israel*, and to bless *Israel* in the kingdom that was coming?"<sup>12</sup> How could Gentiles reconcile Jesus as the Jewish Messiah while the Jewish people rejected him as such? John MacArthur posed the question, "If salvation is *from* the Jews and is first of all *to* the Jews, why did Israel, including her highest religious leaders, reject Jesus as their

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<sup>10</sup>While the majority of individuals see the failure of God's word as the concern Paul addressed in these chapters, Mark Nanos offered a different perspective. He said, "It is often assumed that in chaps. 9-11 Paul is engaged in explaining that God is faithful to Israel as though the Christian gentiles were concerned with this matter: If he was not faithful to Israel how could they be assured he would be faithful to themselves? While this matter is certainly a significant concern for Paul, it does not make sense as the present concern of the gentiles addressed. They appear rather to be growing comfortable with the developing notion that Israel has fallen and they have stepped into Israel's place. As long as God is faithful to themselves all is well, and they do not seem to be concerned otherwise. Paul (and the Christian Jews who have alerted him to this attitude in Rome) is concerned they should (must!) understand the unquestioned faithfulness of God to Israel, albeit in sometimes unfathomable ways, so that they will not draw just such false conclusions about God's intentions toward Israel, and hence such superior conclusions about themselves." Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 246.

<sup>11</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 197.

<sup>12</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 291.

Messiah, Savior, and King?”<sup>13</sup> How does this rejection on their part as a people demonstrate the purpose and plan of God? An additional concern for the individuals to whom Paul penned this letter was that “if God has not fulfilled his promises made to Israel, then what basis has the Jewish-Gentile church for believing that the promises will be fulfilled for them?”<sup>14</sup> John Piper backed this line of thinking saying, “If God does not keep his promises to Israel, all our hope that he will keep his promises to us in Romans 8 falls to the ground.”<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, Paul faced no small challenge as he sought to address the concern over whether God’s promises, purposes, and plan regarding the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles through Christ had failed because his own people had not accepted him as the savior. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones provided keen insight regarding this dilemma:

The purpose of these three chapters is to answer that question and to show plainly and clearly that the purpose of God has not collapsed, and that if these things are properly understood, then there is ultimately no problem at all. Indeed, they are to show that the exact opposite is the case, that God’s purpose always has been carried out, is being carried out, and always will be to an absolute perfection and final consummation.<sup>16</sup>

Recognizing Paul’s purpose in writing Romans 9-11 is extremely important for understanding the nature of God regarding his interaction with his covenantal people. It is also important for understanding his plan of redemption for both Jews and Gentiles as

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<sup>13</sup>John MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>14</sup>Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9-11*, trans. Ingeborg Nixon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 35.

<sup>15</sup>John Piper, *The Absolute Sovereignty of God: What is Romans Nine About?* in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Collection (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

<sup>16</sup>D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *To God’s Glory: An Exposition of Romans 11* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998), 3.

it is accomplished through Christ despite the current situation of the Jewish people. Therefore, the attention of this chapter now turns to examining how Paul answered these pivotal inquiries regarding the issue of Israel's rejection of Christ and the implications this decision by the large majority of Jewish people has for Gentiles.

### **Three Arguments Supporting God's Word**

In Romans 9-11, Paul offered three answers explaining how God's plan of redemption for both Jews and Gentiles alike has not failed. In chapter 9, Paul provided two lines of evidence describing that God's purpose regarding the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles was still being accomplished as he ordained it despite Israel's rejection of Jesus. Then, in chapter 11, Paul revealed the most powerful defense to reject the idea that God's purposes of salvation had failed. He clearly, and with great conviction, expressed a divine action that was hidden previously as a "mystery" but was now being fully revealed. Paul believed this revelation of the mystery provided the ultimate evidence that the Jewish community's rejection of Jesus was not a failure of God's plan of redemption. In fact, for Paul, it was the clearest example that God's plan was still at work.

The three arguments Paul proposed as to the dilemma about the Jewish people intensified as his discussion on Israel progressed through the three chapters. Each line of argumentation provided a clearer picture into the secret and sovereign work of God and his plan of redemption generally, and the salvation of the Jews specifically. Thus, the following paragraphs examine individually these three arguments from Paul in order to understand how the lack of faith by the Jewish people in Jesus is part of God's divine plan.

**Argument 1:  
Only Children of the Promise Believe**

The opening verses of Romans 9 offer the initial clues for answering the question regarding God's purpose of salvation and Israel's rejection of Christ. Paul began the chapter by expressing great anguish and emotional heartache over the fact that his kinsmen had not come to faith in Christ. His brokenness over their lostness was so sincere that he proclaimed he would "wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:3). His words, as Mark Seifrid pointed out, are reminiscent of Moses' desire "to be 'blotted out of the book' of the Lord for the sake of Israel, whom the Lord rejects (see Exod. 32:30-34)."<sup>17</sup> Paul made it a point to acknowledge, before moving on to any argument about the reason for Israel's disbelief, his heart's great anguish over the fact that the Jewish people were not turning to Christ for salvation. For him, answering this issue of the Jewish rejection of Jesus was not academic. It was intensely personal. He knew that those who rejected Jesus were doomed to an eternal separation from God characterized by enduring his holy and eternal wrath as punishment for sinful disobedience. Thus, he found no joy in the current state of his Jewish brethren regarding their relationship with God through Christ. Yet, amidst his great sorrow regarding this rejection (Rom 9:2), Paul was not without hope.

Having laid out his deep affections towards the Jewish people and their salvation, Paul said boldly "But it is not as though the word of God has failed" (Rom

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<sup>17</sup>Mark Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 639.

9:6). As Ernst Kaesemann stated, “The problem of this entire section is here formulated.”<sup>18</sup> In this one verse, Paul laid the foundation for explaining how God’s Word regarding the redemption of Israel was still valid even though the current Jewish actions seemed to contradict it. Commenting on Romans 9:1-5, Piper said, “It might give the impression that Romans 9 is a treatise on the sovereignty of God. It’s not. Romans 9 is an explanation for why the word of God has not failed even though God’s chosen people, Israel, as a whole, are not turning to Christ and being saved.”<sup>19</sup> Later in the same sermon, Piper concluded that the real issue in the chapter resided over “How can God’s elect people, Israel, be accursed and cut off from Christ if the word of God is reliable?”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the chapter is not as much a proof text on God’s sovereignty in election, although there is strong evidence for it there. Rather, the chapter is an explanation about why many Jews rejected Christ and yet how this situation does not nullify the Word of God.

Paul’s first answer as to how God’s Word had not failed was that “not all who descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom 9:6). His reasoning for such a statement was that the majority of the Jewish people did not believe in Jesus due to their spiritual ancestry, not any failed word by God. He said, “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named’” (Rom 9:6-7). As Glancy put it, “For

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<sup>18</sup>Ernst Kaesemann, *Commentary on Romans*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 261. John Piper argued that Kaesemann’s point is the primary issue of the whole of Rom 9-11. For him, the issue Paul was addressing was to show that God’s word was still true and eternally reliable despite the situation with the Jewish people. He said, “What is at stake ultimately in these chapters is not the fate of Israel; that is penultimate. Ultimately God’s own trustworthiness is at stake.” John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 19.

<sup>19</sup>Piper, *The Absolute Sovereignty of God*.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

not all who are members of Israel in the sphere defined by the flesh are members of Israel, the people called to life by God.”<sup>21</sup>

Paul advanced this point by reminding his readers of God’s choice and electing love of Jacob over Esau in verses 9-13. Both of these passages seem to indicate that some Jews are the true offspring of Abraham while others are not. Not every Jewish person could claim to be a spiritual child of Abraham but only those who followed in his act of faithful trust and obedience towards God.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Paul distinguished between the two sets of Jewish individuals by claiming that they were either children of the flesh or spiritual children of the promise. Thus, God’s Word had not failed because many Jews did not believe. Those Jews who are children of the flesh do not believe. This statement was significant because, as Charles Hodge pointed out, “it was a common opinion among the Jews, that the promises of God being made to Abraham and to his seed, all his natural descendants, sealed, as such, by the rite of circumcision, would certainly inherit the blessings of the Messiah’s reign.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, Paul’s words confronted this belief as erroneous.

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<sup>21</sup>Glancy, “Israel vs. Israel in Romans 11:25-32,” 191.

<sup>22</sup>John Walvoord, “Part 1: Does the Church Fulfill Israel’s Program?” *BSac* 137 (1980): 22. Walvoord’s comments about options for interpreting the phrases “the seed” or “descendants” of Abraham in the Bible are useful. He said, “Both Testaments seem to justify the conclusion that the descendants of Abraham are considered in three categories: (a) the natural or physical descendants of Abraham, (b) those who are the descendants of Abraham in the sense of being believing Israelites or true believers like Abraham, as illustrated in the contrast between natural Israel and spiritual Israel in Romans 9:6-8; (c) those who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles, in that they believe in God as Abraham did, as illustrated in Galatians 3:6-9.”

<sup>23</sup>Charles Hodge, *Romans*, ed. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 275.

**Romans 9 and Galatians 4 Connection.** In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul reminded his audience that Abraham had two sons.<sup>24</sup> Ishmael, the one born to him via Hagar, was the slave son while Isaac, the one born to him via Sarah, was the free son. Ishmael served as a constant reminder that Sarah, because of her circumstances, disbelieved that God was able to bring forth out of her aged womb an heir for Abraham. As a result, she turned to her female Egyptian servant in an attempt to fulfill God's word to Abraham. On the other hand, Isaac served as a visible demonstration of the power of God in fulfilling his purposes and promises despite the circumstances or faith of his people. Philip Graham Ryken's comments at this point provide a good summary of Paul's thought:

From the very beginning there was a fundamental spiritual difference between the two sons. One son was born by proxy, the other by promise. One came by works; the other by faith. One was a slave; the other was free. Thus Ishmael and Isaac represent two entirely different approaches to religion: law against grace, flesh against Spirit, self-reliance against divine dependence.<sup>25</sup>

Paul connected and expanded his classification of the meaning of the "slave son" in Galatians by calling them "children of the flesh" in Romans 9. Again, Paul likely had in mind this reference of the "free son" in Galatians when he spoke of "the children of the promise" in Romans 9:7-8. The children of the promise represent those Jewish individuals who demonstrated a faithful obedience and trust in the Word of God like Abraham did in Genesis 15. It was here that Abraham believed the Lord when he was

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<sup>24</sup>Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC, vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 336. George goes on that "Abraham actually had eight sons, six of them by Keturah (Gen 25:1-2), whom he married after Sarah's death." George goes on to say, "Paul did not mention Abraham's latter progeny because they were irrelevant to his present purpose." Instead, Paul was concerned only at this juncture with the two sons in particular, Ishmael and Isaac, because of what they represented.

<sup>25</sup>Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 184.



told, that despite his age, he would have an heir from his own body. As a result, the Lord “counted” or imputed to Abraham righteousness because of this faith. This act of faith and its result of justification was reemphasized in both Romans 4:3 and again in 4:20-25.

Paul’s point in both Galatians 4 and Romans 9 was that there is no connection between being a physical descendant to Abraham and automatically having salvation. Only those Jewish individuals who demonstrate faith in God’s Word are children of the promise, are true descendants of Abraham, and are saved. This idea coincides with Jesus’ statement in John 8:31-47 where he taught that the Jews who were seeking to kill him were not descendants of Abraham. In fact, he told them that if they were really descendants of Abraham, they would be doing what he did, mainly believing in God’s promised Messiah. William Hendriksen expressed, “Abraham’s children do Abraham’s works. Like Abraham of old they obey God’s commands, fully trusting that God will make all things well; they welcome his messengers; and, last but not least, they rejoice in the day of Christ.”<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, just because one is Jewish by birth does not mean he or she is a child of the promise. Piper showed that Israel’s history is full of such individuals, those who are Jewish by flesh but are not part of the promise of God to Abraham. For example, he noted, “Just as Isaac, not Ishmael, was the child of promise, and Jacob, not Esau, was the child of promise, so also throughout Israel’s history there has been a true remnant within Israel who are the heirs of the full covenant blessings. The rest are not the seed of Abraham because, even though they trace their physical descent to him, they

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<sup>26</sup>William Hendriksen, *The Gospel According to John*, Baker’s New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 [CD-ROM] (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 56.

do not share his faith and obedience.”<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, in a more abrasive way, said, “Therefore, the children of the flesh are not the children of God. And by this argument he stops the mouths of the Jews who gloried that they were the seed and children of Abraham.”<sup>28</sup>

Paul’s position was that spiritual faith, and not physical ancestry, was the determining factor regarding one’s relationship with God. He made this idea very clear when he said, “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7). The power in this statement is that anyone who displays faith is a child of Abraham and heirs to the promise. Even Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod conceded that Paul’s point in Romans and Galatians was that mere ancestry to Abraham was not advantageous in itself:

The attitude of the New Testament is quite clear. Jews labor under the illusion that they have some sort of advantage in being descended from Abraham. In so thinking, they are thoroughly mistaken. Being descended from Abraham is no advantage whatsoever. God is able to declare anyone a child of Abraham (God is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham). And Paul confirms this by pointing out that not all of Abraham’s children were of Israel. Isaac was of Israel but Esau was not. So being a physical descendant of Abraham does not make one a child of promise.<sup>29</sup>

Those Jewish individuals who do not turn to Christ demonstrate that they are not true descendants of Abraham because they do not believe God and his promises and are thus not included in the covenant God made with Abraham and “the children of the promise.”

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<sup>27</sup>John Piper, *The Covenant of Abraham*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 1980-1989* [CD-ROM]. The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

<sup>28</sup>Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1998), 290.

<sup>29</sup>Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham’s Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. R Kendall Soulen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 48-49.

Conversely, those Jewish individuals who are believers make up the remnant and are true Israelites.

Paul's point in using this example is that God's Word has not failed because it is still bringing to pass the redemption of the Jewish people. It is only Abraham's spiritual descendants, however, who are gaining this righteousness. Mark Dever's remarks are appropriate to consider as a summation of Paul's first argument. He said, "God has never guaranteed salvation to every physical descendant of Abraham. The true Israelites have always been the children of the promise. This was true even in the Old Testament. Then as now, many Israelites did not believe God's promises. Yet their unbelief did not somehow make God unfaithful. They were simply exposing their own unfaithfulness."<sup>30</sup> The fact that many Jews were not coming to faith is not because God's Word had failed. Instead, those Jews who did not come to faith demonstrated that they were not true Israel. Therefore, Paul's first argument against the notion that God's purpose and plan has failed because of the lack of faith on the part of the Jewish people was that the lack of faith merely showed that they were not children of the promise, not that God's Word, and thus his promises, had failed.

### **Argument 2: Israel Has Stumbled over the Stumbling Stone**

After expanding on the issue of God's justice in the act of unconditional election in the middle section of Romans 9, Paul turned his attention in the final verses of the chapter to offer a second argument as to why the lack of faith of the Jewish people

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<sup>30</sup>Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 161.

was actually a demonstration of the purposes and plan of God. He rhetorically asked why the Gentiles obtained a righteousness by faith when they were not pursuing it while the Jewish people did not succeed in their efforts of obtaining personal righteousness through keeping the law (Rom 9:30-31). He answered that the Jewish people have “stumbled over the stumbling stone” that God “laid in Jerusalem” (Rom 9:32-33).

Lloyd-Jones called this statement by Paul “a crucial statement for all times and in all ages and in all places. In other words, we are looking here at what we may rightly describe as the very heart and centre of the Christian gospel.”<sup>31</sup> Paul’s argument was not only that the lack of faith on the Jewish people’s part demonstrated they are not Abraham’s spiritual descendants. He also stated that the reason for this lack of faith was due to their stumbling over (προσέκοψαν) a stumbling stone (προσκόμματος) established by God.

Before pursuing Paul’s meaning in these verses, it would be beneficial to understand the words he used in this section which have been translated “stumbling” and “stumbling stone” in English Bibles. First, Paul said that they, being Israel, προσέκοψαν over προσκόμματος. The word προσέκοψαν is a third person plural form of the verb προσκόπτω. According to *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, προσκόπτω may be translated meaning either to “make contact with something in a bruising or violent manner; to beat against; stumble” or “to take offense at; feel repugnance for; reject.”<sup>32</sup> Paul used προσκόμματος from the noun πρόσκομμα meaning “a stone that

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<sup>31</sup>Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Sovereign Purpose: An Exposition on Romans 9* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991), 299.

<sup>32</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker [BAGD], 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “προσκόπτω.” This usage is similar to Matt 7:27 which says, “. . . the winds blew and beat against (προσέκοψαν) the house . . . .” Furthermore, in addition to Rom 9:32 and Matt 7:27, a variation of this verb is used in the following passages: Matt 4:6, Luke 4:11, John 11:9-10, Rom 14:21, and 1 Pet 2:8.

causes people to stumble.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the image Paul presented was that Jewish individuals have beaten themselves violently against or stumbled over in a hurtful way an object that causes people to stumble. Not only have the Jews stumbled, but from the whole context of Romans 9:30-33, it seemed as if Paul wanted to contrast this stumbling by the Jewish people with the lack of stumbling exhibited by the Gentiles.

**Question 1: Who or what is this stumbling stone?** The first question that immediately comes to mind regarding these verses is *who* or *what* is this stumbling stone to which Paul referred? It is helpful to note that Paul combined two Old Testament passages to argue that Israel had stumbled over the stumbling stone. The first text is Isaiah 8:13-14 and says, “But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and *a stone of offense* and *a rock of stumbling* to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (emphasis mine). As Schreiner noted, “Israel’s stumbling did not take God by surprise; it was predicted all along.”<sup>34</sup> The second passage is Isaiah 28:16 which says, “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, *a stone, a tested stone*, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: *Whoever believes* will not be in haste’” (emphasis mine).

Two observations from Paul’s usage of these two passages are significant to answering the initial *who* or *what* regarding the stumbling stone. First, from Paul’s use of Isaiah 28:16, one discovers that it was actually God who established this “stone of

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., s.v. “πρόσκομμα.”

<sup>34</sup>Thomas Schreiner, “Israel’s Failure to Attain Righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:3,” *TrinJ* 12 (1991): 214.

stumbling” and “rock of offense” over which the Jewish people were stumbling. The verse clearly credits the Lord God as the one who laid the stone. Second, not only did the Lord God establish the stone, he *is* the stone of offense and rock of stumbling for both houses of Israel. The Lord of hosts who was to be a sanctuary for his people becomes the stone over which they stumbled.<sup>35</sup> While Paul only used the pronoun “I” in Romans 9:32-33, by examining his usage of this term in another epistle, one can conclude that he clearly saw Jesus Christ as the stumbling stone that was laid. In 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul said, “but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews.”<sup>36</sup> Not only does this passage provide insight into the *who* of the stumbling block, it also reasserts Paul’s contention as to the deity of Christ. In Romans 9:5, Paul said, “To their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” Therefore, God the Father laid Jesus Christ the son as a stumbling stone for the Jewish people. The last initial insight one is able to glean from Paul’s usage of these two Old Testament texts is that those who believe in this stumbling stone do not stumble and are not put to shame.<sup>37</sup> In other words, Paul contrasted stumbling on the part of the Jews with belief on the part of the Gentiles. As Douglas Oss noted, the stone had a dual role, “namely, refuge for

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<sup>35</sup>Seifrid, “Romans,” 651.

<sup>36</sup>In 1 Pet 2:4-8, Peter also cited Isa 8:14 and 28:16. He also confirmed that it is Jesus who is the “living stone” who is “rejected by men” but is “chosen and precious” to God. Peter also confirmed that to stumble over Christ means to “not believe” while believing in Christ brings “honor” and “does not put to shame.” In order to ensure that all are clear as to the nature of the stumbling, Peter explained that the stumbling is because “they disobey the word.” Included in this disobedience to the word is the idea that the Jewish people did not repent and believe in the promised Messiah. For a good article comparing and contrasting Paul and Peter’s use of these two texts from Isaiah, see Douglas A Oss, “The Interpretation of The ‘Stone’ Passages by Peter and Paul: A Comparative Study,” *JETS* 32 (1989): 181-200.

<sup>37</sup>Frederic R. Howe, “Christ, the Building Stone, in Peter’s Theology,” *BSac* 157 (2000): 42. When commenting on these passages in 1 Pet 2, Howe said, “The same stone that is foundational to the building is seen as a source or even cause of stumbling.”

believers and judgment for unbelievers.”<sup>38</sup> For Paul, then, to stumble over the stumbling stone of Jesus Christ is to disbelieve in God’s Word, his purpose, and most importantly, him.

**Question 2: How did Israel stumble?** The second question that manifests itself due to the statement by Paul is *how* did Israel stumble? In other words, how was it possible that the Gentiles who were not looking for redemption from God obtained a righteous standing with him while the Jewish people, who were seeking righteousness, failed to obtain this righteous standing before the holy God? Paul answered this question by describing the way in which both groups pursued this righteousness. The Gentiles, as a people group, recognized that any righteous acts they attempted in an effort to satisfy the demands of sin would never make atonement. Thus, taking God at his Word, they obtained righteousness because they believed by faith in Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection for salvation. Schreiner was right, however, to point out that, while from an anthropomorphic view, the faith of the Gentiles in Christ brings justification, ultimately, “the point of v. 30 as a whole is that even though the Gentiles did not seek a right relation with God, nevertheless because of God’s merciful election they have exercised faith and obtained right standing before him.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, no sense of pride on the part of Gentiles should develop for many Gentiles still today seek to obtain a righteous standing with God by works rather than faith. Paul’s point in this passage was that the gospel seemed more appealing to the Gentiles than the Jews. Gentiles received the gospel by

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<sup>38</sup>Oss, “The Stone Passages by Peter and Paul,” 192.

<sup>39</sup>Schreiner, “Israel’s Failure to Attain Righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:3,” 211.

faith due to a supernatural work of God, not any innate or super spiritual reasoning on their parts.

On the other hand, Jewish individuals viewed righteousness and justification coming through Jesus Christ as folly, also due to a supernatural work of God. Instead of trusting alone in Christ's righteous work, they believed atonement for iniquities was possible through works of the law. Again, Schreiner is helpful here. He noted that pursuing the law for righteousness was itself not a bad thing. The law is good and holy. He argued that the Jewish problem was that they pursued the law by works rather than by faith:

The Jews pursued the law in order to obtain right standing with God but they failed to obtain that righteousness with reference to the law because they did not obey the law perfectly. Why is it that Israel did not obtain righteousness by pursuing the law? It is not because pursuing the law, properly understood, is evil or misguided, but because the law was pursued 'as from works' instead of by faith. To pursue the law from works is to use the law as a means of establishing one's own righteousness, but employing the law to establish one's own righteousness is a delusive enterprise precisely because no one can obey the law perfectly. To pursue the law in faith is to recognize that the law cannot be obeyed sufficiently to obtain salvation, and that salvation can only be obtained by believing in Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, the problem for the Jews was that they pursued their own righteousness before God by legalistic means rather than by faith. Paul stated the serious error of such an act in the next chapter saying, "For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom 10:3). Paul's argument was that instead of trusting in Christ's righteous work of redemption and receiving his imputed righteousness as their own, they rejected it and, even more tragically, him.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 219.



Thus, Israel stumbled by rejecting Christ and his crucifixion as having saving merit for them and instead looked at his death as the just punishment of God (Mark 14:58-64). They denied the gift of a divine living temple for a stone temple made with human hands. They denied the gift of the once for all sacrifice of Jesus as the lamb of God in order to make yearly sacrifices which never really procured remission for sin. Whereas the Jewish people should have seen Jesus as the precious stone, the cornerstone, the foundation of their salvation, he became to them a stumbling stone. As Seifrid said, “It is not the temple that is the ‘holy place,’ but rather God himself, who in his saving intervention becomes a stumbling stone to Israel.”<sup>41</sup>

**Question 3: Why did Israel stumble?** The last question that needs answering is *why* did the Jewish people stumble over Jesus? In other words, why did they not see Jesus as the precious stone? Why did they attempt to obtain a personal righteousness by works rather than faith? Why did they not believe in Jesus Christ and thus “not be put to shame” as a result? Paul does not explicitly answer these questions in Romans 9:30-33. However, Peter’s words may be of help now. In 1 Peter 2:4-8, Peter used the same texts of Isaiah and included Psalm 118:22-23 when describing a stone over which the Jewish people were stumbling.<sup>42</sup> In 1 Peter 2:8, however, Peter added the additional insight when he said, “They stumble because they disobeyed the word, as they were destined to do.”

A significant issue arises as one seeks to understand the meaning of 1 Peter

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<sup>41</sup>Seifrid, “Romans,” 651.

<sup>42</sup>Howe, “Christ, the Building Stone, in Peter’s Theology,” 35-43.

2:8, especially with regard to the last statement “as they were destined to do.” Peter used the word ἐτέθησαν which is a third person plural aorist form of the verb τίθημι meaning “appointing or predestining a particular event or situation long before it happens.”<sup>43</sup> The question from this text was whether Peter meant that God ordained disbelief in the life of an individual or that an individual is destined to stumble when he or she does not believe? If the first statement is the proper hermeneutical interpretation of Peter’s meaning, then it would provide evidence that, at least in some part, God is responsible for the individual’s stumbling. If the second interpretation is correct, then the conclusion is that Peter was simply stating that the ordained ends of those who do not obey and believe in Christ is already determined to be one of stumbling.

Many individuals argue for this second interpretation. For example, John MacArthur said, “Unbelievers receive the exact judgment their sinful choice demands—to this doom they were appointed—because they do not believe and obey the gospel. God does not actively destine people to unbelief; but He does appoint judgment (doom) on every unbeliever.”<sup>44</sup> Charles Bigg also believed that the result of disbelief was that they stumble, not that individuals were ordained to stumble and thus disobey. Speaking about Peter’s text, Bigg’s said, “The sense, therefore, is ‘they disobey, and for that reason

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<sup>43</sup>Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 2000), 107.

<sup>44</sup>John MacArthur, *1 Peter*, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 123. For a sampling of others who would agree with this sentiment regarding destined being a result of the fall rather than a cause of the fall, see J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 106-07; A.J. Panning, “Exegetical Brief: What Has Been Determined in 1 Peter 2:8?” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 98 (2001): 48-52.

stumble’; ‘because they disobey, God ordains that they shall stumble.’ Their disobedience is not ordained, the penalty of their disobedience is.”<sup>45</sup>

The idea that God would have a part in an individual’s unbelief is difficult for many to affirm. While John Calvin acknowledged that the thought of this decree was “dreadful” he also recognized that “Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree.”<sup>46</sup> Calvin’s words are insightful as one considers the immediate context of 1 Peter 2:8 and the more specific context of how this relates to the whole of Romans 9-11 and why the Jewish people stumbled over Jesus. While emotionally it may be difficult to grasp, it seems the most faithful interpretation of Paul’s (and Peter’s) argument is that God does indeed play a role in the unbelief of the Jewish people, ordaining that they would stumble and thus disbelief in Christ. Grudem’s insight into the conclusion is needed:

The RSV (with all major Eng. Translations) correctly represents this appointment to disobedience as a completed event in the past (they were destined), for that is the force of the aorist indicative here. It is impossible exegetically to say that God appointed not persons but the fact of stumbling as the penalty for disobedience (so Bigg, p.133) for the verb is plural (‘they were appointed’), and the subject must be the persons who are disbelieving (v. 7) and stumbling and disobeying (v. 8).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 133.

<sup>46</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 21(Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 3.23.7.

<sup>47</sup>Grudem, *1 Peter*, 108.

Schreiner agreed with Grudem saying, “God has not only appointed that those who disobey the word would stumble and fall. He has also determined that they would disbelieve and stumble.”<sup>48</sup>

It is important to note, however, that even though Paul and Peter believed that God ordained disbelief, it does not grant Israel immunity for their disbelief or stumbling. Instead, the Jewish community is still “responsible and guilty for failing to believe.”<sup>49</sup> These two beliefs portray a clear picture of how the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man collide and yet are both true. Furthermore, the rejection and stumbling over the stone of stumbling and rock of offense do not negate the purposes of God. In fact, it only brings to pass those things that God has ordained.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, God may be the author of the stumbling, yet the Jewish people are still responsible for their unbelief--and all the while God’s Word remains true.

### **Argument 3: A Partial Hardening Has Come upon Israel**

Paul gave a third explanation as to how to understand the connection between God’s plan for the redemption of the Jewish people and their obstinacy towards the gospel. The connection, which Paul revealed specifically in Romans 11:25, surrounded the issue of a partial hardening. Paul called this hardening a great mystery saying, “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a

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<sup>48</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 113.

<sup>49</sup>Schreiner, “Israel’s Failure to Attain Righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:3,” 211.

<sup>50</sup>John Piper, *God Laid a Stone of Stumbling*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 1990-1999* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). Lloyd-Jones called this revelation “one of the most remarkable prophecies of the Bible.”<sup>51</sup> The reason Lloyd-Jones was correct in his comments was because in the most clear and unadulterated words possible regarding God’s purpose and plan for the Jewish people and the gospel, Paul disclosed that the fact that the Jewish people were not turning to Christ was because of a specific hardening upon their hearts. Until this point, no knowledge of such an event was known.

At the time when Paul penned the epistle, many Jews were rejecting the message of the gospel, and it seemed as if God’s Word and promise of their redemption had failed. As with the other two previous arguments, Paul’s point in this revelation, however, was that God’s promises had not failed with regard to the Jewish people. Due to God’s covenant with the Jewish forefathers, “the gifts and calling are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). The amazing truth that Paul revealed at this point was that while God’s redemptive purpose for the nations was being fulfilled, Israel largely remained hostile to the gospel. This hostility stemmed from a hardening upon them. The assurance that Paul expressed, however, was that there would be a future day when God would remove this hardening from upon the Jewish people. At that point, the Jewish people will no longer stumble over the stumbling stone. Instead, many will turn to Christ in faith demonstrating that they are true children of Abraham. For Paul, the fact that his Jewish relatives according to the flesh were not turning to Christ in his day was a demonstration that God’s Word had not failed. In fact, God’s Word was sovereignly at work with regard to his plan of redemption for his entire creation. Furthermore, Paul expressed

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<sup>51</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *To God’s Glory*, 167.

numerous times in Romans 11 that the reason this hardening was upon Israel was so that the message of salvation and reconciliation in Christ would go to the Gentiles. It would be only after the “fullness of the Gentiles” occurred that the world would see the Jewish people turning to faith in Jesus in significant numbers.<sup>52</sup>

It is important to see the context of Paul’s third argument in Romans 11. Paul addressed the Gentile audience about the nature of their being grafted in as “wild olive shoots” into the “olive tree” of Abraham’s spiritual descendants (Rom 11:17). His words urged caution on behalf of the Gentiles in order that they not grow arrogant towards their inclusion into this vine or towards the branches that had been “cut off” (Rom 11:18). The temptation may be to think that God had discarded the Jewish people and had now placed his loving favor upon the Gentiles only. Thus, Paul warned his hearers by saying, “They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud but stand in awe” (Rom 11:20). In other words, Paul urged his hearers to not grow haughty by seeing themselves as somehow “superior to the former branches” because of their new position but instead be amazed at the mercy of God.<sup>53</sup> Paul made clear the notion that the Jewish people would one day believe and be saved. He said that if their rejection of Christ allowed for the reconciliation of the nations or “riches for the world” how much greater will it be for them when they believe (Rom 11:12). He reiterated this idea in Romans 11:15 when he said, “For if their rejection means the reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?”

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<sup>52</sup>These last two statements, mainly that the hardening upon Israel served the purpose of allowing salvation to go to the nations and that it would only be after the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in” that the Jewish people will turn in faith, will be the major subjects argued in chaps. 4 and 5 of this work.

<sup>53</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, 221.

**How is the *hardening a mystery*?** Part of this amazing disclosure regarding a hardening as a reason for Israel's unbelief was that God planned it in eternal past but was only now making it known publically. In an effort to quench any sense of conceitedness on the part of the believing Gentiles that might have arisen based on their acceptance of Christ while the Jewish people stumbled over him, Paul said that Israel's unbelief was part of a "mystery" of God and not any failure of the Word of God. Realizing that some would struggle with such an assertion, Paul commented that this hardening was a mystery that previously remained hidden by God from man. Now, however, God wanted Paul to reveal this information to his readers in order that they would understand the true nature of Israel's condition.

There has been much discussion over the "mystery" in Romans 11:25. First, the mystery may mean that Israel has experienced a hardening in part. Second, the mystery may mean that the hardening upon Israel is only partial and temporary.<sup>54</sup> Third, the mystery could be that all Israel will be saved, only that their salvation will come at the end of history.<sup>55</sup> While a full examination as to how the term *μυστήριον* is used throughout the Bible is outside the scope of this paper, it is important to acknowledge the idea behind its usage here in this passage.<sup>56</sup> Willard Aldrich noted that "In the ancient

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<sup>54</sup>For an example of a scholar who argues that the mystery is the partial and temporary nature of the hardening, see Murray, *Romans*, 92-93. See also Willard Maxwell Aldrich, "How Long, Lord?" *BSac* 94 (1937): 223. He understood the statement saying, "That Israel was to be blinded was no mystery (Isa 6:9), but that it was to continue only until the fullness of the Gentiles is nowhere revealed in the Old Testament. The added revelation of the end of the period of blindness is, then, they 'mystery' connected with Israel's blindness."

<sup>55</sup>For an example of a scholar who argued that the mystery is that all Israel will be saved, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 573-74.

<sup>56</sup>For a good starting article about this word, see G. W. Baker, "Mystery," in *ISBE*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.451-54.

pagan religions the term ‘mysteries’ meant the secret rites and celebrations only known to, and practiced by, those who had been initiated.”<sup>57</sup> He went on to note, “The Old Testament had no ‘mysteries’ of this type. God had His mysteries, but what was revealed was revealed for all (Deut 29:29).”<sup>58</sup>

In the New Testament, writers used the term and the most common understanding of the word meant “a divine truth once hidden, but now revealed in the gospel.”<sup>59</sup> For the purposes of this research, Romans 16:25 is the only other time Paul used this term in Romans. In this passage, he said, “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages” (Rom 16:25). According to this passage, the mystery, which previously was hidden, was that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Again, as Aldrich noted, the mystery was “the whole gospel, God’s world embracing purpose of redemption through Christ.”<sup>60</sup> This definition of mystery is consistent with his “gospel” and “the preaching of Christ Jesus” stated in Romans 16:25. In addition, Romans 16:26 tells readers that while the mystery was kept secret for long ages, it has “now been disclosed” in order to “bring about the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26).

Turning back to the mystery of Romans 11:25 and the three options mentioned as ways to understand what exactly Paul revealed that was previously unknown, it seems

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<sup>57</sup>Aldrich, “How Long, Lord?” 219.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 220.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.



as though it is not necessary to argue for one position against the other two. Instead, all three together form a cohesive thought that would be part of a mystery. Thus, the mystery for Paul was that a hardening has come upon Israel, albeit temporarily while Gentiles are being grafted in, and upon its removal, all Israel will be saved.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, instead of seeing the mystery as either or, it is possible to argue that the mystery encompasses all that God is doing in regards to the salvation of both the Jewish people and the Gentiles.<sup>62</sup>

In both of Paul's uses in Romans, μυστήριον expressed "something that people could not possibly know of themselves, but which has now been revealed to them. It was not incomprehensible, not 'mysterious' in our sense of the term; it was something beyond us to discover, though we can understand it all right when God has made it know to us."<sup>63</sup> Thus, the connection of "the mystery" to the "partial hardening" of Romans 11:25 is that this hardening, its future removal, and the subsequent results of its removal was something hidden at one time in the mind and council of God alone but now has been made known. While this information was previously hidden, it has been revealed now in order to thwart any conceitedness on the part of any man and instead bring a sense of "awe" to all (Rom 11:20).

**When did the hardening occur?** Paul revealed as a previously hidden mystery that "a partial hardening had come upon Israel" (Rom 11:25). What he did not

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<sup>61</sup>N. Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>62</sup>MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, 127; Schreiner, *Romans*, 614.

<sup>63</sup>Leon Morris, *Romans, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 419.

reveal in this passage was at what point the hardening happened. Little research has actually occurred that has considered a serious answer to this question. As Sibley noted, “It is often assumed that the period of Israel’s spiritual blindness and hardness towards the gospel is coeval with the “times of the Gentiles,” spoken of by Jesus and Paul. This period of time seems to begin late in the first century, or certainly by the early second century.”<sup>64</sup> He argued, however, that few have really questioned whether this is the correct timing of the hardening.

When one examines Israel’s history throughout the Hebrew Bible, it seems as if the Jewish people constantly disobeyed the Lord in every period of their existence. They forsook his ways and commandments, worshipped the gods of the nations, and committed their abominations such as child sacrifices (Ps 106:34-39).<sup>65</sup> Even though they rejected him, the Lord sent prophets calling the people to repent. When repentance did not occur, the Lord sent them into exile.

One prophet in particular mentioned Israel’s blindness and subsequent hardness towards God’s revelation. In Isaiah 6:9-10, the prophet is told to go to the people who “keep on hearing but do not understand; keep on seeing but do not perceive” in order to “make the heart of this people dull and their eyes heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.” From this command, it would seem as if the hardening started at this

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<sup>64</sup>Jim Sibley, ““Hear O Israel’: Spiritual Obduracy and the Jewish People” (paper presented at the 51<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA, 17-19 November 1999), 4.

<sup>65</sup>Ps 106:34-39 says, “They did not destroy the peoples, as the Lord commanded them, but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood. Thus, they became unclean by their acts, and played the whore in their deeds.”

point in Israel's history. This logic was why Sibley placed the hardening as having signs as coming to pass "prior to the Babylonian Captivity."<sup>66</sup> Even if this was not the actual initiation of the hardening upon Israel, it certainly is the clearest articulation of the act and purpose of the divine hardening. God's intention for the prophet was that he would speak and yet Israel would not be able to repent and believe because of an outside force. Later in the New Testament, Jesus referenced this passage when explaining why he spoke in parables (Matt 13:10-17) and why even though he did many signs, the Jewish community would not believe in him (John 12:37-40).

**The connection of *partial* to *hardening*.** Paul described the hardening that had come upon Israel as *partial*. Three likely interpretations have been suggested for understanding the use of *partial*. First, the word may carry the idea that every Jewish person has been partially, but not totally, hardened to the claims of the gospel. In this case, Jewish people could see elements of truth in the gospel but would not be able to comprehend it fully. Thus, some Jewish individuals would come to faith while others would not. Lloyd-Jones adamantly argued that this first position has to be "rejected completely."<sup>67</sup> He said, "To reject the Messiah means 'a total blindness' and that was the charge that our Lord so constantly brought against the Pharisees. They claimed they had light, were teachers of the people and experts in the Law, but the trouble was that they were absolutely ignorant."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, if this interpretation is correct, there seems to

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<sup>66</sup>Sibley, "'Hear O Israel,'" 6.

<sup>67</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *To God's Glory*, 178.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

be nothing new or insightful that would require Paul to explain their situation as a “mystery.”

A second option for interpreting the meaning of *partial* would be that most, but not all, of the Jewish people have been hardened. The partial nature would be that there are some individuals whose hearts are not callused or hardened to the gospel. Murray advocated this position. He said that *partial* “does not refer to the degree of hardening but to the fact that not all were hardened.”<sup>69</sup> He expounded his thoughts, saying “the hardening of Israel is partial not total” as well as “temporary and not final.”<sup>70</sup> John Gill also argued for this second position:

Not that it was only in some measure or some degree, for it was total, they were darkness itself, and had no spiritual and evangelic light at all on whom it fell; but that this blindness was not general with respect to persons, there were some few, a seed, a remnant, that were delivered from it, though the far greater part of the nation were involved in it, and continue in it to this day.<sup>71</sup>

Paul’s argument about a remnant supports this position. In speaking about the great number of Jewish persons who were not believing, Paul referenced the story of Elijah and the men whom God had kept from giving themselves to Baal (Rom 11:4). Paul made the connection that just as God kept a believing remnant in that day, even in Paul’s day there were some Jewish individuals who were trusting in Christ. He said, “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Rom 11:5). His argument was that while the majority of the Jewish people have been hardened, God has extended

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<sup>69</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 92.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>John Gill, *Romans 11:25*, in *The John Gill Collected Writings* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1999). He continued saying they would remain in this partial hardening “until the fullness of the Gentiles” had come in. This argument is similar to the position of MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, 127.

grace that brings about regeneration and salvation to a small majority of the Jewish people, of which Paul was an example. Thus, the partial hardening was upon the majority of, but not on every, Jewish person.

The third option, advocated by Lloyd-Jones, understands partial to be “referring to length of time: not to the intensity of the blindness but to its duration.”<sup>72</sup> The reason Lloyd-Jones argued for this interpretation was because of Paul’s use of “until” later in the same verse. For Lloyd-Jones, partial in regards to the hardening means “The blindness is not permanent, it is not everlasting; it is a temporary blindness.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, the mystery that Paul revealed was that while the Jews rejected Jesus, it was only for a time. It was *partial*, not final, in its duration. The day whereby Jews turn to Christ in repentance would come.

Instead of seeing the last positions as competitors, Paul’s argument should be understood by putting the two interpretations together. Thus, the best understanding of *partial* from the text, in that it takes into consideration the whole of the passage, is that the hardening affects the majority of, but not every, Jewish person. As well, the hardening is not permanent but only temporary on those who have been hardened. The fact that some Jews come to faith allows for the first interpretation. Paul’s use of the term “until” regarding the hardening in connection with the “fullness of the Gentiles” coming to faith in the passage implies the temporariness of the partial hardening on the Jews allowing for the second.

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<sup>72</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *To God’s Glory*, 178.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

## Conclusion

Paul made three specific arguments over the course of Romans 9-11 regarding the promises of God and the rejection by the Jewish people of Jesus as the Messiah. For Paul, the fact that his Jewish kindred were rejecting the revelation of the gospel regarding the claims about Jesus, albeit heartbreaking, did not demonstrate a failure of God to keep his Word and fulfill his promises that he made in covenant with Israel. In fact, Paul went as far as to argue that the fact that the Jewish people were rejecting Jesus did not catch God off guard or make him powerless. Instead, for Paul, the rejection was due to a partial hardening that had come upon Israel. While God had always ordained this hardening, it was indeed a mystery hidden from revelation until now. In order that the Gentiles not grow arrogant about their own abilities or goodness in regards to salvation or even worse conclude that God's Word was powerless to save, Paul revealed that this rejection of Jesus on the part of Israel was part of God's glorious plan.

Due to this hardening, the Jewish people stumbled over the stone that God had laid as the cornerstone. Even though they were stumbling, as God had ordained and as they were destined to do, Paul reminded his readers that this hardening had not affected every Jewish person. Some Jewish individuals were not stumbling over the rock of offense but instead believed in Christ. Paul himself was one such individual associated with this remnant. For those Jewish individuals who were trusting in Christ as their Messiah, they proved to be true descendants of Abraham. This connection, however, was not because of birth or lineage but because of faith that led to a declaration of righteousness of God on their behalf.

In the end, God's Word proved true in two ways. First, he was fulfilling his promises regarding the redemption of not only Israel but also of the nations. Not only did some Jewish individuals believe but many Gentiles were turning to God in repentance and faith as well. Furthermore, God's Word proved true in that many Jewish people were stumbling over the rock of offense, which God had predestined beforehand that they would. Therefore, in Paul's mind, Romans 9-11 demonstrated powerfully that God's Word has not failed. Instead, it was actively at work accomplishing the very purposes for which he willed it to accomplish.

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## CHAPTER 3

### THE INITIATOR OF ISRAEL'S HARDENING

The previous chapter presented Paul's three lines of reasoning that demonstrated that God's Word had not failed even though the Jewish people largely rejected Jesus as their Messiah. He linked this rejection of Jesus by the Jews to the partial hardening that had come upon them. The Jewish people did not believe because their hearts were hard and calloused towards Jesus and the gospel. At this point, it is significant to consider culpability for this hardening. Was the partial hardening upon the Jewish people a result of their own rejection of the miraculous accounts and teachings of Jesus? Did they reject the claims regarding his death and resurrection to the extent that their hearts became as stone not allowing them to believe? Conversely, was the partial hardening that has hindered the majority of Jewish people from believing in Jesus divine in its origins? More to the point, did God harden the hearts of the Jewish people so that they would not believe the gospel? If so, was this hardening because the Jewish people first hardened their own hearts towards Jesus and this hardening is just the natural response by God to their sinful acts? On the other hand, did God ordain the hardening to happen which in turn resulted in the majority of the Jewish community being unable to believe?

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that according to Romans 11:25 the partial hardening that currently resides upon the people of Israel is due to a supernatural work of God. This hardening by God is not a judicial hardening because of



unbelief but is rather the reason for the unbelief by Israel. In an effort to defend this position, this chapter will examine three topics. First, the chapter will arrive at a working definition for the idea of hardening. Second, the chapter will examine passages in both the Old and New Testaments to distinguish between those texts that indicate that man is responsible for his own hardening from those that indicate that God is responsible for man's hardness of heart. Last, the chapter will examine specifically the hardening theme in Romans 9 and 11 showing that God is responsible for the *hardening* in the phrase, "a partial hardening has come upon Israel." The following statement from Lloyd-Jones is worthy of reflection and serves as a cautionary warning about the study of the hardening of an individual's heart towards God:

Now this is, of course, where we come to the most difficult doctrine which we must approach with fear and trembling because we would never deal with it, were it not that it is in the Scriptures. Let us be careful that we do not allow human wisdom and understanding to intrude itself in any shape or form. There are those who dislike this doctrine and who reject it and there are others who react against them and are almost proud of it. But both are equally wrong. This is a doctrine that ought to fill us all with a sense of awe and of astonishment. Any partisan spirit that comes in on any side with regard to it, makes it clear that people do not realize that they are dealing with the inscrutable mind and purpose of the everlasting God.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Meaning of Hardening**

The word Paul used in Romans 11:25 to express *hardening* was πώρωσις.

Upon examination, only two authors used this specific root word in the New Testament.

Paul used this variation twice in his epistles while the word is found only once in the

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Lloyd-Jones, *To God's Glory: Exposition of Romans 11* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 35-36.

Gospel of Mark.<sup>2</sup> While many English translations, including the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, New International Version, and Revised Standard Version translated πώρωσις with the word “hardening,” the King James Version translated it as “blindness.” With either English word, one may understand the meaning of the term to be a “state or condition of complete lack of understanding, dullness, insensibility, obstinacy.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, πώρωσις is associated with other words such as σκληρός meaning “hard or rough” and παχυνω meaning “make insensitive.”<sup>4</sup> Even more helpful is Barclay’s understanding of the word. He thought the best illustration was that of a callus. Speaking about the nature of a callus, he said, “When a callus grows on any part of the body that part loses feeling. It becomes insensitive.”<sup>5</sup> While calluses are usually on the outside of the body, a symbolic callus could form on the heart. In a spiritual sense, if the heart was hardened or callused, it would lose feeling and become insensitive to the promptings and leadings of the Lord. In the context of Romans 11, part of Paul’s mystery was that Israel has had a hardening

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<sup>2</sup>See Mark 3:5, Rom 11:25 and Eph 4:18. In Mark 3:5, the text tells the reader that Jesus looked around at the Pharisees with anger and was grieved because of “their hardness of heart.” Their hardness of heart not only blinded them from seeing the glory of Christ, it also made them hardened to the need of this one whose hand was deformed. Instead of rejoicing with the crippled man in the possibility that one might be able to bring restoration to this individual, their hard hearts drove them to concern themselves only with whether Jesus would break the Sabbath by healing the individual. Speaking about this blindness on the part of the Pharisees, R. Alan Cole commented, “All they saw was a possible ground of accusation against Jesus if He took advantage of this Sabbath encounter to heal. By such moral blindness, they stood self-condemned, even before a word was spoken.” R. Alan Cole, *Mark*, TNTC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1989), 131.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Bauer, BAGD, s.v., “πώρωσις.”

<sup>4</sup>Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), s.v. “Hard, Hardened,” “σκληρός,” by U. Becker.

<sup>5</sup>William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 146.

or callus develop that has hindered them from seeing or being spiritually sensitive and impacted by the truth regarding Christ. John Gill's words about the extent and result of this blindness are timeless and worthy of reflection:

This "blindness" designs their unbelief, the hardness of their hearts, and darkness of their understandings with respect to God himself, whom they knew not in Christ; not as the Father of Christ; nor even the perfections of his nature, particularly his righteousness; which was the reason of their setting up their own righteousness, and of their non-submission to the righteousness of Christ: they were blind as to the Messiah; they knew him not, when he came; they saw no beauty and comeliness in him; could not discern the characters of him in Jesus, though they were so manifest; and rejected him notwithstanding the clear evidence of his ministry and miracles. They were in the dark about the sense of the prophecies of the Old Testament; a veil was upon their hearts when they read them, so that they understood them not, and could not see their accomplishment in Christ; they were even ignorant of the law, the spiritual nature, true use, and right end and scope of it; and it is no wonder that the Gospel should be hidden from them.<sup>6</sup>

As Gill so powerfully expressed, the result of such a condition of callousness in the heart is the lack of faith, which if not removed, leads to the rejection of Christ. Jonathan Edwards echoed a similar sentiment saying, "Now, by a *hard* heart is plainly meant an *unaffected* heart, or a heart not easy to be moved with virtuous affections, like a stone, insensible, stupid, unmoved, and hard to be impressed. Hence the hard heart is called a *stony heart*, and is opposed to a *heart of flesh*, that has feeling, and is sensibly touched and moved."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>John Gill, *Romans 11:25*, in *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1999). Note that Gill said because of their blindness, they were not able to see the Messiah. He did not say that because they did not see Jesus as the Messiah, they were blinded. This is additional evidence supporting the belief that the hardening precipitated rejection, rather than rejection bringing upon a state of hardness.

<sup>7</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 1:243.

In Ephesians 4:18, when speaking about Gentile unbelievers, Paul said, “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to ‘their hardness of heart.’” The result of the hardness in the heart is a failure to see the beauty and majesty of Jesus the savior. Lloyd-Jones’ explanation of a spiritually hardened heart as it relates to this passage by Paul is powerful:

He has been dealing more with the intellect under the terms *understanding darkened*, and *ignorance that is in them*, but here he says that as we track the trouble further we shall discover that the ignorance that is in people and which controls them is ultimately due to the fact that a hardening process has taken place in the very depths of their heart, and because of this thickening and hardening and callosity there is an absence of feeling; and the result of the absence of feeling is that men are no longer susceptible to the truth. Not only do they not believe, but they are no longer susceptible to truth, for their hearts are hard.<sup>8</sup>

A hard heart “darkens” or “blinds” men from seeing truth. In place of responding by faith to the offer of salvation in Jesus, hardened people remain blinded to the atoning work of Christ as efficacious and at the same time seek to earn a righteousness standing on their own merits. Therefore, a definition of hardening may be callousness over one’s heart or mind that hinders the mental attitudes and heart’s affections from responding in repentance, faith, and obedience towards God.

### **Culpability for Hardening in the Bible**

Since hardening is associated with an inability to respond to the commands of God, it is now vital to determine who triggered this condition. In the Bible, different persons are responsible for the hardening depending on the situation. Matthew Poole

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<sup>8</sup>Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 66-67.

said, “Besides natural hardness, which is in all men, and is hereditary to them; and habitual hardness, which is contracted by a custom in sin, as a path is hardened by the continual trampling of passengers; there is judicial or judiciary hardness, which is inflicted by God as a punishment.”<sup>9</sup> By Poole’s assessment, not counting the hardness that is common to all sinners, the hardening that occurs upon an individual’s heart is either a result of man’s own rejection of spiritual things or is a result of God’s punishment upon a person.<sup>10</sup> So for Poole, either a man’s heart grows harder as he continues to reject Christ or God hardens his heart because he continues to reject Christ. Are these the only two options though when considering hardening? Is it possible that God hardens a man’s heart before he rejects Christ or with the intent to ensure that he will reject Christ?

As previously stated, the question for this chapter is whether God or man is responsible for the hardening that has come upon Israel. Furthermore, if the hardening is from God, is the act purely retributive? Does hardening always occur as judgment for sin? The following paragraphs will seek to show that the hardening upon Israel is indeed from God but that it does not have judgment or punishment as its purpose. In an effort to help answer questions that develop from a close reading of passages in Romans 9-11 that speak about hardening, the following section will examine passages from both the Old

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<sup>9</sup>Matthew Poole, “Romans 9:18,” in *Poole’s Commentary*, vol. 3, *The Encyclopedia Puritannica Project* [CD-ROM] (Bealeton, VA: Encyclopedia Puritannica Project, 2005), vol. 2.

<sup>10</sup> While the Bible most often noted that man or God was responsible for the hardening, the Bible also revealed a few passages that indicate that Satan too is capable of hardening an individual’s heart. For example, while 2 Cor 4:4 does not use hardening, it used blinded, which as mentioned before, is closely related and at times interchanged with hardening in some English texts. What this text demonstrates is that neither God nor man is the cause of a heart that does not respond to the gospel but rather “the god of this age.” A simpler passage is 1 John 2:11 which says that “darkness” has blinded a person’s eyes when he does not love his brother and walk in truth.

and New Testaments where hardening of the heart was mentioned. The goal of this section is to see first, if a pattern develops regarding when a man's heart is hardened and second, to determine who hardened it and why it was hardened.

### **Passages Where Man Is the Cause**

In the New Testament, the word group often translated “harden” or some variation is at times associated with an act that a person commits.<sup>11</sup> For example, there are warnings to individuals to learn from the example of the Jewish people in the Old Testament and to “not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7). Again, in Romans 2:5, Paul warned his readers “because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.” Because of passages like these, there is merit in affirming that, at least in some instances, the hardening of a heart is a man-induced action. Therefore, the following is a list of passages where the proper conclusion is that man is responsible for hardening his own heart toward either God, the word of God, or obeying what God has commanded.<sup>12</sup>

1. Exodus 8:15. “But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, *he hardened his heart* and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.”
2. Exodus 8:32. “But *Pharaoh hardened his heart* this time also, and did not let the people go.”
3. Exodus 9:34. “But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, *he sinned yet again and hardened his heart*, he and his servants.”
4. Deuteronomy 15:7. “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, *you shall not harden your heart* or shut your hand against your poor brother.”

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<sup>11</sup>Other variations included hardened, hardening, and hardness.

<sup>12</sup>Left out of this list are passages in Rom 9-11 that deal with hardening. They will be dealt with separately in subsequent pages. Additionally, I have included the italics in these passages to emphasize the person doing the hardening.

5. 1 Samuel 6:6. "Why should you *harden your hearts* as the Egyptians and Pharaoh *hardened their hearts*? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away, and they departed?"
6. 2 Chronicles 36:13. "He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. *He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart* against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel."
7. Job 9:4. "He is wise in heart and mighty in strength; who has *hardened himself* against him, and succeeded?"
8. Psalm 95:8. "*do not harden your hearts*, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness"
9. Proverbs 28:14. "Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but *whoever hardens his heart* will fall into calamity."
10. Zechariah 7:11-12. "But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. *They made their hearts diamond-hard* lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts."
11. Hebrews 3:8. "*do not harden your hearts* as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness"
12. Hebrews 3:15. "As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, *do not harden your hearts* as in the rebellion'."
13. Hebrews 4:7. "again he appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, *do not harden your hearts*'."

A couple of issues from these passages deserve acknowledgement regarding the nature of hardening. First, these passages indicate that man does have some role in hardening his heart. Not only did some of these texts state that a person hardened his own heart (i.e., Pharaoh), the warning passages in Hebrews also implied that an individual has control, at least in some circumstances, over the condition of his heart. Second, the Lord knew that some individuals would harden their hearts (Exod 8:15). Third, the hardening of one's heart is a sinful action (Exod 9:34).

What is not conclusive from these passages, however, is whether an individual's hardening of his heart is of his own initiative or whether it is a result of the Lord doing a divine work upon him. For example, while Exodus 8:15 stated that Pharaoh hardened his heart, it did not say whether this hardening is of his own free will apart from God or if this act is the fulfillment of something that God first ordained, and Pharaoh is simply fulfilling the divine plan.<sup>13</sup> This type of statement may make some individuals uncomfortable because as stated, hardening one's heart toward God is a sin.

Furthermore, the question could be asked "Why would God cause someone to resist His will and then hold that person accountable for the sin He promoted?"<sup>14</sup> The idea that God is the reason an individual hardens his own heart may contradict a passage like James 1:13 which says that God is not tempted by sin nor tempts anyone to sin. Thus, if one believes that God hardens a person's heart, does this make God the author of sin?

### **Passages Where God Is the Cause**

As demonstrated above, there are texts that imply that man is the cause of the hardening upon his own heart. There are many texts, however, where the cause of the hardening is not attributed to the individual but rather to an outside force. In the great majority of these types of texts, the author clearly indicated that the outside force is God himself and that he is the one who has caused a hardening upon an individual. The

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<sup>13</sup>Consider Ezra 1:1. Ezra revealed that Cyrus, king of Persia, made a proclamation regarding the rebuilding of the temple of God. The text also revealed that this proclamation was because "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia." Therefore, while it may seem like Cyrus sent the Jewish people back, it was because the Lord worked in his heart to bring this event to pass. The same argument can be made regarding Pharaoh, only in reverse. Just as God stirs hearts for good, he can also stir hearts to accomplish his purpose even through evil means (Rom 9:18). Consider also Prov 21:1, which says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."

<sup>14</sup>Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," *BSac* 153 (1996): 410.



following list includes those passages where it is clear to conclude that God is the agent that brought about the hardening of an individual's heart.<sup>15</sup>

1. Exodus 4:21. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But *I will harden his heart*, so that he will not let the people go'."
2. Exodus 7:3. "But *I will harden Pharaoh's heart*, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt"
3. Exodus 9:12. "But *the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh*, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken to Moses."
4. Exodus 10:1. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh, for *I have hardened his heart* and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them'"
5. Exodus 10:20. "But *the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart*, and he did not let the people of Israel go."
6. Exodus 10:27. "But *the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart*, and he would not let them go."
7. Exodus 11:10. "Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and *the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart*, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land."
8. Exodus 14:4. "'And *I will harden Pharaoh's heart*, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.' And they did so."
9. Exodus 14:8. "And *the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh* king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly."
10. Exodus 14:17. "And *I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians* so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen."
11. Deuteronomy 2:30. "But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for *the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate*, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day."

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<sup>15</sup>As stated with the previous list regarding man being the cause of his own hardening, those passages in Rom 9-11 that speak of hardening are not included in this list but will be addressed separately in the subsequent pages.

12. Joshua 11:20. “For it was *the Lord’s doing to harden their hearts* that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses.”
13. Isaiah 63:17. “O Lord, why do *you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart*, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.”

Based on these passages, it seems like there is evidence to conclude God brought to pass hardening in the hearts of all types of people and that the cause was not always punitive. This idea, however, causes many to grow uncomfortable to the point that textual gymnastics are performed in order to conclude that God only hardened in response to man’s initial sin or self hardening. Chisholm noted, “In an effort to preserve human moral responsibility and to avoid the conclusion that God would override the human will or manipulate free moral agents like puppets, some argue that the objects of divine hardening first hardened themselves.”<sup>16</sup> One such example is S. R. Driver. He suggested that hardening is just a Hebrew idiom and should be understood “in so far as he [Pharaoh] hardened himself...But even supposing that the passages mean more than this, we must remember that, especially in His dealings with moral agents, God cannot be properly thought of as acting arbitrarily; He only hardens those who begin by hardening themselves.”<sup>17</sup>

This idea goes back to the issue of God and sin. In arguing that God is merely hardening an already hardened heart, no charge of sin can be made against him. While this notion might protect God from any charge of wrongdoing, nothing in these passages gives evidence that the hardening is not caused first by God. In the context of Exodus,

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<sup>16</sup>Chisholm, “Divine Hardening in the Old Testament,” 410.

<sup>17</sup>S.R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 53.

God revealed to Moses that he was hardening Pharaoh's heart so that he would not concede to Moses' request and that the Lord would display his glory and power to both Israel and the nations in the setting free of this covenant people (Exod 14:4).<sup>18</sup> There is nothing in the text that allows one to conclude convincingly that God merely hardened Pharaoh's heart because Pharaoh had already hardened his heart towards God. In fact, God told Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart even before Pharaoh knew of the Lord. Consider this situation: when Moses went to declare God's word to Pharaoh, the leader replied, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go" (Exod 5:2). It would seem the hardening Pharaoh experienced preceded any self-hardening towards God that would have brought about God's punishment via hardening.

While some reject the idea of God being responsible, in some fashion, for an act that is sinful, there are clear examples in the Bible where the text states that God is the author of the action which itself is sinful and yet that God is immune from the accusation of sin. The way some theologians have addressed this dilemma is by concluding that God has a revealed will and a secret will.<sup>19</sup> The revealed will is that which God has clearly made known to man with regard to obedience and righteousness. The secret will, however, is where God works in the lives of men, sometimes through the act of sin, to bring about his eternal purpose. The three classic examples include God's explanation

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<sup>18</sup>This goal of the display of his glory seemed to be accomplished as revealed by the lips of Rahab. In Josh 2:8-11, Rahab confessed to the Israelite spies that the people of Jericho were fearful of the them because they had heard of the Lord's mighty power in drying out the Red Sea and sending destruction upon the rulers with whom Israel interacted.

<sup>19</sup> For another good discussion about the secret and revealed will of God, see John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspective on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 107-31.

regarding Joseph being sold into slavery (Gen 45:4-8 and 50:20), God putting a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets in order to entice Ahab (1 Kgs 22:20-23), and Jesus being crucified by sinful men (Isa 53:10 and Acts 2:23). Edwards spoke specifically about this idea of a revealed and secret will:

We and they know it was God's secret will, that Abraham should not sacrifice his son Isaac; but yet his command was, that he should do it. We know that God willed, that Pharaoh's heart should be hardened; and yet that the hardness of his heart was sin. We know that God willed the Egyptians should hate God's people . . . . We know that it was God's will, that Absalom should lie with David's wives . . . . We know that God willed that Jeroboam and the ten tribes should rebel. The same may be said of the plunder of the Babylonians; and other instances might be given. The Scripture plainly tells us, that God wills to harden some men . . . . That he willed that Christ should be killed by men, etc.<sup>20</sup>

It needs noting that there are some passages in the Bible where the author of the hardening is either not explicitly revealed or where it is difficult to determine the person responsible for the hardening. For example, there are texts where the context does not say that the individual hardened his own but neither does it indicate conclusively who is causing the hardening. Exodus 7:13 says, "Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said." From the context, one cannot determine definitively who caused the hardening, only that the individual's heart was hardened as God had revealed previously. Although no person was revealed specifically as the one who caused the hardening, many of the other passages in the Exodus account regarding Pharaoh have hardening in the passive tense. That fact implies that the hardening is caused by an outside force upon the individual.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the Divine Decrees," in *Miscellaneous Remarks, The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 2:526-27.

<sup>21</sup>Other passages like this example where it is inconclusive as to the author of the hardening include Exod 7:14, 7:22, 8:19, 9:7, 9:35, Dan 5:20, Mark 6:52, 8:17, 2 Cor 3:14, and Heb 3:13.

### **Passages in Romans Dealing with the Hardening by God**

What the previous section revealed is that while the Bible clearly gives examples of men hardening their hearts, there is also sufficient evidence to argue that God has a role in, and that at times he actually initiates, the hardening of hearts in order that his purposes would be accomplished. In this section, having established that in some instances, God hardened an individual, the argument will be advanced that the hardening of Israel is of a divine nature and that God hardened this people before they hardened themselves or because they did something that deserved hardening. The following sections will show that three times in Romans 9 and 11 Paul saw the hardening upon Israel as something God brought to pass. Each section will show that Paul believed that Israel did not respond to the gospel because God hardened them, not that they were hardened by God because they did not believe in the gospel.

#### **Romans 9:18**

The first instance of hardening Paul mentioned in his discourse about Israel was Romans 9:18. In this passage he said, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” This verse is a summary statement in response to any questions a reader may have had concerning God’s right to elect unconditionally as demonstrated with Jacob and Esau. Paul attempted to answer preemptively the most obvious objection that would be raised by the hearers; mainly, does electing and loving someone while hating another before either “had done neither good nor bad” make God unjust (Rom 9:11-13).

This passage is difficult for many to digest. For example, speaking about this passage, Leon Morris said, “Let us notice first that neither here nor anywhere else is God

said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself.”<sup>22</sup> The weakness of this statement was that the very passage seemed to indicate that God hardens whomever he desires regardless of any needed act by the individual. It seems like the clearest and most straightforward understanding of Romans 9:18 is that Paul believed whether someone is saved or hardened was a result of God’s nonnegotiable eternal will. Schreiner, commenting on this passage, said, “Thus both mercy and hardening depend wholly on his will (v. 18), and the sovereign freedom of God is heralded in a most stunning way.”<sup>23</sup> Conferring with Schreiner, Piper noted the connection between the source of the hardening and the source of mercy:

So the answer to our first question is that the objection in verse 14 rose from Paul’s teaching of unconditional election – that God chooses whom he will graciously save before we are born or have done anything good or evil. Our election to eternal life is not based on what we choose or what we do. It is based on God alone. Which person chooses to trust Christ and be saved, and which one chooses to reject Christ and be lost, is finally God’s choice.<sup>24</sup>

According to the last sentence, Piper clearly argued that an individual’s hardness of heart towards the gospel is of God. This conclusion concurs with Romans 9:18 in that for God to harden whomever he wills there must be no demands for it to occur. In other words, just as mercy, which is demonstrated in the form of unconditional election, is based on God’s free choosing rather than any foreseen faith on the part of the unregenerate person or a response to anything that this lost person does, the ultimate

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<sup>22</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 361.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 510.

<sup>24</sup>John Piper, *The Freedom and Justice of God in Unconditional Election*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

hardening of an individual is due to God's will independent of that person's lack of faith or sinful acts. Again, Piper is helpful at this point:

There are two sides to God's choosing, and verse 18 picks that up well: 'He has mercy on whom He wills, and He hardens whom He wills.' If the mercy is ultimately unconditional, the hardening is ultimately unconditional. That's what verse 18 adds, simply repeating what verse 11 had said, 'Before they were born or had done anything good or evil,' God chose who would be the beneficiary of his mercy and who would not. Ultimately, God does not save or condemn because of constraints laid on him by the willing or doing of man. God is free. He acts according to his own wise purposes to uphold and display the fullness of his glory.<sup>25</sup>

Piper also argued that, "There are at least seven reasons for thinking he meant: God is free in hardening whom he hardens and does not base his decision who to harden on anything a person does."<sup>26</sup>

1. That is what the words most naturally mean.
2. The exact parallel with mercy shows that the act of God in hardening is as unconditional as the act of God in having mercy. So if we believe that God's showing mercy is unconditional, the most natural way to take the parallel is that the hardening is unconditional.
3. This is in fact exactly what Paul infers from God's words in verse 15, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.' Paul draws out of this in verse 16, 'So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.' If that is what 'I have mercy on whom I have mercy' means, then it is probably what 'I harden whom I harden' means, namely, 'It depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who hardens.'
4. The parallel with Jacob and Esau shows that mercy and hardening are unconditional . . . . In other words, the context demands that Paul address not just the love and mercy part of God's sovereignty but also the hate and hardening part of God's sovereignty. The parallel with Jacob and Esau in verse 13 shows that the hardening and the mercy are unconditional.

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<sup>25</sup>John Piper, *The Fame of His Name and the Freedom of Mercy*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

<sup>26</sup>John Piper, *The Hardening of Pharaoh and the Hope of the World*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

5. The objection and Paul's answer to it in verse 19 show that Paul did not deal with God's sovereignty the way most people deal with it today. Paul raises the objection: 'You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' Now at this point most people today say, God finds fault because his hardening is a response to our prior self-hardening. Let me say this calmly and firmly: That is exactly the opposite of what Romans 9:18 teaches. . . . Paul could have so easily removed the objection of verse 19 that way, and he did not! How easily Paul could have answered the objection with all the answers of modern man! And he didn't. Because they are the wrong answer.
6. Verse 21 shows that Paul sees mercy and hardening as unconditional because he speaks of the objects of mercy and hardening as coming from the same lump of clay . . . . The stress is that it was not the nature of the clay that determined what God would do with it. It was the free and wise and sovereign will of the potter. He has mercy on whom he wills and he hardens whom he wills – from the same lump of clay.
7. In Romans 11:7 . . . the decisive issue in who is hardened and who is not is election, not some prior willing or running on our part, but God who elects.

It is with this understanding of hardening that one must read Paul's reference to Pharaoh in Romans 9:17. Paul used this story in Exodus in Romans 9 because it is a great example of this freedom by God to harden as he deems best for his glory.

It is impossible for anyone who reads the Exodus account with a proper biblical hermeneutic to conclude anything other than that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in some fashion. A point of contention occurs, however, when the question seeks to determine the nature of this hardening by God. This discussion is not new. Beale pointed out that during the Reformation period, the various minds of the time struggled over understanding who was the primary cause of hardening. He said, "In trying to refute Erasmus' claim that Pharaoh first hardened his heart freely apart from divine influence, Luther attempts to argue that God was the ultimate cause. John Calvin agreed with

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Luther, but Sebastian Castellio and Jabob Arminius agreed with Erasmus.<sup>27</sup>

Still today, there is no agreement on the author of Pharaoh's hardening. There are some scholars, like Erasmus and those who followed his interpretation, who argue that this hardening of Pharaoh was in response to his denials of Moses' requests. Regarding Pharaoh, Driver stated that he was, "from the first a self-willed, obstinate man who persistently hardens himself against God, and resists all warnings: God thus hardens him only because he first hardened himself."<sup>28</sup> Walter Kaiser agreed with Driver in commenting that, "Pharaoh first hardened his own heart and Yahweh did not make Pharaoh's heart hard until the sixth plague."<sup>29</sup> Again, John Stott argued, "Neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself. That Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and refused to humble himself is made plain in the story. So God's hardening of him was a judicial act, abandoning him to his own stubbornness."<sup>30</sup> Morris agreed saying to, "let us notice first that neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself. We must bear in mind that, while God repeatedly is said to have hardened Pharaoh . . . it is also true that Pharaoh is repeatedly said to have hardened himself . . . . God's hardening follows on what Pharaoh himself did. His hardening always presupposes sin and is always part of the punishment of sin."<sup>31</sup> As Morris pointed out, one usually arrives at this

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<sup>27</sup>G. K. Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9," *TrinJ* 5 (1984): 129.

<sup>28</sup>Driver, *Exodus*, 54.

<sup>29</sup>Walter Kaiser, *Towards Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 255.

<sup>30</sup>John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 269.

<sup>31</sup>Morris, *Romans*, 361.

conclusion regarding God's response to Pharaoh's self-hardening based on the sequence of revelation. In Exodus 8:15, 32, and 9:34, the Bible says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Then, in Exodus 9:12, 35, 10:1, 20, and 14:18, the Bible says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. The conclusion reached is that because it is argued by some that Pharaoh first hardened his own heart and would not let the people of Israel go, God, in turn, also hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to bring great judgments upon him and the land of Egypt.<sup>32</sup>

This conclusion, however, is weakened when one considers the complete structure and context of the account in Exodus. With regard to the structure, the verbs concerning God's actions towards Pharaoh are active rather than passive. This idea means that God actively did something to Pharaoh instead of letting it happen. As Lloyd-Jones noted, "The statement, quite definitely, is that God rendered Pharaoh stubborn and obstinate. It was not that He permitted him to become thus."<sup>33</sup>

Not only do the tenses reveal God's action, the action timetable demonstrates God's divine hand in the hardening. God revealed to Moses, before there was ever any mention of Pharaoh hardening his own heart, that he would harden Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh would not let the children of Israel go.<sup>34</sup> As Schreiner noted, "A careful analysis of the OT text also reveals that God's hardening of Pharaoh precedes and undergirds Pharaoh's self-hardening, and it is an imposition on the text to conclude that

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<sup>32</sup>For a more detailed exposition of this interpretation, see Roger T. Foster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton: Tyndale House 1973).

<sup>33</sup>Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God's Sovereign Purpose: An Exposition of Romans Chapter 9* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 168-69.

<sup>34</sup>John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 160-78.

God's hardening is a response to the hardening of human beings."<sup>35</sup> In Exodus 4:21, God said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go." This hardening by God was well before any mention of a self-hardening by Pharaoh.

In Exodus 7:2-5, God is more revealing in his statement to Moses concerning the hardening of Pharaoh:

You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.

Then, in Exodus 7:13, Moses revealed, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said." These last words in verse 13 fulfill the revelation made by God in Exodus 7:3 concerning his hardening of Pharaoh. Thus, Piper said, "it would be unwarranted to construe 7:13 as anything other than a fulfillment of God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart."<sup>36</sup> Even more to the point, Piper noted that, "Not once in Ex 4-14 is the assertion of God's hardening of Pharaoh grounded in any attitude or act of Pharaoh."<sup>37</sup>

Beale's position coincided with Piper's in that he believed that because of the grammatical structure of Exodus 4:21 as well as its placement before any other

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<sup>35</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 510.

<sup>36</sup>Piper, *The Justification of God*, 163.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 174.

revelation regarding Pharaoh's own actions, God should be viewed as the cause of the hardenings in every account. Beale said, "Even when Pharaoh is subject of the hardening, or when the subject is unmentioned, these statements describe a resulting condition traceable to a previous hardening action caused by God (cf. 7:13, 14, 22, 8:15 [19]; 9:7, 35)."<sup>38</sup> Ellison's thoughts support such a position:

We may fairly deduce from this that God did not choose and raise up Pharaoh who was compelled to act contrary to his natural character. At the same time the priority given to God's declaration of coming hardening cannot fairly be interpreted as meaning God's punishment for man's self-willed hardening, which he foreknew. However much human cooperation there may have been, the hardening was part of God's express purpose, not for the Pharaoh's ruin—we are given no hint as to his eternal destiny—but for the carrying through of God's purposes.<sup>39</sup>

While not as forceful as the previous scholars, Moo too recognized that for Paul, God is the one solely responsible for Pharaoh's initial hardening. He said, that while, "The book of Exodus is not clear about the relationship between God's decision to harden Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh's own hardening of his heart . . . . Paul clearly gives the initiative to God."<sup>40</sup>

In addition to both the tenses and the contextual structure of the revelations in the Exodus account, a third reason to conclude that the hardening Pharaoh experienced was due to a preemptive work of God was from the context of Romans 9:14-18 itself. Remember, Paul used the example of God's dealings with Pharaoh to answer the question as to God's fairness when dealing with individuals. Paul did not give the answer that showed God was fair by saying that Pharaoh first hardened his own heart. Paul could

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<sup>38</sup>Beale, "Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 149.

<sup>39</sup>H. L. Ellison, *The Mystery of Israel: An Exposition of Romans 9-11* (London: Paternoster Press, 1976), 50.

<sup>40</sup>Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 311.

have easily said that God hardened Pharaoh only after Pharaoh hardened his own heart. That answer would have cleared God of all wrongdoing. Instead, what Paul used as a defense was that God raised Pharaoh up for a purpose and that he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills. Therefore, the only conclusion that Paul left regarding the person responsible for the hardening was God. To understand his argument any other way distorts the meaning and purpose of Romans 9:14-18.

As the initiator, God hardened Pharaoh's heart for a purpose. In both Exodus 4 and 7, when revealing that he is the one responsible for Pharaoh's hardening and that Moses should not be shocked when Pharaoh does not obey his words, the Lord also revealed that this hardening was for the purpose of displaying his great power and judgment. Piper said, "In each case it is happening 'as the Lord had said,' and what he had said was, 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart.'"<sup>41</sup> This interpretation means that behind being hardened by God and the subsequent self-hardening by Pharaoh are the plan and purpose of God. While some interpreters may attempt to argue that this revelation by God to Moses is that of a foreseen act by Pharaoh, it fails to understand its usage by Paul in Romans 9 as an example of God hardening whomever he wills. If God saw beforehand that Pharaoh would harden his own heart and thus too decided to harden Pharaoh's heart because of this foreknown information, then the hardening was not predicated on any freedom in God, which totally contradicts what Paul said. The purpose in hardening Pharaoh was to display and proclaim the greatness of his name to the nations, not punish for a previously hardened heart. Again, commenting on the hardening in Romans 9:14-18, Piper argued, "It is not described as a response to what Pharaoh does,

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<sup>41</sup>Piper, *The Hardening of Pharaoh and the Hope of the World*.

but as a sovereign rule over what Pharaoh does.”<sup>42</sup> By hardening Pharaoh’s heart, God demonstrated his great power and might in bringing Pharaoh and Egypt to nothing all the while proclaiming his great love and care for his people Israel. Rahab confirmed this purpose when she declared, “All the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water . . . . Our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Josh 2:9-11). Therefore, one is right to conclude that Pharaoh’s hardening was a direct result of God’s initial act and served God’s greater purposes.

Before moving on to the next two passages, it is helpful to provide two summary points regarding Paul’s explanation on the hardening of God as presented in Romans 9:18. First, the text implies that Paul believed the hardening by God is not in response to man’s own hardness of heart but instead that he precipitated and caused it. Hodge made a good argument to confront those who may complain that this conclusion makes God liable for wrongdoing. He pointed out, “God did nothing to Pharaoh beyond what he deserved. God did not make him wicked, he only refrained from making him good by the exertion of special and altogether unmerited grace.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, Pharaoh was already a sinner, a fallen descendant of Adam, and was in need of divine mercy. As Lloyd-Jones said, “The sin is already there; the sin is produced entirely by man. All God does in this process of judicial blindness is that He exaggerates it, as it

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Charles Hodge, *Romans*, ed. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 285.

were.”<sup>44</sup> The fact that God did not have mercy towards him but instead raised him up only to harden his heart is not unjust or unfair.<sup>45</sup> As Beale commented, “This is not to say that Pharaoh’s volitional decisions and accountability should be overlooked or ignored; the concern . . . is about the ultimate cause of the hardening.”<sup>46</sup>

The purpose that Paul had in mentioning the Exodus account, and specifically Pharaoh, in relationship to mercy and hardening was that God had sovereignly orchestrated the events of men’s hearts and that this idea was fundamentally important for understanding why Israel had rejected Christ as the true savior. God merely raised Pharaoh up for such a time and hardened his heart to accomplish his divine will. God did not make him a sinner by hardening his heart. He simply chose not to demonstrate mercy towards him and instead hardened him as he willed. As Paul said later, God, as the potter, has the right to do whatever he desires with his “clay” (Rom 9:20-21) and in the case of Pharaoh, it was to raise him up to a position of prominence all the while hardening his heart so that he would not let the people go. For those who might think that this act by God is unfair for Pharaoh, Seifrid reminded us of what Paul said in Romans 9:11 about none being righteous and seeking God when he stated, “Pharaoh was

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<sup>44</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *To God’s Glory*, 40.

<sup>45</sup>John MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 35. Refuting any notion of God being unjust, MacArthur said, “Moses was a Jew, whereas Pharaoh was a Gentile; but both of them were sinners. Both were murders, and both witnessed God’s miracles. Yet Moses was redeemed and Pharaoh was not. God raised up Pharaoh in order to reveal His own glory and power, and God had mercy on Moses in order to use him to deliver His people Israel. Pharaoh was a ruler, whereas Moses’ people were slaves under Pharaoh. But Moses received God’s mercy and compassion, because that was God’s will. The Lord’s work is sovereign, and He acts entirely according to His own will to accomplish His own purposes. The issue was not the presumed rights of either men but rather the sovereign will of God.”

<sup>46</sup>Beale, “Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 149.

hardly searching for mercy!”<sup>47</sup> Thus, God, being free to do with man what he wills, brought a sinful man to a powerful position of authority and freely hardened this man’s heart, all without being unjust or unfair.

A second summary point regarding Romans 9:18 is that Paul believed that the hardening by God served a specific purpose. As it is explained in the story of Moses and Pharaoh in the Exodus account, God’s hardening of individuals is for the purpose of displaying his power, justice, mercy, and grace (Rom 9:22-23). Indeed, God’s hardening of a man’s heart, or specifically in this case Pharaoh’s heart, brought him glory by “declaring his name throughout all the world.”<sup>48</sup> Just as this hardening displayed God as a powerful God to the nations and a redeeming God to the people of Israel, so now God has also hardened Israel for a time in order to display his glory and mercy both to the nations and Israel.

### **Romans 11:7-10**

A second passage necessary for understanding the issue of the divine hardening upon Israel is Romans 11:7-10. In the opening verses of Romans 11, Paul reminded the readers that the number of Jews who believed in Jesus was low. This disturbing trend is part of the reason that Paul mentioned in Romans 10:1-2 that his prayer and desire was for the salvation of his fellow kinsmen. So great was Paul’s anguish over the lostness of the Jews that he was willing to forfeit his own redemption if it would result in their salvation (Rom 9:2-3). While there was (and still is today) a

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<sup>47</sup>Mark Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 644.

<sup>48</sup>John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2000), 103-04.



remnant being saved, for the great majority of Jews, “they are perishing and are cut off from Christ.”<sup>49</sup> The natural question to this situation is why, if Israel as a whole are the people of God (Rom 11:2), are so many rejecting Christ as the Messiah? The answer provided by Paul is found in Romans 11:7-10.

In Romans 11:7, Paul revealed, “The elect obtained it but the rest were hardened.” The “elect” referred to Israel that Paul mentioned in the proceeding part of the passage while “it” is that which they were seeking. More specifically, “it” is eternal life. Paul, then, is saying that some Jewish individuals, the elect, have obtained life through trusting in Christ while the rest, those who are not the elect, have been hardened. One should find the similarities with Paul’s statement in Romans 9:18 about God showing mercy to whom he wills while he hardens whomever he wills. Piper said by obtaining it, the elect Jews “obtained right standing with God. Obtained faith and justification and salvation . . . obtained a standing in the remnant, the redeemed, the justified, the saved.”<sup>50</sup> But what about the others in regards to their salvation? The text said that they “were hardened” (Rom 11:7).

In an attempt to expound on what was meant by this statement, Paul referenced three passages from the Hebrew Bible. First, Paul referred to Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4 to reveal in Romans 11:8 that “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.” In other words, God, who makes man physically blind or capable of seeing (Exod 4:11) has given the

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<sup>49</sup>John Piper, *Has God Rejected His People*, pt. 2, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

<sup>50</sup>John Piper, *The Elect Obtained It, The Rest were Hardened*, in *Sermon from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

Jews a spirit of numbness so that they are not able to see spiritually the glory and majesty of Christ and the benefits of his redeeming work. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 Paul revealed, “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” In Romans 11:8, however, he revealed, “It is God who has blinded the Jews by giving them eyes that do not see Christ as the Messiah and ears that do not hear the truth of the gospel message.”<sup>51</sup> Paul then added as a third passage adapted from Psalm 69:22-23 in Romans 11:9-10 stating that Christ is a stumbling block for Jews because their eyes are darkened so that they cannot see.

These passages and their message are undoubtedly difficult to grasp. Rather than seriously struggling over the implications of such passages, it is possible merely to gloss them over in an effort to avoid controversy. These efforts, however, usually produce a faulty or inadequate understanding of God and his work of redemption as it relates to the whole of Romans 11. The heaviness felt in these verses is why Piper said that the content in these passages “is light-years removed from the trivial early-morning banter you hear on radio. It is never mentioned or considered on television. It is in another world from entertainment. It is never heard or seen in the manuals of church growth or popular assessments of modern culture. But if it's true, all of these are affected.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>See Lloyd-Jones, *God's Sovereign Purpose*, 178. One way to rectify this seeming contradiction is to argue that while God is the primary cause of all things, including the blindness and hardness of heart as revealed in Romans 11:8, he does use secondary causes or means to accomplish his purposes. Therefore, while Paul may attribute the blindness to Satan in one passage and to God in another, ultimately God is the primary cause in both cases while Satan is used, at least as revealed in the Corinthians passage, as the means of executing God's will. Having said that God is the primary cause, he is free from blame and is above reproach. For further details about primary and secondary causes, see the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, section 5:1-4.

<sup>52</sup>Piper, *The Elect Obtained It, The Rest were Hardened*.

One must ask why God would harden the rest of the Jews (Rom 11:7). The common way to understand the hardening in this verse is to see it as the result of not seeking God through grace but rather through works of the law (Rom 9:30-33 and Rom 11:6). The idea is that the elect obtained salvation because they received grace from God while God made those hardened this way because they did not pursue him by faith. As John Murray said, “We may not abstract this hardening from the sustained indictment brought against Israel in the proceeding context.”<sup>53</sup> He went on to state, “It is judicial hardening and finds its judicial ground in the unbelief and disobedience of its objects.”<sup>54</sup> Because they did not seek God through faith but instead tried to establish a righteousness through works of the law, God hardened them as a judicial act by hindering their eyes and hearts from being able to see. What should have been a blessing to them, turned instead into a stumbling block and retribution for them (Rom 11:9).

As mentioned previously, the Jewish hardening was not primarily a result of their actions as individuals. Stanford Mills said, “A careless reader of Scripture could, at this point, stumble into a false assumption that the ‘hardening’ process in Israel was the result of her own human frailty or the work of her self-willed leaders, whereas a careful study of the succeeding verses will show that the ‘hardening’ process was brought about wholly in accordance with God’s plan and purpose, as operative today as it was in the past.”<sup>55</sup> Piper said, “In the act of hardening God is free and is not ultimately constrained by any act or any condition of man outside himself. We saw from Romans 9, on this very

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<sup>53</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol 2, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 72.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>55</sup>Stanford Mills, *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing, 1968), 289.

issue, that God's glory depends on his freedom never to be ultimately dependent on the will of man for the choices he makes."<sup>56</sup> Second, although God's hardening of the Jews is not caused by any specific action or hardness on their part, indeed they are deserving of this hardening. In Romans 11:9, the text says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them." According to Piper, "The word 'retribution' implies that punishment of wrong is involved. The point is they deserved the snare and trap and stumbling that they experienced. Which means we must really reckon with true guilt and true accountability."<sup>57</sup>

Again, this doctrine is not easy. Nevertheless, one cannot merely ignore it for this description is the way that God has chosen to reveal himself to his creation. Furthermore, ignoring to teach and preach such matters because they seem to be inconsistent or contradictory robs God of his glorious self-revelation. Noting a seeming inconsistency that one may argue about God's freedom in hardening and yet man's deserving of this hardening, Piper said, "God is sovereign; man is a responsible moral agent. God is free and never ultimately determined by forces or actions or wills outside himself. On the other hand, we are morally responsible. We are really guilty for our sinfulness and really deserving of retribution and punishment."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, while God is the first cause of their hardening, those hardened are deserving of this act. While this conclusion is not easy to explain from a human's perspective, it is the best explanation of hardening. Being finite and limited in knowledge, man does not know the mind of the

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

infinitely wise and holy God. Speaking to this limitedness on our part, Piper said, “God so arranges all reality, in his unsearchable wisdom, so that many indeed experience ongoing rebellion and hardness against God; but he does this, mysteriously, in such a way that he is never unjust or blameworthy in what comes to pass, and we never cease to be morally accountable.”<sup>59</sup>

In summary, at the end of this section of Romans 11, Paul has explained that while it may seem like Jews, for the most part, are outside of God’s salvation, this circumstance is not true for all Jews. Pointedly, Paul noted that a number of elect Jewish individuals have believed in Jesus while other Jews have been hardened. Both this election and hardening has nothing to do with the individual but is due totally and solely to the work and will of God. Nevertheless, this is not the end of Paul’s words concerning this hardening of the Jewish people. For his final statements, it is necessary to examine Romans 11:25.

### **Romans 11:25**

Recognizing the potential for Gentile believers to grow arrogant about their inclusion into Christ, Paul said, “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). Paul revealed that the hardening by God upon the nation of Israel was only for a time. In fact, this callousness would remain only until the full number of the Gentile elect come in. Then, the hardness would be removed from Israel and all Israel will be saved.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

Thus, in the context of Romans 11, Paul revealed that this hardening by God of Israel serves two specific redemptive purposes. First, it allows Gentile individuals to be “grafted into the vine” of God’s people (Rom 11:24). Paul said in Romans 11:11 that “through their (Israel’s) trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous.” Second, this hardening by God allows him to show mercy to Israel (Rom 11:31-32). But how does God show mercy to all by hardening Israel?

The purpose in Israel’s hardening by God is not that they be cut off forever (Rom 11:11, 15).<sup>60</sup> Instead, the hardening is the means that God ordained so that all peoples may receive mercy. Piper’s thoughts at this point are enlightening:

What Paul makes clear in Romans 11, that may not be as clear in these other texts, is that the spill over of the Gospel to Gentiles did not just result from Israel’s trespass as though this took God off guard, and he had no plan in it. Instead there was divine design behind it. Verse 7: It was God who hardened. And it was the hardening—the trespass (v. 11b)—that brings salvation to the Gentiles. ‘Through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles.’ This is God’s unfathomable wisdom being worked out in history and shown to us in Romans 11.<sup>61</sup>

While some may still argue that this hardening is wrong on God’s part, God is in no way unjust for such actions. Wakefield noted, “God is not unjust in hardening the hearts of some; rather, he demonstrates his righteousness by having mercy on some who do not deserve it.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the highest priority of God is the fame of his name (Isa 48:11). Therefore, the hardening of the Jewish people, which leads to the salvation of the nations, is in line with his righteous will. This hardening upon Israel serves a similar

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<sup>60</sup>John Piper, *Did Israel Stumble in Order that they Might Fall?* in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Andrew Wakefield, “Romans 9-11: The Sovereignty of God and the Status of Israel,” *RevExp* 100 (2003): 71.

purpose of the hardening of Pharaoh in that it displays God's great name and power.

Piper said, "The divine purpose of Israel's hardening and trespass and rejection was to save a fullness of the Gentiles. There is a merciful purpose in the hardening. He consigned them to disobedience—he hardened them—that he may have mercy (v. 32)."<sup>63</sup>

In a way that defies all human logic and reasoning, God revealed in Romans 11 that the purpose of his hardening was to save both Jews and Gentiles. Piper rightly paraphrased Romans 11:11-16 by saying, "The hardening and trespass of Israel are designed to bring salvation to the Gentiles. And salvation to the Gentiles is designed to make Israel jealous. Why? So that Israel will return and lay claim on her Messiah, and become part of Church of Jesus Christ."<sup>64</sup>

If God determined to harden individuals because they hardened their own hearts, then God's plan and purpose of bringing salvation to both groups of people is false. Either the hardening was God's plan and means of accomplishing his will or it was in response to Israel's rejection of Christ. If it is the latter, Paul's argument in Romans 11:11-15 is invalidated. Furthermore, if hardening is based on man's heart and not on God's plan or purpose, Paul's statement in Romans 11:25 holds no ground. One must conclude that God has "mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills" (Rom 9:18) and that in doing so, God is greatly glorified and that salvation comes to all people.

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to answer the question as to whether the act of hardening, especially as it relates to the salvation of Jewish people, was caused primarily by God, or was a response by God to the hardness of the Jewish people's own heart. Lloyd-Jones noted that in the Bible, there seem to be two different types of hardening. First, there is a hardening whereby God "quits striving" with man and allows him to pursue after the desires of his own heart.<sup>65</sup> There also seems to be, according to Lloyd-Jones, a divine hardening whereby God actively works in an individual so as to make his heart hard and unresponsive.<sup>66</sup> Based on Paul's explanation from Roman 9 and 11, as well as an investigation of the hardening of Pharaoh, it seems the best conclusion is Lloyd-Jones' second position; specifically, that God is the author of the Jewish hardening. As Sibley put it, "the rejection of Messiah was a result of Israel's obduracy, not the cause of it."<sup>67</sup>

One need not flinch or bypass a text that expresses the issue of hardening. Nor should one see this doctrine as juxtaposed to the idea that God does not desire the death of the wicked. The reason for this assertion is that this hardening by God of the Jewish people is not contradictory to God's desire for all to be saved (2 Tim 2). In fact, this hardening is the very means that God has ordained so that salvation would go to all

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<sup>65</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *To God's Glory*, 37-38. Examples where God "quits striving" with the sinful desires of men and lets them pursue after their own sinful desires include the account in Gen 6 and Rom 1.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-40.

<sup>67</sup>Jim Sibley, "Hear O Israel: Spiritual Obduracy and the Jewish People" (paper presented at the 51<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA, 17-19 November 1999), 4.



nations (Rom 11:11-12, 32). Douglas Harink provided a good summary that is worthy of consideration:

Paul insists that the current condition of Israel's "hardening" is entirely God's doing. Israel's actions and moral condition . . . do not enter the picture at all. If Israel "remains bound" in a condition, it is because God has bound it there (11:32). Indeed, that is precisely the point of Paul noting, with reference to Jacob and Esau, that God's purpose was declared to Rebecca "before they had been born or had done anything good or bad . . ." (9:11). God's choosing "the younger," Jacob, is not injustice on God's part precisely because the issue is not about moral success or failure but about God's mercy and hardening, enacted not with respect to moral condition, but strictly with respect to a divine purpose that must be accomplished.<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, as was the purpose declared in the revelation told to Moses, the chief purpose in God hardening the hearts of individuals seems to be "to demonstrate his power and proclaim his name" (Rom 9:17). In the end, the results of Israel's hardening will be that God shows mercy to all (Rom 11:32). As Schreiner noted, "For just as Pharaoh was hardened to effect the salvation of Israel, so Israel is hardened so salvation can be extended to the Gentiles."<sup>69</sup> It is to this thought that Israel's hardening serves as a means of salvation for others that the next chapter will expound upon more fully.

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<sup>68</sup>Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 170.

<sup>69</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 511.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PURPOSE OF THE HARDENING

In Romans 9-11, Paul addressed the issue of Israel's unbelief toward Jesus and the gospel. He shared that the primary reason Israel "stumbled" over Jesus was due to a previously undisclosed mystery. Part of this mystery included the revelation that the Jewish people were experiencing a partial hardening from God that hindered them from coming to Jesus by faith. This assertion creates a new question; mainly, why were the Jewish people hardened by God? What was the purpose of God in sending upon the hearts of the Jewish people a callousness that blinded them from seeing the truth, beauty, and majesty of the gospel?

Typically, two potential reasons have been proposed as to why God hardened the Jewish people. The first reason given for the hardening asserts that the act was purely punitive in nature. The hardening occurred because God, who is a just and holy God, exerted divine judgment upon Israel for their wickedness. As Leon Morris noted, "His hardening always presupposes sin and is always part of the punishment of sin."<sup>1</sup> This idea resonates on the surface. God will not leave sin unpunished. The terrible decision to reject the Messiah would lead God to unleash great punishment upon this people.

One is able to reject the position that the hardening of God upon the Jewish people was merely a punishment for not believing in Jesus, however, for two main

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<sup>1</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 361.

reasons. First, if Paul had said that Israel rejected God's offer of salvation first and then God poured out a partial hardening upon their hearts as a result, it would be easy to conclude that the hardening was punitive. As demonstrated in the last chapter, however, Paul's intention in revealing the mystery was to disclose that Israel's unbelief was due to the hardening, not the other way around. Therefore, the hardening was God's plan to accomplish his divine purpose. Paul is clear in communicating that it was the hardening itself that led to Israel's rejection of Jesus, not the rejection of Jesus that led to the hardening.

Second, if the hardening was a judicial act by God towards those who rejected Jesus, why does God not harden all people as a judicial act when they reject Jesus? Why did Paul specifically mention that a partial hardening had come upon Israel? Would one not expect that a hardening of some type would come upon the Gentiles too as they reject Jesus? Some, who choose to affirm that the hardening was punitive, may argue that God punished Israel with a divine hardening while not punishing the other nations because Israel was his chosen people and should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah due to his works and teachings. Nevertheless, this argument seems weak compared to Paul's overall argument in Romans 9-11 that the hardening has more significance in its design than it being a simple punishment allocated against Israel for rejecting Jesus.

The second position offered in an attempt to answer the question as to why the Jewish people were hardened affirms that the divine act towards the Jewish people served a redemptive, rather than punitive, purpose. In the great mystery of the Bible, Israel, as a people, was hardened so that they would not receive Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. This rejection on their part was the means that, in turn, allowed Jesus to be proclaimed to all

the nations as the Messiah of all peoples. This belief that God hardened the Jewish people in order to include non Jews into the lineage of Abraham by bringing them to faith in Christ finds support in Revelation 5:9 which says that Christ has ransomed a people for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation” of the world. Ultimately, this redemption of all peoples will include the Jewish people who will eventually turn to Christ in faith once God lifts the hardening off their hearts.

Paul’s emphasis in Romans 11 was to refute any idea that the hardening of God upon the Jewish people was a reason for boasting by the Gentiles. Instead, the partial hardening upon the Jewish people proclaimed a gracious act by God that allowed redemption to be shared with all people groups and thus is a significant means of displaying the glory of God. This chapter supports this thesis by first refuting the idea that the hardening upon Israel was a judicial act of rejection by God of the Jewish people. Then, the chapter proposes three reasons for the divine hardening as revealed in Romans 11.

One cannot overstate the significance of Romans 11 in supporting the idea that God has hardened the Jewish people in order to send the gospel to all peoples. As one examines Paul’s argument in the chapter, two distinct periods regarding the Jewish people are discernable.<sup>2</sup> The first ten verses discuss Israel’s current situation regarding their rejection of Jesus. Then verses 11 through the end of the chapter provide insight

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<sup>2</sup>Douglas Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 354. Moo noted that Paul broke Rom 9-11 into three distinct eras dealing with the history of God’s promises to the Jewish people. The first era, Israel’s past, is dealt with by Paul in Rom 9:6-29. The second era, Israel’s present, is contained in Rom 11:1-10. The last era, Rom 11:11-32, is Paul’s description of Israel’s future.

into the future of Israel. These verses explain how the nation as a whole will have a significant role as God redeems all of creation. Speaking to the great importance of this chapter for understanding salvation history as a whole, John Piper said that Romans 11 “is all about the way God has acted and will act toward Israel and toward the nations in history. And therefore it is all about who God is and what he is like.”<sup>3</sup> The way a person understands this chapter will affect his view and understanding of God, his overall worldview, his political views, and his views on evangelizing Jews and Gentiles.<sup>4</sup>

### **Not as a Means of Rejection**

One way of interpreting the purpose of the hardening upon the Jewish people involves their rejection of Jesus. In Matthew 24, Pilate determined that Jesus was innocent of the charges the Jewish leaders levied against him. Despite his conclusions regarding Jesus, he still bowed to the pressure of the masses regarding their desire for Jesus’ execution. Before sentencing Jesus, however, he proclaimed, “I am innocent of this man’s blood” (Matt 24:24). The text revealed that the Jewish people who heard his confession cried out, “His blood be on us and our children” (Matt 24:25).

A common implication derived from this passage is that since the Jewish people rejected Jesus as their Messiah and called for his execution, God has rejected them as his people. Part of this rejection included a hardening of their hearts. Another part of the rejection by God of the Jewish people included the destruction of the Temple around

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<sup>3</sup>John Piper, *Has God Rejected His People*, pt. 2, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>For good works dealing with the political side of dealing with and seeking to evangelize this hardened people, see Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004); Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

AD 70. The ideology affirms that just as the Jewish people “washed their hands” of Jesus, God has now “washed his hands” of them, finding for himself a new people. This belief is commonly referred to as Replacement theology.<sup>5</sup>

### **Replacement Theology**

The main premise behind Replacement theology, or supersession, is that the Church has replaced the Jewish people with regard to the promises made in the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> Terence Donaldson used the word “replacement ecclesiology” and expressed its motivations as deriving from the “idea that the Gentile church owes its existence to the rejection of Israel, God having rejected the one and put the other in its place.”<sup>7</sup> Walter Kaiser, who opposed the ideology, said, “Replacement theology, then, declared that the Church, Abraham’s spiritual seed, had replaced national Israel in that it had transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel had lost because of disobedience.”<sup>8</sup>

Replacement theology has existed in the church since its earliest days. Rather than listening to Paul’s warnings about growing arrogant about their inclusion into Christ at the expense of the Jews, the early church, which continued to become more Gentile

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<sup>5</sup>For a good resource discussing the nature of replacement theology, see *Mishkan* 21 (1994). The entire volume of this journal was dedicated to discussing replacement theology.

<sup>6</sup>It is also known as “displacement theology” implying that “the old covenant with Israel has been abrogated and a new covenant has been set up in its place with the New Israel.” For further details on this, see Jacques B. Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 2002), 55.

<sup>7</sup>Terence L. Donaldson, “Riches for the Gentiles (Rom 11:12): Israel’s Rejection and Paul’s Gentile Mission,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 82. Donaldson argued that this replacement theology had roots early in the life of the church.

<sup>8</sup>Walter C Kaiser, Jr., “An Assessment of Replacement Theology: The Relationship Between the Israel of the Abrahamic-Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church,” *Mishkan* 21 (1994): 9.

and less Jewish in both congregational makeup and worship practices, saw little need to reach out to the Jews. Instead, “Church fathers taught that the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people resulted in a collective guilt which made them subject to the permanent curse of God.”<sup>9</sup> Donaldson pointed out, “By the latter half of the second century CE, displacement approaches to the relationship between the church and Israel were well established within the developing Christian self-understanding.”<sup>10</sup> He noted that once the separation of Christianity from Judaism was completed, scholars saw the Christian “church as Rachel, the loved wife who had displaced the earlier wife Leah, laying sole claim to the name and family possessions of Israel in the process.”<sup>11</sup> This idea that the church was the new “Israel of God” continued to gain momentum and acceptance as orthodoxy within Christianity and still exists in various forms and expressions even today (Gal 6:16).<sup>12</sup>

Potential attitudes may develop by some who affirm Replacement theology that are not biblical. There is the potential to hold the Jewish people in disdain blaming them for Christ’s crucifixion. Although it may be subtle, this spirit is present in some believers.<sup>13</sup> In its more aggressive forms, anger and even hatred towards this people is

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<sup>9</sup>Marvin Olson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 88-89.

<sup>10</sup>Donaldson, “Riches for the Gentiles,” 82.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Probably the most infamous expression of vengeance by a Christian was Martin Luther’s work *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Written in 1543, Luther’s book originated out his frustration and inability to convert Jewish individuals to Christ. Luther lashed out with the pen regarding this people and saying many things that have been used by Hitler and other anti-Jewish individuals. See Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies* in *Luther’s Works*, trans. Martin Bertram (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

<sup>13</sup>For a sobering look at the reality of the way Christians have treated the Jews throughout the history of the church, see Michael L Brown, *Our Hands Are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the Church and the Jewish People* (Pensacola: ICN Ministries, 1992), 1-174.

carried out in vengeance and acts of violence. Individuals place upon the Jews sole responsibility for killing Christ. Considering a passage like Acts 2:23, however, that says that Jesus was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men,” one might be less likely to hate the Jews and instead see the crucifixion as God’s means of salvation to all people who believe. The Jews were the instruments God used to bring the crucifixion to pass. Making atonement for the sins of all people groups, however, was the reason God put him to death (Isa 53:10).

According to Paul’s argument in Romans 11, replacement theology is in error. While it is true that the Jewish people rejected their Messiah in large numbers, this does not mean that God has rejected them (Rom 11:1-2). Jim Sibley argued that although some Christians may say that God is finished with the Jews, Paul exclaimed just the opposite. He contends that any sort of rejection on the part of God is only temporary and is only so Gentiles could be grafted into the Jewish root (Rom 11:15).<sup>14</sup> In fact, Paul argued that Gentile salvation served to create jealousy in the Jews causing them eventually to turn to their Messiah in faith (Rom 11:14-25).

Therefore, the hardening upon the Jewish people was not because they rejected Jesus. Rather, it is the other way around. The reason the Jews rejected Jesus was because God hardened their hearts. As one examines Romans 11 in detail, Paul’s argument that God has not cast off the Jewish people either completely or finally is readily viewable. Paul made it known that God still loves the Jewish people, is still

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<sup>14</sup>Jim Sibley, “Christianity Vis-à-vis Judaism,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 44 (2002): 32-34.



fulfilling his covenants with the Jewish people, and even now is still saving Jewish people, albeit not many.

Paul opened Romans 11 by rhetorically asking if God has rejected the people of Israel (Rom 11:1). The question is a valid concern based on the lack of substantial numerical evidence regarding Jews who had believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Furthermore, in the verse immediately proceeding the opening verses in Romans 11 said, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Rom 10:21).<sup>15</sup> Thus, it would seem that while God desires Israel to be saved, they are not because they have hardened their hearts to the gospel invitation. As a result of this rejection of Christ on the part of the Jews, one may be quick to conclude that God has in turn rejected Israel.

Paul adamantly responded, however, that God has not rejected his people. In response to his own rhetorical question as to whether God has rejected his people, he exclaimed “by no means” (Rom 11:1)! Then in Romans 11:2, he emphatically stated, “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” According to Paul, the exact opposite was true. He shared that “at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Rom 11:5). The remnant was comprised of Jews who were trusting in Christ due to God’s mercy towards them. This mercy by God demonstrated his faithfulness and steadfast love to this people rather than any type of hatred or rejection. Paul not only gave these opening verses in Romans 11 as proof that God was still demonstrating

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<sup>15</sup>Moo noted that this question referenced back beyond Rom10:21. In fact, he saw the whole content of Rom 9:30-10:21 as background to this question. Because of the Jewish refusal to believe, even though the gospel had been extended to them, the question by Paul is relevant. See Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary, 353.

faithfulness towards the Jews, he also presented four lines of reasoning throughout the rest of the chapter which nullify any argument by those that would favor replacement theology.

For one, Paul a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin, used his own conversation as evidence that God had not broken his covenantal promises with the Jewish people (Rom 11:2). While it seemed that the Jewish people were not believing in Jesus, Paul indicated that there was indeed a remnant of Jewish believers who were exhibiting faith, of which he was included. This remnant certified God's continued faithfulness to Israel. If God had indeed rejected Israel, why were there any Jewish people, much less a remnant, who believed the message regarding Jesus as the Christ? Thus, Paul, using his own life's conversion and Jewish ancestry as an example, refuted the notion of replacement of the Jewish people in regards to redemption. Speaking about this passage, Schreiner noted that, "God has not rejected his people, for the choice of Paul as an ethnic Israelite illustrates the principle that he has chosen a remnant of ethnic Jews for salvation."<sup>16</sup> The remnant displayed that God had kept his promises to Israel.

Second, Paul asserted that God had not rejected Israel because his election of them as a people remained. Of all the peoples of the world of which God could have chosen to display his glory and grace, God chose for his very own the Jewish people. In Deuteronomy 7:7-8, Moses, speaking regarding God's election, articulated adamantly the basis and nature of God's choice of Israel as a people and the subsequent benefits of this relationship as his people:

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<sup>16</sup>Tom Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 578; Rob Richards, *Has God Finished with Israel?* (Milton Keynes, England: Word Publishing, 1994), 103.

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God chose Israel not based on anything in them or that they had done. He chose them because he loved them and wanted to pour out his redeeming love on this people. Paul picked this idea up in Romans 11 stressing that God's election was based in love, and not Israel's actions, and that their election still existed thanks in part to God's covenantal faithfulness to himself and because of his oath and promises that he made to Israel's patriarchs. God promised first to Abraham and then reiterated it again to Israel at Mount Sinai that he was their God and that they were his people. According to Paul, this promise of relationship has not been revoked due to any disobedience by Israel or failure to trust in Christ. As Paul said, "But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).

Thus, Paul stated that the gifts God gave to the Jewish people, specifically those things he mentioned in Romans 9:1-5, had not and would not be taken back by God. Furthermore, the calling to Abraham and his descendants still remained. The word Paul used, *irrevocable*, means unable to be taken back. Thus, there is no reason to conclude for one moment that God's relationship, promises, gifts, callings, and salvation has changed with Israel. As Paul noted in Romans 9, Israel, as the adopted child of God, holds a unique relationship with God that no other nation can claim.<sup>17</sup>

Paul said that while Israel may be enemies in regards to the gospel, in regards to election, they were still beloved. This connection was due to the promises and

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<sup>17</sup>Ralph Gade, "Is God Through with the Jew," *Grace Journal* 11 (1970): 25-26.

covenants God made with the Jewish patriarchs. As Murray said, “God has not suspended or rescinded his relationship to Israel as his chosen people in terms of the covenants made with the fathers . . . God still sustains his peculiar relation of love to them, a relationship that will be demonstrated and vindicated in the restoration.”<sup>18</sup> God is always faithful to his promises, even when his people are not (2 Tim 2:13). As Michael Horton pointed out, “Israel is the recipient of the laws and promises, the covenants of Sinai and Abraham, and whatever happens to extend the family is in fact an expansion rather than replacement of Israel.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, because of God and God alone, the Jewish people have not been rejected or replaced with another people. They have only been partially hardened, and this hardening is only for a time. Mounce pointed out correctly that God, “does not change his mind regarding the nation he called and sustained with gracious acts of provision and protection.”<sup>20</sup> So while Israel is indeed “enemies of God” for a time for our sake (Rom 11:28), God has not rejected nor replaced them.

Third, Paul noted that God has not replaced Israel, even though so few are displaying faith, and used the experience with Elijah as an example (Rom 11:2-6). In the account of Elijah, the prophet felt all alone in regards to his obedience towards God’s word. The Lord revealed to him that he was not alone but that he had saved for himself seven thousand individuals who too were devoted to the one true living God rather than prostrating themselves to Baal (1 Kgs 19:14-18). This remnant in Elijah’s day was paralleled with the remnant that still existed in Paul’s day. Just as there were those in

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<sup>18</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968),

<sup>19</sup>Michael Horton, “Remnant: Who Is Israel?” *Modern Reformation* 15 (2006): 11.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 226.

Elijah's time who displayed faith in God, in Paul's time, albeit relatively small in comparison to the whole of the Jewish population, there were some Jewish persons who were trusting in Christ and finding salvation. The point that needs recognition is that the Gentiles who are believing and being grafted in are being grafted into the same vine that the Jewish believers are already in. As Donaldson noted, the "Gentiles join the Jews who believe, not that they replace the Jews who do not."<sup>21</sup>

A last reason to reject replacement theology is due to the structure of Romans 11:25. Paul revealed a mystery to the readers regarding the reason for Israel's unbelief. The revelation of the mystery, Paul said, was to keep the Gentiles from conceitedness. In other words, Paul wanted his readers to know that it was not good to boast about their salvation or make errant judgments about the lack of salvation on the part of the Jewish people. The mystery revealed why the Jewish people did not believe. Nothing in the text confirmed that God had rejected, either finally or completely, the Jewish people. In fact, the announcement confirms just the opposite.

It is true that many Jewish people throughout the history of the church have failed to turn to Christ. The conclusion, however, that failure to believe in Christ is due to God's rejection of them as a people should itself be rejected. Paul gave no convincing evidence that would allow one to conclude God has cast off Israel and replaced them with the church. The prophet Jeremiah is helpful at this point when he said in Jeremiah 31:37, "Thus says the Lord: 'If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD'." The prophet seemed to indicate that the only way God

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<sup>21</sup>Donaldson, "Riches for the Gentiles," 84.

would reject Israel for sin or rejection, even the rejection of Jesus the Messiah, is if man was able to count and plot all of the stars in the sky. Obviously this phrase is an overstatement but it drives home the point. God has promised to not reject his people Israel. Thus, the hardening upon Israel is not a sign of God's divine displeasure and rejection of the Jews as his people.

### **A Means for Making Jews Jealous**

In Romans 11:11, Paul posed a question regarding Israel: "So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall?" A close reading of the question will reveal that it was not asking whether or not Israel had stumbled over Christ and fallen. The obvious answer to that question would be yes. The issue Paul considered was whether Israel's stumbling displayed that they had permanently fallen from God's graces. The word Paul used in posing this question was *πέσσωσι* and carried the idea of "to fall utterly and permanently."<sup>22</sup> Paul posed this rhetorical question as to whether God's hardening upon Israel that he mentioned in Romans 11:8-10, "this spirit of stupor" which "darkened their eyes" and caused their unbelief, was a demonstration that they had permanently fallen from God's grace as a special people. As Schreiner put it, the question Paul was really preparing to answer was, "whether Israel's failure to obtain salvation is irrevocable and irreversible."<sup>23</sup> Paul forcefully responded, as he previously did in Romans 11:1, with a resounding "by no means!" As Leon Morris noted, "For Paul, the idea is preposterous."<sup>24</sup> The stumbling over the rock of offense was not irreversible and any notion to the

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<sup>22</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 2:75.

<sup>23</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 593.

<sup>24</sup>Morris, *Romans*, 406.

contrary was inconceivable. In fact, the stumbling would be reversed as soon as the Jews brought to pass the divine purpose God had in making them stumble in the first place. The appropriate question at this point, then, is what divine purpose did it serve?

The first answer Paul provided regarding the purpose of this hardening was that the divine act served as a means to make Israel jealous. He continued his thought saying, “Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous” (Rom 11:11). Again, in Romans 11:13, Paul said that a primary purpose in his ministry to the Gentiles was to “make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.” With this idea in mind, the first reason given for the hardening upon the Jewish people was to make them jealous as they saw Gentiles coming to faith in the Jewish God.

Paul hoped that by leading many Gentiles to faith, the Jews would turn to Christ for salvation too. Paul’s whole argument rested on this idea of jealousy. As Schreiner stated, “Paul hopes that his ministry to the Gentiles will flourish, causing many Gentiles to be saved. This would provoke the Jews to jealousy and salvation, which in turn would introduce the end of history.”<sup>25</sup> While Paul made it known to his Gentile readers that only through Israel’s trespass did salvation come to them, the primary point he was driving home was that the ultimate goal of this process was to make Israel jealous for what the Gentiles had. Morris believed that “Paul is saying that the salvation of the Gentiles was intended in the divine providence to arouse in Israel a passionate desire for the same good gift. When they saw the wonder of the messianic salvation, the Jews would want it for themselves.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 596.

<sup>26</sup>Morris, *Romans*, 407.

Paul sensed the great importance his calling to the Gentiles had in the overall scheme of redemption. As an apostle to this people, he knew that he had the opportunity to make his fellow kinsmen jealous. Speaking to his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul said, “I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them” (Rom 11:13). The question that arises from this text is what did Paul mean by saying he sought to magnify his ministry? How would magnifying his ministry impact the Jewish people in such a way that they would turn to Christ?

In the context of these verses regarding making Israel jealous, Paul believed the way to magnify his ministry was to win as many Gentiles to the Lord as possible. The word he used for magnify (δοξάζω) is a verb which carries the idea “to glorify” or “to make much of.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, Paul’s goal was to glorify or exalt his ministry to the Gentiles in such a way that some Jews would turn to Christ. Paul did not have in mind what many modern day preachers think regarding glorifying a ministry where they become the main celebrity. Paul’s purpose, it would seem as demonstrated throughout the whole New Testament, was not to put the attention on himself but rather on the one to whom the Gentiles were turning. As Martin Luther noted, “He does not glory it for the sake of personal satisfaction but for the sake of the salvation of others.”<sup>28</sup> In making much of Christ through both his teaching and writings, and by becoming all things to all men in order that he might save some, he undoubtedly saw many Gentiles turn to Christ in faith. The result of such a focus was that when more Gentiles turned to Christ, the bigger the

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<sup>27</sup>Walter Bauer, BAGD, s.v. “δοξάζω.”

<sup>28</sup>Martin Luther, *Lecture on Romans*, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Pauck, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 15 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 311.



illustration was for the Jews. Therefore, a good understanding of what Paul meant when he said his desire was to “magnify my ministry” was that he hoped to be as faithful to the gospel as possible, making the most of every opportunity to speak about Christ, with the goal being to see as many Gentiles come to Christ as possible.

Paul said that the goal of this magnifying of his ministry was to make the Jews jealous and “save some” (Rom 11:14). It is important to note that while Paul acknowledged that the Jewish people had been hardened, it did not mean that some would not come to faith upon hearing the gospel. In other words, Paul believed that some Jews would be saved even during the time of divine hardening. He trusted in God’s promise of a remnant. Therefore, Paul committed to seeing Gentiles come to faith knowing that this mission was the means that the Lord had ordained. Gentile faith would bring some Jews to a deep jealousy that in turn would ultimately lead to genuine repentance and faith in Christ. For Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, this goal was his passion and underlying mission.

While Paul expressed that a main purpose for Gentiles should be to make Israel jealous of the salvation that has been extended to them, far too often Gentiles have exhibited hatred and animosity towards the Jews instead. Barry Rubin claimed that making Israel jealous should be the central focus of Gentiles. He said just as the Great Commission was given directly to the Jews, so the notion to provoke Israel to jealousy should be seen as the “Gentile Great Commission.”<sup>29</sup> Rather than making the Jewish people jealous, however, with love for Christ and for them, Christians have shown hatred,

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<sup>29</sup>Barry Rubin, *You Bring the Bagels, I’ll Bring the Gospel: Sharing the Messiah with Your Jewish Neighbors*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1998), 31. See also, Richard Freeman, *The Heart of the Apostle: A Commentary on Romans 9-11* (Instantpublisher.com, 2007), 77.

animosity, extreme arrogance, and condescending views towards Jews and their salvation. Eckhard Schnabel powerfully noted the effects of such an attitude:

I submit the real challenge for largely Gentile Christian churches is not the interpretation of 11:26a (like Jesus, Peter, and Paul we will continue to evangelize all people, 'Jews first and also the Greeks,' no matter which eschatological scheme we may find most convincing). It is, rather, the question whether the reality of our churches prompts Jews to jealousy, let alone Gentiles! If we have to sidestep a clear answer to the question, when the reality of our churches is characterized more by unbelief, coldness, disobedience, fragmentation, alienation, assimilation or lack of love, and when we see hope only for the time after the Parousia, we should not get too exasperated about the fate of Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Morris also noted how Gentile believers have failed to incite jealousy on the part of the Jews. He said, "It is a matter of profound regret that just as Israel refused to accept this salvation when it was offered to them, so the Gentiles have all too often refused to make Israel envious. Instead, Christians have characteristically treated the Jews with hatred, prejudice, persecution, malice, and all uncharitableness. Christians should not take this passage calmly."<sup>31</sup> As Paul noted, if their transgression brought riches to the Gentiles, how much more will the benefits be to all when Israel, out of a sense of jealousy, turns to Christ for salvation (Rom 11:12). It is not exactly clear what Paul meant in saying, "how much more will their full inclusion mean." Hodge's interpretation is helpful. He said, "If the rejection of the Jews has been the occasion of so much good in the world, how much more may be expected from their restoration?"<sup>32</sup> It does seem that an appropriate implication of this passage is that this event, mainly the turning of Jews to Christ, would signal that the end has come and that God has fulfilled his word to the Jews. Therefore,

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<sup>30</sup>Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Israel, the People of God, and the Nations," *JETS* 45 (2002): 56.

<sup>31</sup>Morris, *Romans*, 407.

<sup>32</sup>Charles Hodge, *Romans*, ed. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 325.

instead of displaying haughtiness towards the Jewish people, Gentiles should demonstrate grace and brokenness, much like Paul did.<sup>33</sup>

### **A Means for Grafting in Gentiles**

Not only did Israel's hardening serve to provoke them to jealousy as they saw Gentiles coming to faith, it was also a means for God to extend salvation to the Gentiles. As the text says, Israel's trespass or stumbling over Christ means "riches for the world" and "their failure means riches for the Gentiles" (Rom 11:12). This idea is consistent with what Paul said earlier in Romans 10:30 in that "the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it." In other words, God has hardened Israel in order to show Gentiles mercy. Connecting this idea to Paul's use of mystery later in the chapter, Mark Nanos said, "So the 'mystery' is not so much *that* Israel is 'stumbling' or will be saved, although it may be in part the reminder of these truths, but rather it is *why* Israel is stumbling and *how* Israel will be saved."<sup>34</sup>

From the context of Romans 11, the reason for Israel's stumbling is for the sake of the Gentiles. The link between Israel's rejection of Jesus resulting in their "trespass" (Rom 11:11) and the opportunity for Gentiles to come to faith in him cannot be separated. As Schreiner noted, "The lapse of Israel is part of God's all-encompassing purpose, for by means of their trespass salvation has been given to the Gentiles."<sup>35</sup> Schreiner continued this point saying, "God planned that the Jews would reject the gospel

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<sup>33</sup>This idea is fleshed out in detail in chap. 6 when the dissertation discusses the implications divine hardening has for evangelism.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 260.

<sup>35</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 593.

in large numbers, and in response to their rejection the message was proclaimed to Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:45-48; 18:6; 28:24-28).<sup>36</sup> This idea is consistent with Genesis 12 where God told Abraham that in him all the families of the world would be blessed (Gen 12:3). The notion is that every nation and people that displayed faith in God through Christ would be counted righteous (Gen 15:6). Thus, Paul's second reason as to why God hardened Israel was to allow the Gentiles to be grafted into the promises of God made to Abraham.

To explain this mercy towards the Gentiles, Paul used the illustration of an olive tree (Rom 11:17-24). In his example, the tree represented "the people of God throughout history."<sup>37</sup> Jewish individuals, represented by natural branches of the olive tree, experienced a pruning off while the Gentiles, represented by wild olive shoots, were being grafted into the same tree. Paul's illustration, like Jesus' illustrations, had a direct cultural connection. The significance of this illustration was that a common "horticultural practice in Israel was to invigorate an olive tree that had stopped bearing fruit by grafting wild olive branches into it."<sup>38</sup> As Paul progressed in this illustration, he pointed out several important aspects to which the Gentiles should give careful attention. First, he said that the Gentiles were grafted in "among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree" (Rom 11:17). Next, he warned the Gentiles against developing any type of arrogance towards those cut off and explained why the original

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 594.

<sup>37</sup>Thomas Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 477.

<sup>38</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, (reprinted, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 204-05.

branches were cut off and why the Gentiles were being grafted in and sustained by it (Rom 11:18-22). Last, he explained that though many branches were cut off, “God has the power to graft them in again” (Rom 11:23-25). The following paragraphs expound on the meaning and implication of these three insights.

### **Broken Branches and Grafted Olive Shoots**

Paul began his illustration to the Gentiles stressing that only “some of the branches were cut off” (Rom 11:17). It is important to note Paul’s use of the word *some* rather than *all*. Paul did not say that God cut off *every* Jewish person in order to graft the Gentiles into the olive tree. Rather some of the natural branches, or the remnant Paul mentioned earlier in the chapter, would remain in the olive tree. To this idea Donaldson said, “. . . the point is clear: the Gentiles who have been grafted onto the olive tree have come to join the natural branches already there (ἐν αὐτοῖς), the latter sharing (συγκοινωνοὺς) with the newcomers the goodness that was naturally theirs.”<sup>39</sup> Not all Jews have been cast aside. Rather, believing Gentiles are being connected with the believing Jewish brothers into one vine. As Peter Anders said, “The important point here is that, according to Paul, it is not believing Israel that is incorporated into a new Gentile covenant community, but it is the elected, believing Gentiles who are incorporated into and supported by the true covenant Israel of God.”<sup>40</sup>

That Jews and Gentiles are together in Christ once again repudiates any argument that the Jewish people, as a whole, have been rejected by God and replaced by

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<sup>39</sup>Donaldson, “Riches for the Gentiles,” 84.

<sup>40</sup>Peter Anders, “Called by the King: Election and Assurance in Romans 9-11,” *Modern Reformation* 15 (2006), 26.

the Gentiles. Paul continued the theme by saying that the Gentiles who were grafted into the olive tree would be “grafted in among the others” where both the natural branches and the wild olive shoots would “share in the nourishing root of the olive tree.” As Richard Freeman pointed out, “These new Gentile believers did not replace the remnant of Israel, but rather found themselves among them, bearing fruit with them.”<sup>41</sup> The “olive tree” would be comprised of both Jews and Gentiles finding their salvation in Christ. This idea coincides with his expression in Ephesians 2:11-22:

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Why was it necessary to cut off any branches in order to make room for the “wild olive shoots?” Is it correct to conclude that Paul believed that the “olive tree” only had so many slots available and space was needed for the wild shoots? This conclusion seems to be incorrect in that Paul later said in the analogy that branches cut off would be grafted back in by the power of God (Rom 11:24). No indication is given in the text that any more pruning of natural branches or newly grafted in wild olive shoots will occur for

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<sup>41</sup>Freeman, *The Heart of the Apostle*, 85.

this last act of grafting to be accomplished. Donaldson commented that, “there is no shortage of space on God’s olive tree.”<sup>42</sup> So again, why did Paul state that some branches were cut off? As with every illustration, the temptation is to read it as an allegory where every point coincides directly with something real and definable. It seems the most natural conclusion from the reading is that the “cutting off” of some branches is Paul’s way of saying that the door has opened up for the gospel to go to the Gentiles. It is how he expressed the hardening in the olive tree illustration.

### **Olive Shoots: Stand in Awe**

In the context of the vine and branches analogy, Paul did concede that the Jewish branches were “broken off because of their unbelief” (Rom 11:20). The reminder here is that even though God is the one who has divinely hardened Israel, there is still judgment upon them for their unbelief. This thought, although troubling to some, is no different than Paul’s argument in Romans 9 where he posed the rhetorical question, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” (Rom 9:19). According to Paul, God has the right to do with his creation whatever he likes, and in this case, even though he hardened Israel, they are still responsible for their unbelief.

Jewish people were broken off because of unbelief, but the unbelief was given by God in order that they would be broken off allowing the Gentiles to be grafted in. From eternity past, it has always been the Triune God’s plan to redeem sinners from every nation, tribe, and language. Therefore, in his eternal decree, the way he willed this process to come to pass was through the hardening of the Jewish people, which resulted

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<sup>42</sup>Donaldson, “Riches for the Gentiles,” 83.

in their being cut off and in turn allowed the nations to be grafted in. As Lucien Cerfaux noted, “The rejection of the mass of the Jewish people was necessary for God’s plan, and it made way for the Gentiles.”<sup>43</sup>

It is important to remember Paul’s bold assertion in Romans 9:18. In that passage, he said, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills.” For Gentiles, the reality of their being grafted in has nothing to do with their own righteousness. Instead, it has all to do with God calling them to himself and grafting them in. As Moo rightly pointed out, “Gentile Christians have not earned the right to be grafted into the olive tree. Their arrogance takes the form not only of bragging over Jews but also of boasting in their own accomplishment. Their attitude, so it seems, is that they felt so important and deserving that God removed Jews in order to include them (v. 19).”<sup>44</sup> They must remember that they were sinners and enemies of God. Their redemption is based solely on God’s display of grace and mercy. The reason the Gentiles have been grafted in is because of faith in Christ, which is the gift of God (Eph 2:8-9). This notion is why Paul admonished them to “stand fast through faith” (Rom 11:20). Thus, Paul warned them not to grow arrogant in their thinking or proud as if they had earned God’s favor but instead to “stand in awe” of God’s unbelievable mercy both to them and at the expense of the Jews (Rom 11:20). As Evertt Harrison remarked, “It was

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<sup>43</sup>Lucien Cerfaux, *The Christian in the Theology of St. Paul* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 70.

<sup>44</sup>Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary, 367.



Jewish disobedience in regard to the gospel that opened the gates of mercy for the Gentiles.”<sup>45</sup>

Ben Witherington quipped, “It is a regular feature of God’s work that redemption for one person may require or involve judgment on another person.”<sup>46</sup> This statement was demonstrated most clearly in Jesus’ substitutionary death for sinners. This idea was seen as well throughout the whole of Scripture where certain animals took the place of individuals acting as a sin offering. Again, this idea was proved true in relationship to Israel’s hardening and the Gentile’s being grafted into the olive tree. Because the Jews stumbled due to their hardening by God, salvation came to the Gentiles. As Scripture recounts, God is the creator of all peoples and will be the redeemer of all peoples. Donaldson’s summation regarding the hardening as the very means for Gentile salvation is powerful:

Israel’s failure to respond to the gospel makes possible the “riches for the Gentiles” by opening up not some space but some time. If Israel had responded to the gospel immediately, if God had not been prepared to harden all but the remnant, the Gentiles would have remained branches of the wild olive tree and vessels fitted for destruction. God has set aside some of the natural branches not to replace them with those drawn from Gentiles but to provide an opportunity for the Gentiles to be grafted into the tree, so that they might share the goodness of the root with the natural branches—only some of them now, but all of them in the end.<sup>47</sup>

Even in unbelief, Israel is fulfilling the purpose of being a light to the nations. As John Johnson noted, their unbelief is what allowed salvation to come to the nations.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Everett Harrison, *Romans*, in vol. 7 of *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 125.

<sup>46</sup>Ben Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 256.

<sup>47</sup>Donaldson, “Riches for the Gentiles,” 94.

<sup>48</sup>John J. Johnson, “A New Testament Understanding of the Jewish Rejection of Jesus: Four Theologians on the Salvation of Israel,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 236.

What Johnson meant is that Israel, in this hardened state, has unintentionally fulfilled the call to proclaim the greatness of God to the nations. In Isaiah 42:6-7, the Lord said, “I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” While this content applied to Jesus, the one who gave sight to the blind, called those who were in the prison and darkness of sin to the glory of his being, Israel too was to serve as the “light bearer” to the nations. In an ironic way, through their hardening, the Jewish people are still fulfilling this role. Their hardening has allowed those Gentiles who are in darkness to enter into a relationship with the living God.

Therefore, instead of having any sense of pride, the Gentiles should stand in humbleness towards the Jews as well as awe towards God. Furthermore, Paul warned his readers that just as God cut off the natural branches for unbelief, he would do the same to the Gentiles (Rom 11:21). Hence, the Gentiles grafted in to Christ, should see God’s kindness towards them as unmerited and unearned. They should display a gentleness not only towards those branches cut off but also towards those Jewish branches who, along with them, are being nourished by Christ.

### **Natural Branches Grafted Back In**

The last point of significance regarding this illustration of the natural branches, the wild olive shoots, and the olive tree, is the assertion that the branches, which had been cut off, could be restored to the tree by the power of God. Paul’s argument is, “that if the hard thing, the thing contrary to nature—i.e., the grafting of wild branches into the cultivated vine—has been accomplished, one should not find it difficult to believe that

God will restore the broken-off branches of the cultivated olive to their former position.”<sup>49</sup> The reason it is easier to cultivate such an action is due to Israel’s history. As C. K. Barrett asserted, “It will be easier—if such things can be compared—to bring back to the holy people a Jew born into the covenants of grace, endowed with the law (which did after all bear witness to the manifestation of God’s righteousness by grace through faith—iii.21), and instructed by the messianic prophecies, than to introduce for the first time a Gentile whose only advantage was the dim vestige of religion which warned him that the world of which he was part was not his but God’s (i.20).”<sup>50</sup> Even more to the point is the bold declaration expressed by Paul that not only does God have the power to restore the broken off branches, he indeed will do it (Rom 11:23). The Jews will indeed be grafted again into the olive tree.

Once again, Paul confronted any hint of pride and boasting saying, “For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree” (Rom 11:24). Paul believed that just as Gentiles would be cut off for future unbelief, Israel would be grafted in again once they expressed belief. All of the promises to the patriarchs, to which Christ represents as the true olive tree, will be theirs again upon belief in him. Just as the patriarchs believed in God’s promised Messiah, so too when the Jews believe in God’s Messiah—Jesus—will they be part of the tree again.

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<sup>49</sup>Harrison, *Romans*, 122

<sup>50</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1957), 219.

### A Means for Displaying God's Glory

A last reason Paul disclosed that God hardened the majority of the Jewish people was to display his glory through mercy. Paul said, "So they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all" (Rom 11:31-32). As with Pharaoh, the hardening served a greater purpose, mainly the glorification of God's power and might. In the hardening of the Jewish people, and through the grafting in of the Gentiles, and then in turning back to the Jewish people for salvation, God is seen as merciful to all.

Witherington said, "Israel was destined to stumble so that Gentiles might rise, but also so that all might rise up by the grace of God."<sup>51</sup> In the end, both Israel and the nations are saved by the same power: God's mercy.<sup>52</sup> Considering Paul's point of God showing mercy to all, Greg Herrick said, "The fact that God first chose Israel, then hardened her in order to reach Gentiles, but yet will finally save her is according to His plan to bring mercy unto all. The idea that God has confined all to disobedience is similar to His hardening Israel (as a sovereign decision) and reflects the fact that, as Paul has made clear, it does not depend on man's effort but on Him who has mercy (9:16)."<sup>53</sup>

R. B. Hays correctly noted that Paul's use of "God did not spare" in Romans 11:21 has ties back to Christ and God ordaining him to be a sacrifice for others. He said,

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<sup>51</sup> Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 256.

<sup>52</sup> Jennifer Glancy, "Israel vs. Israel in Romans 11:25-32," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 45 (1991): 201.

<sup>53</sup> Greg Herrick, "Israel's Present Hardening and Future Salvation: An Exegesis of Romans 11:25-32," *Biblical Studies Press* 2 (1997) [on-line]; accessed 7 August 2009; available from <http://bible.org/article/israels-present-hardening-and-future-salvation-exegesis-romans-1125-32>; Internet.

‘What Paul has done, in a word, is to interpret the fate of Israel christologically . . . Israel undergoes rejection for the sake of the world, bearing suffering vicariously.’<sup>54</sup> Jennifer Glancy noted this connection too when speaking about Israel’s sufferings in connection with other’s salvation and God showing mercy to all:

Just as Paul died to the ties of Judaism, he may expect that Israel will have its identity crucified before it experiences the mercy of God. If so, then what Paul perceives as Israel’s present crisis of identity may in fact be the first stage in Israel’s salvation—a death to the wholeness of Israel that will result in Israel’s eschatological restoration to life. In this context, Paul’s allusion to Israel’s sonship evokes the fate of Jesus, God’s son, whose death was the prerequisite to his resurrection. Israel becomes *symmorphos* with Christ not by coming to believe in Jesus, but by sharing Jesus’ destiny.<sup>55</sup>

This idea of Israel suffering for the glory of God finds its support in Psalm 44. In the opening verses of the Psalm, the author recounted the story of God’s mighty power in delivering Israel from her enemies. Then, the author turned to his current situation where it seemed as if God was punishing the Jewish nation despite faithfulness. The psalmist said, “But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies” (Ps 44:9) and that “you have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations” (44:11). As the psalmist said, “All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way” (Ps 44:17-18). The psalmist concluded that the reason for the current situation was for the glory of God. He said, “Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be

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<sup>54</sup>Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 61.

<sup>55</sup>Glancy, “Israel vs. Israel in Romans 11:25-32,” 192.

slaughtered” (Ps 44:22). Hays made the connection of these passages in Psalm 44 with Paul’s thought in Romans 11:

Paul’s extraordinary interpretation of the “stumbling” of his Jewish contemporaries as divinely ordained becomes less dissonant when read against the choral background of Psalm 44. If exilic Israel’s suffering is interpreted by the psalmist not as punishment but as suffering for the sake of God’s name, then perhaps even the temporary unbelief of Israel can be understood as part of God’s design to encompass Jews and Gentiles alike with mercy. And indeed, so Paul argues in Romans 11:11-32.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, God hardened Israel in order to display his glory and grace to all men. None could say that Jews are saved by their relationship to God through Abraham. Their disobedience points directly at Christ and the need to trust in him. The hardening, then, allowed God clearly to demonstrate mercy to both Gentiles and Jews in redeeming them both.

### **Conclusion**

Taking Romans 9-11 together, the primary purpose in God hardening Israel was that it served to display his glory to all. There is no hint that the hardening was due to rejection of Christ by the Jews. Ultimately, the divine hardening, which Israel experienced and is still experiencing, is a means for displaying God’s glory. God ordained the rebellion of his own people to make room for the Gentiles. He will also use the jealousy of the Jews over the inclusion of the Gentiles to bring the Jews to salvation. Therefore, as Paul stated, “God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all”<sup>57</sup> Just as God has been the author of Israel’s partial hardening, he will be

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<sup>56</sup>Hays, *Echoes*, 61.

<sup>57</sup>Andrew Wakefield, “Romans 9-11: The Sovereignty of God and the Status of Israel,” *RevExp* 100 (2003): 70.

the author of their turning to Christ and having fullness of life. Thus, to paraphrase what Paul stated previously in Romans 9:18, only in reverse order, “God hardens whom he wills and he has mercy on whom he wills!” Rob Richards provides a good summary of God’s work towards Israel in Romans 11 and his purpose in their hardening.

Were we to be in any doubt, Paul outlines seven examples of restoration concerning Israel (11:12ff). Their transgression (that is Israel’s failure as a nation to accept the Messiah), he contrasts with the promise of fullness (11:12). Their rejection he contrasts with the promise of acceptance (11:15), their being broken off (the natural olive tree), with the promise of being grafted in (11:23-24), experiencing a hardening in part, with the promise of being saved (11:25-26), being godless, with the promise of their sins being taken away (11:26-27), being at present enemies of the gospel, with the truth that they are loved on account of the patriarchs (11:28), being disobedient, with the promise of receiving mercy (11:31-32).<sup>58</sup>

God indeed has consigned Israel to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.

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<sup>58</sup>Rob Richards, *Has God Finished with Israel*, 103.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE REMOVAL OF THE HARDENING: ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED

This dissertation has argued that Paul's perspective regarding Israel in Romans 9-11 was that God has hardened them, as a nation, to the gospel. Second, Paul argued that the result of this hardening led to their rejection of Christ. Third, Paul believed this hardening served the purpose of bringing the gospel to all nations. Last, Paul understood that this hardening was only temporary and would be lifted one day by God. Thus, while Paul suffered over the condition of his kinsmen as they endured the hardening from God, he found his comfort as he looked forward to the day when the hardening would be removed from them. He knew that just as God had placed them under his mighty hand of hardening, one day he would extend a hand of mercy and grace and that the people of the covenant would be saved. With this in mind, he penned that first part of Romans 11:26 saying, "And in this way all Israel will be saved."

As the last chapter demonstrated, one of the purposes of the hardening was to make Israel jealous and ultimately serve as a means to show them mercy by grafting them back into the olive tree. Therefore, while the previous chapters of this dissertation have examined the nature and purpose of this divine hardening that is upon Israel, it is appropriate to turn attention now to the examination of what Paul meant in this expression regarding the Jewish people once the temporary hardening by God is lifted from their hearts.



To explore this issue, it is necessary to examine Romans 11:25-32, and especially verses 25-26. Much discussion in scholarly circles has sought to determine what Paul meant in these crucial verses. Traditionally, Bible scholars have translated Paul's phrase "all Israel will be saved" in Romans 11:26 in one of three ways.<sup>1</sup> The first possible translation argued that Paul was referring to the great number of Jewish people who will turn to Christ. This turning will occur "just previous to, or at the very moment of, Christ's return."<sup>2</sup> The second possible translation was one that John Calvin expressed in his commentary on Romans. He argued that "all Israel" referred to all of the elect Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Christ throughout the history of man.<sup>3</sup> A third possible interpretation for "all Israel" was the "total number of elect Jews, the sum of all Israel's remnants."<sup>4</sup> As Paul mentioned in the opening passages of Romans 11, God has provided for himself a remnant in every generation. Thus, all Israel will be the combination of all the remnants throughout the Jewish people's history as the covenant people of God. With these options as the background, the purpose of this chapter is to determine which of these three possible interpretations best explains Paul's use of "all Israel." In order to arrive at the best conclusion, this chapter will examine each of these three interpretations for their strengths and weaknesses.

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<sup>1</sup>James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2001), 787. In Garrett's work, he mentioned various scholars who affirmed each of the three positions. See also Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 139-40.

<sup>2</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 379.

<sup>3</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen, in *The John Calvin Collection* [CD-ROM] (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2000), 339-40.

<sup>4</sup>Hendriksen, *Romans*, 381.

### **Option 1: Numerous Jews Turn to Christ in the End**

The first possible way of interpreting “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 is to understand that Paul was referring to a significant turning of the Jewish people to Christ at the end of times. After the Gentiles come to faith, a historic turning to Jesus on the part of ethnic Israel will occur. The following paragraphs will explore both the strengths and weakness of this view, which is the most widely held interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Strengths**

The first strength of this argument is its relationship to the context of Romans 11. In this chapter, Paul warned against pride on the part of the Gentiles. He explained the grafting in of the Gentiles was not at the expense of the Jewish people’s salvation. Paul made it clear that God has not rejected Israel (Rom 11:1-2, 5). Instead, Paul revealed that the rejection on the part of the Jews is a result of a mystery. This mystery was not some problem that is incomprehensible for humans. Rather, as C. E. B. Cranfield noted, this mystery is “something which could not be known by men except by divine revelation, but which, though once hidden, is now revealed in Christ and is to be

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<sup>5</sup>Scholars advocating this interpretation include Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 202; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 575-77; David Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Church: A New Perspective on History and Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1995), 50-53; Bruce Longenecker, “Different Answers to Different Issues: Israel, the Gentiles, and Salvation History in Romans 9-11,” *JSNT* 36 (1989): 95-123; Moo, *Romans*, 723; John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 25; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 615; Rob Richards, *Has God Finished with Israel?* (Milton Keynes, England: Word, 1994), 94-113; Michael Vanlaningham, “Romans 11:25-27 and the Future of Israel in Paul’s Thought,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 3 (1992): 141-74.

proclaimed so that all who have ears to hear may hear it.”<sup>6</sup> In Romans 11:25, Paul explained this mystery stating that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was due to their partial hardening. By partial, Paul did not mean that every ethnic Jew was made lukewarm to the gospel. Instead, it meant that most of the nation of Israel has been hardened while another smaller group has received mercy. This hardening by God was for the purpose of granting Gentiles salvation (Rom 11:11) and grafting them into the olive tree (Rom 11:24).

More to the point, Paul revealed that the primary purpose of this hardening was to allow the “fullness of Gentiles” to receive salvation. By this, Paul meant the temporary blindness of the Jews to the truth of the gospel served the purpose of making the gospel available to the Gentiles. Upon hearing the gospel, the Lord would then effectually open the hearts of the elect Gentiles so that they would believe and be saved (Acts 13:48, 16:14). An implication of this statement, however, is that there is a time when all of the elect Gentiles will have come to faith bringing to an end the period when Gentiles will turn to Christ for salvation.<sup>7</sup> It is after this point, according to those who affirm this position, that ethnic Israel will turn to Christ and be granted salvation.

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<sup>6</sup>Cranfield, *Romans*, 573. See also Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: William S. & Alfred Martien, 1859), 277; Moo, *Romans*, 714; Schreiner, *Romans*, 613.

<sup>7</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 614. Schreiner noted, “Many scholars have failed to see that the mystery also relates to the Gentiles, in that the period in which salvation will be available to them will not last forever . . . the focal point of the mystery is the timing and manner of Israel’s salvation: Israel will be saved after the inclusion of the Gentiles.” Cf. Hodge, *Romans*, 278. Hodge said concerning fullness, “It does not necessarily imply that all the Gentiles are to be thus brought in before the conversion of the Jews occurs, but that this latter event was not to take place until a great multitude of the Gentiles had entered into the kingdom of Christ.” This interpretation allows the possibility for additional Gentiles to turn to faith upon seeing the Jews turn to Christ (Rom 11:12, 15). See also John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 93-96.

A question for this position is what Jews are included in Paul's mind when he said, "All Israel will be saved"? Did he mean the ultimate salvation of every Jew who had ever lived? Did he mean salvation would come only to those Jews who at the end of time trust in Christ? Alternatively, did he mean all Jews who are alive just prior to Christ's return? Regarding the first interpretation, it is unlikely that Paul affirmed the salvation of every Jew who ever lived. If this were the case, why did he ache (Rom 9:1-3) and pray (Rom 10:1) for the salvation of the Jews? Why did he endure beatings and imprisonment if he believed that the eventual salvation for all Jews would occur? Why did he continue to visit and preach the gospel in synagogues if the salvation of all Jews was a forgone conclusion? All of Paul's actions and words reveal that he did not believe that "all Israel" in Romans 11:26 included every Jew who ever lived.

Additionally, Paul stressed in Galatians 2:16 that individuals receive salvation by faith and not works. He added in Romans 10:14-17 the vital importance of hearing the word as part of coming to faith. He also noted in Romans 11:15 the association between the Jews' reconciliation before God and their acceptance of Christ. Last, he stated that those who had been broken off from the olive tree would be grafted back in upon demonstrating faith (Rom 11:23). While it seems unlikely that Paul believed in the salvation of every Jew alive at the time of Christ's return, God is able to save all who are alive at that time.

The best reason, however, to conclude that Paul did not mean every Jew who was alive at that time would be saved is based on previous uses of this word in the Bible. Leon Morris said, "'All Israel' does not mean each and every Israelite without

exception.”<sup>8</sup> Ben Merkle concurred with this thought stating, “This view comes from the OT and rabbinic literature where the term ‘all Israel’ does not necessarily include every single Israelite.”<sup>9</sup> “All Israel” in the Old Testament had a corporate nature. Therefore, when a text like Joshua 7:25 says that “all Israel” gathered to stone Achan, it is unlikely to assume that every single Jew alive actually participated in the stoning death of Achan for his disobedience. Instead, “all Israel” in cases like this referred to the nation at large and not necessarily to every Jew individually. Therefore, in the context of Romans 11:26, it seems the best understanding for Paul’s use of “all” is that he meant the nation as a whole will be saved rather than every Jew. Moo’s observation that “Paul writes ‘all Israel’ and not ‘every Israelite’” is helpful at this point.<sup>10</sup>

### **Weaknesses**

A potential weakness of this position is the way that those who advocate this interpretation handle the translation of καὶ οὕτως. Those interpreters who advocate a mass turning to Christ on the part of ethnic Jews usually translate this construction as “and then” or “after that.” The problem with this translation, however, is that the temporal interpretation for this construction. Noting the potential for translating this passage as such, Merkle said that the “BAGD does not cite one possible use of οὕτως with a temporal significance.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, to translate this passage as saying that ethnic

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<sup>8</sup>Leon Morris, *Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 420.

<sup>9</sup>Ben Merkle, “Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 710.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 719.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 717-20. See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 620; Hendriksen, *Romans*, 379.

Israel is partially hardened until the total number of elect Gentiles comes to faith *and then* the salvation of all ethnic Israel will occur goes beyond any grammatical allowances for this construction found in the New Testament. Hoekema best summarized this critique concerning the issue of timing when he said, “Paul is not saying, ‘Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in, and then (after this has happened) all Israel will be saved.’ But he is saying, ‘Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.’”<sup>12</sup>

Schreiner, who advocated this turning to Christ by ethnic Israel, argued that the proper way to understand this construction is to see it as denoting the mode or manner.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Paul revealed the manner or way and not the time in which salvation will come to ethnic Israel. This idea was what made Paul’s disclosure so marvelous and mysterious. While Paul never doubted that God was still faithful to his promises to Israel, his revelation was shocking in the manner in which their salvation would come. As Schreiner noted, “What is new and distinctive is the revelation that all Israel would be saved only after the full number of Gentiles had been inscribed into the people of God.”<sup>14</sup> This understanding seems to fit best both the use of the Greek words and the interpretation in connection to the rest of Romans 11.

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<sup>12</sup>Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 145.

<sup>13</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 621. For others who also interpret this phrase as modal or one of manner, see Calvin, *Romans*, 339; Hendriksen, *Romans*, 379; Merkle, “Romans 11,” 716-17. Merkle, however, saw this modal interpretation as adding strength not to the ethnic Jewish interpretation but the remnant interpretation.

<sup>14</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 621.

A second criticism leveled against this position was its relationship to the rest of Romans 9-11. Throughout those chapters, Paul revealed his great anguish and sadness for the fact that the very Jews with whom he shared the gospel rejected it forthright. Merkle argued that Paul's concern was not about the future of Israel but instead about the immediate salvation of those Jews among which he lived. He said, "Does Paul hope of provoking the Jews to jealously imply a future mass conversion? The answer to this question must be 'no' since Paul uses his own ministry as the means of provocation. Paul's hope for the salvation of 'some of them' comes through his own ministry."<sup>15</sup> Hendriksen agreed with this analysis saying, "The reader has not been prepared for the idea of a mass conversion of Israelites. All along Paul stresses the very opposite, namely, the salvation in any age (past, present, future) of *a remnant*."<sup>16</sup> Charles Horne, whose position agreed with Hendriksen's and Merkle's assessments, pondered, "If Paul is speaking in 11:26 of a future mass conversion of the nation of Israel, then he is destroying the entire development of his argument in chaps. 9-11. For the one important point that he is trying to establish constantly is exactly this: that God's promises attain fulfillment not in the nation as such (that is, all of ethnic Israel) but rather in the remnant according to the election of grace."<sup>17</sup> This idea will again be addressed when the third option for understanding "all Israel" is examined.

A third criticism of this position was that any future mass conversion of ethnic Israel contradicts Paul's statements in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. In these passages, Paul

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<sup>15</sup>Merkle, "Romans 11," 714.

<sup>16</sup>Hendriksen, *Romans*, 379.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Horne, "The Meaning of the Phrase 'And Thus All Israel Will Be Saved' (Romans 11:26)," *JETS* 21 (1978): 333.

said, “For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last!” Paul’s words imply that ethnic Israel could forget obtaining salvation because God’s wrath was upon them. While this passage is difficult to reconcile with Paul’s words in Romans 11, those affirming the mass salvation of ethnic Israel attempt to find one. For example, Schreiner said concerning this verse that, “It may be that 1 Thess. 2 refers to a historical punishment the Jews had already received, or perhaps more likely the words are reserved for those Jews who had actually rejected the gospel.”<sup>18</sup> While this attempt at a cohesive understanding of the two passages may not appease the harshest of critics of this position, it does provide one logical and potential understanding that reconciles Paul’s words between the two passages.

### **Option 2: The Combination of the Elect Jews and Gentiles**

In his commentary on the book of Romans, Calvin interpreted Paul’s citation of “all Israel” as a combination of Jews and Gentiles:

Many understand this of the Jewish people, as though Paul had said, that religion would again be restored among them as before: but I extend the word Israel to all the people of God, according to this meaning, –“When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole of Israel of God, which must be

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<sup>18</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 623.



gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the first-born in God's family."<sup>19</sup>

In other words, Calvin believed that both the elect Gentiles grafted into the olive tree as well as the elect Jews who God regenerated comprised "all Israel." Calvin was not the only theologian who advocated this view. Moo acknowledged that this position "became especially widespread among Protestant Continental theologians in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the following paragraphs will examine this interpretation for its strengths and weaknesses to determine if this is the best possible understanding of Paul's words.

### **Strengths**

The primary strength for this interpretation was the numerous scripture passages penned by Paul that combine Israel and Gentile believers as one group. For example, in Romans 2:28-29, Paul said, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter." The implication from this passage is that all are considered "Jews" who have believed in Christ as their savior and have had their hearts of stone turned to hearts of flesh (Ezek 11:19, 36:26).

In addition, in Romans 4, one finds another passage providing validity for this interpretation. Commenting of the nature of Abraham's justification before God outside

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<sup>19</sup>Calvin, *Romans*, 339-40. See also Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1971), 41. In contrast to Calvin's views, Murray noted that the Geneva Bible, which was produced four years before Calvin's death, placed in the margin notes concerning Rom 11:26 that there would be a time when the nation of Israel would indeed turn to Christ.

<sup>20</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 721.

of the Law, Paul said, “The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Rom 4:11-12). According to Paul’s thinking in this verse, Abraham was not the father of ethnic Jews alone. Instead, he was the father of all who believe in Christ.

Additional passages outside of Romans provide support for this understanding of “Israel” being a hybrid of both Gentiles and Jews. In Galatians 3:7-9 Paul said, “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. Moreover, the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” In the context of this passage, it seems that one should not interpret Israel as only ethnic Jews but instead include all of those who like Abraham, believe in the Lord, and are thus counted righteous. Likewise, Paul said in Galatians 3:29 that “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” What connects an individual with Abraham, and consequently, with “Israel” is being found in Christ. This spiritual lineage was why Paul said, “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal 6:15-16).<sup>21</sup> The key point in this passage was that Paul labeled those who are a new creation as being the true Israel of God. Based on passages

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<sup>21</sup>For a good assessment on the nature of Paul’s understanding concerning the Israel of God and the New Israel, see W. S. Campbell, “Israel,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 441-42.

like these, some scholars conclude that Israel in Galatians is the same Israel in Romans 11 and thus provides the answer to the question of “all Israel.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Weaknesses**

One of the great weaknesses to interpreting “all Israel” to mean both Gentiles and Jews is that it does not fit the context of Romans 11 well. Schreiner’s words on this point illuminate this dilemma:

The central and decisive objection to this interpretation is the context of Rom 9-11, especially the immediate context of chapter 11. The failure of ethnic Jews to obtain salvation is what provoked chapters 9-11 in the first place. Moreover, the preceding verses in chapter 11 preserve a distinction between Gentiles and ethnic Jews: the Gentiles are being grafted onto the olive tree while the Jews—as the natural branches—are being removed. Indeed, to posit that the term ‘Israel’ includes believing Gentiles in verse 26 requires that Paul lurches to a new meaning for the term ‘Israel’ in verse 26 . . . It is obvious in verse 25 that the term ‘Israel’ refers to ethnic Israel in contradistinction to the Gentiles. Thus, it is extremely unlikely that the term ‘Israel’ would have a different meaning in verse 26 than it did in verse 25.<sup>23</sup>

Cranfield was more forceful in his statement at this point. He declared that this position “must surely be rejected; for it is not feasible to understand Israel in v. 26 in a different sense from that which it has in v. 25, especially in view of the sustained contrast between Israel and the Gentiles throughout vv. 11-32.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Moo said, “For Paul in this context to call the church the ‘Israel’ of God would be to fuel the fire of the Gentiles’

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<sup>22</sup>In addition to Calvin, current scholars advocating this view include Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 862; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 250.

<sup>23</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 615.

<sup>24</sup>Cranfield, *Romans*, 576.

arrogance by giving them grounds to brag that *we* are the true Israel.”<sup>25</sup>

In addition, any spiritual Israel comprised of both Jews and Gentiles was contrary to the other uses of Israel throughout chapters 9-11. For example, Paul used the word “Israel” in Romans 9-11 in the following places: 9:4, 6, 27, 31; 10:19, 21; 11:1, 2, 7, and 25. In each of those cases, the most natural interpretation was to understand Israel as referring to the ethnic descendants of Abraham and not some spiritualized hybrid of believing Jews and Gentiles.

This issue is especially crucial with regard to Romans 11:25. If Paul meant ethnic Israel in this verse, what evidence is there to believe that he would suddenly switch to make Israel mean both Gentiles and Jews? The purpose of Romans 11:25 was to remind the Gentiles that the negative response on the part of the Jews towards the gospel was only partial and would cease when all of the elect Gentiles have come to faith. Indeed, Paul’s line of thinking with regard to an ethnic Israel distinct from a combination of Gentiles and Jews continued through Romans 11:29. In Romans 11:28, Israel was described as an enemy of God for the sake of the Gentiles but was indeed still loved because of God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, Paul noted, “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29) implying that those gifts listed in Rom 9:4-5 as well as the election made by God of ethnic Israel remain. It is not until Romans 11:30 that Paul picked up any reference back to ethnic Gentiles. Even then, the Gentiles are still distinct in Paul’s mind from ethnic Israel. In these passages, he revealed

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<sup>25</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 721. Moo did say, however, “My point is not that Paul would deny that this is the case; Gal 6:16 and Phil. 3:3 show conclusively that he would be quiet happy to use this language—but only in a certain rhetorical situation. That rhetorical situation is entirely different in Rom. 11.”

that both groups have been or are presently being made disobedient to God and that he has or will show mercy to both. The distinction between the two seems evident.

A last objection to this position was the relationship this interpretation has to the “mystery” of Romans 11:25. Paul clearly referred to the fact that the material he was about to share had been hidden in the past. Therefore, to understand “all Israel” as meaning only the total number of elect Jews and Gentiles who have come to faith fails to provide any mystery at all. As Iain Murray said, “If the ‘all Israel’ of verse 26 refers to the final salvation of all believers, Jew and Gentile, why does Paul call it a mystery?”<sup>26</sup>

### **Option 3: The Total Number of Elect Jews throughout History**

The last possible understanding of “all Israel” was that Paul meant the total number of elect Jews from all time. At some future point, the last remnant Jew will turn to faith in Christ thus completing the full number and salvation of all Jews. Hendriksen, who advocated this position, said, “It is obvious that if, in every age, some Israelites are hardened, it must also be true that in every age some are saved . . . . The term ‘All Israel’ means *the total number of elect Jews, the sum of all Israel’s remnants.*”<sup>27</sup> Thus, this partial hardening until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in is not understood as giving temporal guidance but instead revealed that the majority of Israel will always be hardened but that a few will always be saved.

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<sup>26</sup>Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 63.

<sup>27</sup>Hendriksen, *Romans*, 381. Other scholars who additionally advocated this position include Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 106; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 699; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 187.

## Strengths

The primary strength of this argument was its relationship to Paul's words in Romans 11:1-7. Paul has lamented in chapters 9-10 that so many in Israel have not believed the gospel despite their election as a people and all of the benefits that come with being Jewish. In chapter 11, Paul noted, however, that some Jews do in fact believe in Christ and thus neither God nor his word has failed. When applied to Romans 11:25-26, the mystery was not that Jews do not believe. The hidden mystery was the fact that God has kept his promises and remained faithful to call some Jews to faith. Noting that Romans 11:26 says "so" and not "then" as well as "shall" and not "will be," this remnant was being saved alongside of the believing Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> The completion of the fullness of the Jews was occurring simultaneously with the completion of the fullness of the Gentiles.<sup>29</sup>

A second supporting piece of evidence for this position was the current references that Paul used throughout chapter 11. For example, Paul noted in Romans 11:1-5 that "at the present time there is a remnant." In answering his own question about God's possible rejection of the Jews, he referred to the issue of a present remnant and not some future conversionary event. Again, in Romans 11:13-14, Paul's concern seemed to be with those Jews in his day who were not responding to the gospel and not future Jews or some future awakening. A third example is found in Romans 11:31 where Paul said of the Jews that, "they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy." Twice in this sentence alone, the time reference

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<sup>28</sup>Herman Hoeksema, *God's Eternal Good Pleasure*, ed. and rev. Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 333-34.

<sup>29</sup>For a fuller explanation of this position, see Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 143.

is to Paul's "now." Furthermore, the last part of this sentence implied that the receiving of mercy and salvation on the part of the Jews was a current reality. O. Palmer Robertson stated that on the evidence of these four passages in addition to Romans 11:25-26, one should understand that "Paul's central concern continues to be the present response of Israel."<sup>30</sup> This notion of the here and now in Paul's words does provide strong evidence in support of the view that he meant that the Jews were being saved at the same time as the Gentiles.

### **Weaknesses**

One of the primary weaknesses of this interpretation was that it did not provide evidence for why Paul would say "all Israel" in Romans 11:26. Paul already noted that there was certain remnant Jews who believed in Christ, of which he was one (Rom 11:1-6). If Paul's intention was merely to explain that as the full number of Gentiles come to faith, all of the elect Jews or remnant would come to faith as well, why did he talk about any mystery? This apparent contradiction has caught the attention of scholars. John Murray stated, "That all the elect will be saved does not have the particularity that 'mystery' in this instance involves."<sup>31</sup> Michael Vanlaningham added, "If 'all Israel' is simply the elect from ethnic Israel who are saved along with the Gentiles throughout the age, special revelation to Paul in the form of a *mysterion* (vs. 25) is pointless."<sup>32</sup> There seems to be something anticlimactic at this point with this interpretation regarding Paul's statement of a mystery if all his meaning was merely the completion of the fullness of the

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<sup>30</sup>Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 170.

<sup>31</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 97.

<sup>32</sup>Vanlaningham, "Romans 11:25-27," 160.

elect Jews. As Moo noted, “What stands out in vv. 25b-26a, what Paul has not yet explicitly taught, and what entails a reversal in current Jewish belief, is . . . Israel hardened *until* the Gentiles come in and *in this way* all Israel being saved.”<sup>33</sup> Moo continued by saying that what was significant from Paul’s perspective was that “Israel would one day experience a spiritual rejuvenation that would extend far beyond the present bounds of the remnant.”<sup>34</sup>

This perceived weakness was not, however, without its rebuttals from its supporters. Advocates for this third position have argued that the mystery was that a remnant remains as a testimony to God’s mercy and saving initiative throughout history.<sup>35</sup> Hendriksen argued the first part of Romans was not in contradiction to the latter part of the chapter, especially the mystery phrase. While Paul’s words in the opening verses describe the presence of a remnant, Romans 11:26 was the cumulative collection of all these single remnants throughout Israel’s history.<sup>36</sup> The mystery was that there was always a remnant present even though most of Israel was hardened to God. Hoekema noted that this mystery contained the reality that “Though Israel has been hardened in its unbelief, this hardening has always been and will continue to be only a partial hardening, never a total hardening . . . Israel will continue to turn to the Lord until the Parousia, while at the same time the fullness of the Gentiles is being gathered in.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, salvation has come to “all Israel” throughout the history of the people and not to

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<sup>33</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 716.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 718.

<sup>35</sup>Hendriksen, *Romans*, 382.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 145. See also Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 174.



just a small group who happen to be alive at the time just prior to Christ's return. The mystery was that while it may appear God has rejected Israel, he indeed has not and remnant Jews offer proof of this fact.

Although this position tries to free God from any accusation of wrong doing to the previous generations of Jews who do not come to faith, it still was lacking in appeal, especially in its understanding of the mystery. Evidence points to Paul's mysterious revelation as meaning more than the disclosure that a simple remnant of Jews will always be present. There does not seem to be anything strangely or drastically different or significant about this understanding alone. That was why Schreiner noted that "The word 'until' implies that the hardening of the majority of Israel will be lifted after the full number of Gentiles are saved . . . suggesting not merely the salvation of a remnant throughout history but a great ingathering of Jews into the people of God."<sup>38</sup>

Interesting, however, were Moo's comments on this argument. While he was not a supporter of this position, he did advance the proposition that one cannot merely dismiss this position because of this seeming imperfection. He said, "Paul's focus is not so much on the fact that all Israel will be saved as on the manner in which it will be saved."<sup>39</sup> He felt that the stronger case for rejecting this position rested in the shifting of meaning for Israel between verses 25 and 26.<sup>40</sup> To affirm that Paul meant merely a remnant, one must explain how this would fit into his discussion of their being cut off

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<sup>38</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 618. Cf. Ben Merkle, "Romans," 14-16. Merkle argued, "A hardening will occur throughout the whole of the present age until the return of Christ. Paul is not suggesting a time when the hardening will be reversed but a time when the hardening is eschatologically fulfilled."

<sup>39</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 722.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

and then eventually grafted back in. By its very nature, remnant individuals are those who have remained faithful. In the context of Romans 11, the individual in the Jewish remnant was that person who has indeed turned to Christ by faith. Therefore, why would Paul then argue their being cut off? What did they do that caused them their pruning from the olive tree?

### **Conclusion**

All three interpretations of “all Israel” offer some insights into Paul’s meaning in Romans 11:25-26. The second position made notable arguments in the way that Paul used the term “Israel” throughout the New Testament. While there is little doubt that he meant the combination of believing Jews and Gentiles in many passages, this does not seem to be his intention in this context in Romans 11. Romans 9-11 are three special chapters dealing specifically with ethnic Israel unlike any other references in the rest of the New Testament. Therefore, since Paul’s audience is of a Gentile nature and since his material specifically related to the issue of ethnic Israel’s rejection of the gospel, this position, which understands “all Israel” to mean the combination of both Jews and Gentiles, is not the best interpretation of the three possible options.

Additionally, while the third option should be commended for the way it seeks to fit logically with the first section of Romans 11 speaking about a remnant’s presence, it does not seem to be the best interpretation, especially as Paul explains his understanding of the olive tree and those being grafted in nor the mystery in Romans 11:25-26. For if Paul was implying by his use of “all Israel” the classification of the remnant consisting of the total number of elect Jews who indeed turn to Christ, then expectations of a future mass conversion of Jews is negated. Instead, one should expect to see the majority of

Jews always forsaking the truth of the gospel. Paul did seem to hold out hope, however, that while in his day there were some Jews who did come to faith, establishing a remnant in his day, at some future point in time there would be a mass turning to Christ on their part. This idea was the mystery and this interpretation was what allowed Paul to extol God with his powerful words of praise in Romans 11:33-36. The majority of Jews have been hardened in the wisdom of God in order to allow the grafting in of Gentiles. Paul has already addressed those who would argue that this hardening by God to the great majority of Jews was unfair when he said that God has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills, and who are we to question his ways (Rom 9:18-23)? When the full number of Gentiles is complete, then God will show mercy to ethnic Israel removing the blinders from their eyes, much the way he removed the scales from the eyes of Paul (Acts 9) in order that they too may see and believe. In this way, God receives praise for his mysterious and glorious means of salvation.

Therefore, from the material presented in this chapter as it relates to the context of Paul's argument in Romans 11, the option that most faithfully captures Paul's intention of "all Israel" was to understand this phrase as referring to the ethnic Jews. At some future time, just prior to or even at the Lord's return, a noticeable turning by ethnic Israel to Christ will occur. Neither Paul, nor any other author in the Bible gave explicit details as to when the "fullness of Gentiles" will have come in. One can assume that there is a certain number for whom Christ died and thus ransomed from the Gentile

tribes.<sup>41</sup> It will be after the total conversion of those elect Gentiles that the removal of the partial hardening upon the nation of Israel will occur and Jews from all over the world will then turn to Christ. Furthermore, while the Bible does affirm that there has been, is currently, and indeed always will be a remnant of Jewish believers in God's Messiah, Paul's words seem to imply a greater event in the mass turning to Christ by numerous Jews. As Jonathan Edwards said, "Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews, in Rom. xi."<sup>42</sup> When this happens, it will fulfill what Paul said in that "all Israel will be saved."

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<sup>41</sup>Rev 5:9 is helpful here. It says, "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation," indicating that there are certain numbers (at least 1) from every people group who will indeed be saved. Therefore, the conclusion should be made that once the task of taking the gospel to the nations has been completed and individuals from those people groups have been saved, then the full number of the Gentiles will be complete.

<sup>42</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 1:607.

CHAPTER 6  
IMPLICATIONS FOR JEWISH EVANGELISM

In *Understanding Church Growth*, Donald McGavran said, “Today’s paramount task, opportunity, and imperative in missions is to multiply churches in the increasing numbers of receptive peoples of the earth.”<sup>1</sup> Later in the same book, he said, “Church growth often depends on harvesting fields when they are ripe.”<sup>2</sup> McGavran recognized the imminent missiological dangers that an individual could deduce from such statements and responded appropriately:

Recognition of variations in receptivity is resisted by some mission thinkers because they fear that, if they accept it, they will be forced to abandon resistant fields. Abandonment is not called for. Fields must be sown. Stony fields must be plowed before they are sown. No one should conclude that if receptivity is low, the Church should withdraw mission.<sup>3</sup>

He continued saying, “Correct policy is to occupy fields of low receptivity lightly.”<sup>4</sup> In the meantime, he noted, “Christian mission should perfect organizational arrangements so that when these lands turn responsive, missionary resources can be sent quickly.”<sup>5</sup>

McGavran’s observations regarding the principal of receptivity, and especially, how to minister to those fields that are not currently receptive, is extremely important to

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<sup>1</sup>Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 63.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

consider in light of the current hardening upon the Jewish people. It is safe to conclude that the majority of Jewish people are not receptive at this time to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This statement does not mean that Jews will not turn to Christ. It does mean, however, when compared to other people groups, the Jewish people respond less frequently to the invitation to repent and believe in Jesus.

The temptation, then, based on the principal of receptivity, is to turn attention to other people, to spend money on other mission areas, and to divert workers to fields that are more receptive than is the Jewish mission. While this idea may be the right course of action in regards to reaching various Gentile people groups, it is the argument of this chapter that the Jewish people should hold a special place and emphasis in evangelism and mission attention despite the lack of receptivity to the gospel.

This chapter will address this issue by first making the argument that Jewish evangelism is a needed activity based on Paul's own missiological strategy. Next, the chapter will explore how the Southern Baptist Convention has attempted to engage this hardened people with the message of redemption. Finally, the chapter will examine possible strategies for placing emphasis on evangelizing the Jewish people in the context of Southern Baptist life.

### **Arguments Opposing Jewish Evangelism**

In this day of political correctness and with the influence of the postmodern mindset, many unbelievers do not agree that the church should seek to evangelize the Jewish people. The world sees this activity as hostile, mean spirited, and arrogant. How naïve they feel Christians are in believing that they are right in their understanding of spiritual matters while the Jewish people are wrong and need saving. One public

example at this point is helpful to communicate the hostility the world has at those who see the need for Jews to be evangelized. Conservative political pundit Ann Coulter, who is no stranger to controversy, caused a great public outcry during an interview a few years back when she expressed her views about the Jewish people and their need to be converted. Speaking with Donny Deutsch, she said that Christians were on the “fast track” to heaven and that the Jewish people needed to be “perfected.”<sup>6</sup> Dumbfounded by the fact that Coulter actually held such views, Deutsch rebuked her and said that she was “too educated” to make such a statement.<sup>7</sup> Continuing the dialogue, Coulter said it was exactly what she believed and that Christians were in fact “perfected Jews” themselves.<sup>8</sup> Deutsch angrily ended the conversation concluding that her comments were anti-Semitic. He also stated that Coulter’s failure to recognize her position as being hateful was scary.<sup>9</sup> While this attitude might be expected from those who have not been changed by the gospel, there are also an increasing amount of people claiming the name of Christ who believe that the Church should not seek to evangelize the Jewish people. The following paragraphs will explore some of the reasons this belief is held.

### **Sonderweg Position**

Adherence to the Sonderweg position has led some individuals to believe

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<sup>6</sup>For a full transcript of the dialogue, see “Columnist Ann Coulter Shocks Cable TV Show, Declaring ‘Jews Need to Be Perfected by Becoming Christians’ [on-line]; accessed 31 October 2007; available from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,301216,00.html>; Internet.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Jewish evangelism was not necessary.<sup>10</sup> In his article critiquing the Sonderweg movement, Michael Vanlaningham described the position as “the Jews need Jesus Christ, but the future conversion of all Israel that Paul presents in Rom 11:25-27 takes place at the time of the second coming of Christ, when the Lord himself comes from heaven, is seen by Israel, preaches the gospel to the Jews, and they are converted.”<sup>11</sup> The idea is that the Jews have a “special way of salvation, a Sonderweg.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Sonderweg position is significant to consider because of the implications it has for evangelism. If the conversion of Jewish individuals to faith will not occur through Christian testimonies, but rather through the testimony of Jesus himself, there would be no real need to share the gospel with them while they are hardened.

Otfried Hofius was a proponent of Sonderweg. He believed that “‘all Israel’ is not saved by the preaching of the gospel . . . . Rather, Israel will hear the gospel from the mouth of Christ himself at his return—the saving word of his self-revelation which affects the faith that takes hold of divine salvation.”<sup>13</sup> For him, this idea was the great mystery Paul revealed in Romans 11. The salvation of most of the Jews will occur not by

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<sup>10</sup>Two of the more famous proponents of this movement include Franz Mussner and Krister Stendahl. For a good article exploring their influence and belief on this position, see Reidar Hvalvik, “A ‘Sonderweg’ for Israel’: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11:25-27,” *JSNT* 38 (1990): 87-107. See also, Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

<sup>11</sup>Michael Vanlaningham, “Should the Church Evangelize Israel? A Response to Franz Mussner and Other Sonderweg Proponents,” *TrinJ* 22 (2001): 197.

<sup>12</sup>Hvalvik, “A ‘Sonderweg for Israel,’” 88.

<sup>13</sup>Otfried Hofius, “‘All Israel Will Be Saved’: Divine Salvation and Israel’s Deliverance in Romans 9-11,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Supplementary 1 (1990): 36. See also Jennifer Glancy, “Israel vs. Israel in Romans 11:25-32,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 45 (1991): 191-203. Furthermore, although he did not specifically describe it in the detail of Hofius, Martin Luther did say, “Christ, therefore, has not yet come to the Jews, but he will come to them, namely, in the Last Day. . . . It is in this sense that one must interpret the apostle: he speaks about Christ’s mystical advent to the Jews.” Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, trans. and ed. Wilhelm Pauck, *The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 15 (London: SCM Press, 1961), 316.



the normal means used for the Gentiles or even the Jewish remnant. Instead, the hidden mystery Paul was referring to was that a number of Jews would receive salvation when they hear Christ himself proclaim his gospel. Jennifer Glancy agreed with this idea. She said, “The redemption of Israel does not follow their willing conversion to Christianity, but rather occurs through God’s invasion of the human sphere.”<sup>14</sup> She continued saying, “The catalyst to Israel’s salvation does not seem to be preaching of the church, but an encounter with the eschatological Lord; the analogy with Paul’s own apocalyptic encounter with the risen Jesus is worth noting.”<sup>15</sup> The most clear and pointed articulation of this position may be Richard Bell’s thoughts:

I now raise the question how Paul envisaged the salvation of Israel: through conversion or through some other way independent of Christ? Paul certainly does not speak of a conversion of Israel in the sense that after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, the gospel is preached to Israel, and Israel comes to believe . . . . Israel will not be saved independent of the gospel and independent of faith. Salvation for Israel, as for Gentiles, is through faith. This is shown clearly by 11:23 . . . . Israel must come to faith in Christ in order to be saved. How then does Israel come to faith? Israel comes to salvation through the gospel, which she receives from the coming Christ . . . . “All Israel” will therefore come to faith as Paul himself came to faith: through a direct meeting with the risen Christ.<sup>16</sup>

The idea that salvation will come via Jesus himself, at first glance, seems to find confirmation in Old Testament prophecy. In Romans 11:26b, Paul, cited Isaiah 59:20-21 and said, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” The

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<sup>14</sup>Jennifer Glancy, “Israel vs. Israel in Romans 11:25-32,” *USQR* 45 (1991): 198.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.* Vanlaningham, however, argued that Paul’s conversion was not the natural method and should not seen as the prototype for Jewish conversion. He said, “Problems exist which make it difficult to think that the Damascus road experience of Paul is in some way the exemplar for a mass conversion of Jews in the future.” For a more detailed explanation as to why Vanlaningham argued for such a conclusion, see Vanlaningham, “*Evangelize Israel?*,” 216.

<sup>16</sup>Richard Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9-11*, WUNT, vol. 63 (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994), 143-44.

assumption from the context of Paul's writing is that this deliverer is indeed Christ and that he will remove all ungodliness from Israel at his second coming. Schreiner, not a Sonderweg proponent, noted that the passages in Romans 11:26-27 do give evidence that "Jesus will remove the unbelief from Israel and grant them faith when he returns."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, proponents believe that faith will occur in the lives of the Jews when they see Jesus Christ himself. It should be pointed out, as noted by Vanlaningham, that "the Sonderweg position takes place by grace through faith in Christ, though it does bypass the Church."<sup>18</sup>

Another passage that may give support to this thesis is Zechariah 12:10. The passage says, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn." The understanding of this passage is that when Jesus returns, Jews will see him and his wounds and will weep. They will weep because they realize that he is the Messiah and they were responsible for his death. They will also weep because they realize that they have rejected him for so long.

The problem with the Sonderweg position, however, is that it fails to see the role that Paul sees for the Church in regards to engaging Israel with the gospel. As Vanlaningham pointed out, Sonderweg proponents see any missionary effort by the church as a mere stopgap measure rather than an effective and fruitful mission. He said, "The effort to win the Jews was to be only a temporary measure, and not normative; such

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<sup>17</sup>Tom Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 620.

<sup>18</sup>Vanlaningham, "Evangelize Israel?" 199.

a mission misunderstands God's elective purpose for his people in which he alone (not the church or the gospel) is their Sovereign and controls their destiny."<sup>19</sup> Instead, the church should do all it can to make Israel jealous by enjoying the salvation that is now theirs, but there need not be a concerted effort to engage this hardened people. The belief by many Sonderweg proponents is that the hardening Israel is experiencing is divine in origin and can only be remedied by God's return.

This argument is weak, however, in that there is nothing that links the strength of the hardening to his return. As Vanlaningham stated, Sonderweg proponents fail to acknowledge the "possibility that God could just as easily suspend the hardening of Israel and lead her to righteousness through the proclamation of the gospel as he could through the Parousia."<sup>20</sup> This idea seemed to be Paul's argument in Romans 11:14 that even in his ministry to the Gentiles, he could save some Jews for Christ through the proclamation of the gospel. As Vanlaningham stressed, "If the Jews were hardened but a small number could nevertheless be won through the gospel, the door appears to be left open to the possibility that the future salvation of all Israel could take place in the same way—in response to the gospel as it is proclaimed by the church."<sup>21</sup>

Evidence to reject the Sonderweg position is found not only in Paul's thought in Romans 9-11 but also in some of the parables and teachings declared by Jesus. In many of the parables, being prepared before the master returned was demanded rather than being given a chance to respond when the master appeared. For example, in the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 200.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

parable of the ten virgins, one must be ready before the bridegroom comes. Once he comes, it is too late to prepare. The individual was “shut out” of the festivities. D. A. Carson noted the connection between this parable and the Parousia and found no indication that Jews were immune from the command to be prepared or suffer the consequences.<sup>22</sup>

In Matthew 24, the warning to the reader is to be ready at all times because one does not know the hour when the son of man will return (Matt 24:44). The danger of not being prepared when the son returns is punishment. Later, the reader is warned that if one is not ready when the master comes, the result will be judgment and punishment in hell (24:45-51). Craig Blomberg commented on this parable saying that the excessive punishment one will experience for not being prepared (i.e., “cut him to pieces”) “is excessively harsh” and that there is “no parallel in first-century Palestine” for such imagery. Therefore, he concluded that the parable is warning of the “eternal judgment following the commencement of the messianic kingdom.”<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, based on the theology of Paul as well as examples like these parables, there is no indication that the Jewish people are immune from responding to the gospel. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the church should withhold the gospel from the Jewish people because they have some special way of being saved. The commandment to the church is to share the gospel with the Jews. The commandment to

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<sup>22</sup>D. A. Carson, “The ΟΜΟΙΟΣ Word-Group as Introduction to Some Matthean Parables,” *NTS* 21 (1985): 279.

<sup>23</sup>Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 191.

the Jews is to respond in faith to the only son of God. In this way, both Jews and Gentiles will be ready when the son appears to establish his kingdom.

### **Replacement Theology**

A second reason some argue that Jewish evangelism is not necessary is due to Replacement theology.<sup>24</sup> Briefly, this ideology affirms that because the Jewish people rejected Jesus, God has rejected them. The church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. There is no need to share the gospel with this people judged and discarded by God. They had their opportunity to respond to Jesus and they rejected him. Individuals should not waste time or resources engaging them with the gospel. Therefore, those who affirm replacement theology would conclude that since God has rejected the Jewish people due to their disobedience, all efforts to convert them are frivolous and unbiblical.

### **Dual Covenant**

A third possible argument some claim that gives validity for seeing evangelism towards the Jewish people as unnecessary is based on the issue of covenant. The theory believes that because God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15, the Jewish people do not need to receive Jesus to be saved. Since the Gentiles were not part of the covenant, they need to receive the Messiah. The Jews, however, as the people of God, have no need of a redeemer Messiah. They are already forgiven because of their national covenant. In other words, the Jews have the Old Covenant by which they are saved and the Christians have the New Covenant by which they are saved. As a result,

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<sup>24</sup>I previously expounded on this theology in chap. 4 when discussing whether the reason for Israel's hardening was due to God's replacement of them as a people. Therefore, I will only offer a brief summation here for space considerations.

there is no need for Christians to seek to proselytize them. The name of this theory is Dual Covenant theology.

While many churches and denominations have aligned themselves with this theology, the concepts presented are very troubling and are unfounded biblically. The movement finds great popularity today in a society where Christians fear offending anyone. The result is that believers advocate this dual covenant theology allowing them to neglect sharing the gospel in order to avoid charges of anti-Semitic and at the same time to gain public approval. An example of the prevalence of this idea within the Christian community was demonstrated when the Southern Baptist Convention addressed the issue of Jewish evangelism.

At the annual meeting in 1996, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a formal resolution on Jewish evangelism. The resolution had three primary goals. First, members of the Southern Baptist Convention adopted this resolution in order to refocus the convention's attention on the need for evangelizing the Jewish people.<sup>25</sup> The second goal of this resolution was to affirm publicly that explicit faith in Jesus is necessary for all peoples' salvation, including the Jews and that the Southern Baptist Convention firmly believed in the need for the Jewish people to be saved. Last, the resolution served as a means to express the conviction that it is the responsibility of Christians to pray for and share with the Jewish people the good news about Jesus Christ. The concluding line of the resolution summarized well these three purposes of the resolution when it said, "Be it

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<sup>25</sup>Stan Guthrie, "Jewish Evangelism Getting Its Long Denied Respect," *Baptist Press*, 26 February 1997.

finally resolved, that we direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people.”<sup>26</sup>

Response to this resolution from those not affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention was quick and negative. Two notable examples were the responses by Abraham Foxman and Tommy Baer. Foxman, the Anti-Defamation League National Director, issued a statement saying, “The campaign launched by Southern Baptists to convert Jews to Christianity is an insult to the Jewish people and a setback for the cause of interfaith dialogue and understanding.”<sup>27</sup> Baer, who served as the president of the B’nai B’rith at the time, rebuked the SBC commenting that this decision would hinder the future relationship between the two groups. He said, “In recent years, other Christian denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Roman Catholic Church have emphasized the importance of dialogue with American Jews while refraining from all conversion efforts.”<sup>28</sup> The underlying presupposition of his comment was the idea that the Southern Baptist Convention should take notice of the actions, or lack thereof, by their sister denominations within Christendom and follow in their example.

Baer was correct in noting that many self-ascribing Christian denominations no

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<sup>26</sup>For the whole resolution, see Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Jewish Evangelism” (resolution passed at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, June 1996) [on-line]; accessed 8 August 2009; available from <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=655>; Internet.

<sup>27</sup>Abraham H. Foxman, “Southern Baptist Efforts to Convert Jews Is an Insult to the Jewish People” (press release, 14 June 1996) [on-line]; accessed 19 October 2007; available from [http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ChJew\\_31/2761\\_31.asp](http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ChJew_31/2761_31.asp); Internet.

<sup>28</sup>Religious Tolerance, “B’nai B’rith Urges Southern Baptist Convention to Reconsider Formal Resolution Actively Seeking to Convert Jews to Christianity” [on-line]; accessed 25 October 2007; available from [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_jcon2.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_jcon2.htm); Internet.

longer believe Jewish conversion is necessary. For example, the year prior to the Southern Baptist Convention resolution, the Alliance of Baptists called for the rejection of methods seeking to convert the Jewish people. The Alliance of Baptists believed that since the Jewish people were already in a covenant with God, evangelism and conversion was unnecessary. Instead, the group argued that positive dialogue should be the course for the future.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the United Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church USA have all published material discussing their disapproval regarding attempts to convert the Jewish people and have instead instructed individuals to direct their efforts with the Jewish people towards meaningful dialogue and ecumenical good for the community.<sup>30</sup> In a work expounding the World Council of Churches' position paper on Christian-Jewish engagement, Alan Brockway illustrated and summarized well the various positions surrounding the idea of evangelizing Jewish persons:

There are Christians who view a mission to the Jews as having a very special salvific significance, and those who believe the conversion of the Jews to be the eschatological event that will climax the history of the world. There are those who would place no special emphasis on a mission to the Jews, but would include them

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<sup>29</sup>Alliance of Baptists, "A Baptist Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations" [on-line]; accessed 31 October 2007; available from <http://www.allianceofbaptists.org/christian-jewish.htm>; Internet. The Alliance of Baptists reaffirmed this statement in 2003.

<sup>30</sup>For a summary statement by Christian scholars from other denominations regarding Jewish evangelism, see *A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People* (Statement by the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, 1 September 2002) [on-line]; accessed 24 October 2007; available from <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=986>; Internet. See also Cindy Rodriguez, "Panel of Christians Rejects Attempts to Convert Jews, Report Expected to Warm Relations," *The Boston Globe*, 6 September 2002, sec. National/Foreign, p. A 3. For the official position of the United Methodist Church regarding Jewish Evangelism, see United Methodist Church Leader Resources, "Building New Bridges in Hope" [on-line]; accessed 28 October 2007; available from <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=4&mid=3301>; Internet. For the Presbyterian Church USA position, see "Christians and Jews" [on-line]; accessed 28 October 2007; available from <http://www.pcusa.org/interfaith/study/christiansjews.htm>; Internet. For the Catholic position regarding Jewish Evangelism, see "Reflections on Covenant and Mission" [on-line]; accessed 29 October 2007; available from [http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/metaelements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs\\_usccb120802.htm](http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/metaelements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs_usccb120802.htm); Internet.



in the one mission to all those who have not accepted Christ as their Saviour. There are those who believe that a mission to the Jews is not part of an authentic Christian witness, since the Jewish people finds its fulfillment in faithfulness to God's covenant of old.<sup>31</sup>

As this quote pointed out, the positions describing why one should or should not share the gospel with Jewish people vary from denomination to denomination. Thus, this controversy surrounding Jewish evangelism raises a very significant question for the remainder of this paper. Was the Southern Baptist Convention correct biblically in seeking to share the gospel with the Jewish people in order to bring about their salvation? Conversely, was this venture an unbiblical waste of time that only directed stress and hardship towards a people already in good standing with God? Should the Southern Baptist Convention follow the example of other denominations in affirming the special relationship God has with the Jewish people, this dual covenant, and therefore do away with all efforts to convert the Jewish people?

Jim Sibley contended correctly that even though the Abrahamic Covenant with the Jews was unconditional, it does not guarantee salvation for all the descendants of Abraham.<sup>32</sup> He pointed to Acts 4:12 as evidence of the necessity of faith in Jesus for salvation: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Baruch Maoz stated his opinion even stronger:

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<sup>31</sup> Alan Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements of the World Council of Churches and its Member Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988), 1-186. See also, David A Rausch, *Communities in Conflict: Evangelicals and Jews* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 135. For the actual position paper to which Brockway responded, see World Council of Churches, "Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue" [on-line]; accessed 18 August 2009; <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=1499>; Internet.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Sibley, "Evangelical Objections to Jewish Evangelism" (lecture notes, *Interfaith Evangelism Workshop: Judaism, Pt. 4*, Summer 2002, photocopy), 1.

Time and time again the apostles addressed the people of Israel with the gospel, calling them to repent, to turn from their sins (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22, etc.) and from their unbiblical religiosity (Acts 3:13-14; 5:28-29; 7:42; 10:28), and to submit to the Messiah God had sent the nation in accordance with his promises to the fathers. You see, Jews are sinners too . . . . We Jews need Jesus because we are sinners as much as anyone else. We need to be forgiven. We need to be converted (the old word for ‘turned’) from sin to God. We need to repent. We need a Saviour because we cannot save ourselves and no one else can do it for us. Jesus is that promised Saviour . . . . We Jews need to have that gospel proclaimed to us. We need the gospel as much as do the Gentiles.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, the biblical account consistently teaches that the Jewish people, just like all other people, must express explicit faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Any idea that they are saved or immune from God’s wrath for sin based on their heritage is biblically unscriptural and eternally damning.

It also bears noting that the New Testament does not teach that an individual should avoid sharing the gospel for fear of the political repercussions. The apostles always sought to communicate the truth of Christ despite threats, public outcry, and even imprisonment (Acts 4). At times, their efforts brought persecution and even death. Nevertheless, the early church was moved by the truth of the gospel and was convicted that both Jews and Gentiles needed to trust in Christ. As a result, they were willing to suffer humiliation and shame in order that God’s elect would come to faith. The same should be the practice of the church today, especially in regards to sharing the gospel with the Jewish people. Public opinion and political expediency do not dictate what the church should do. As this paper will demonstrate next, the church should follow Paul’s example in seeking to win Jews to Christ.

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<sup>33</sup>Baruch Maoz, *Judaism Is Not Jewish: A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 44.

### **Paul's Priority in Jewish Evangelism**

If none of the preceding positions are supported by Scripture, the task then becomes to identify the proper understanding for engagement with the Jewish people. The Bible clearly teaches that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). It also teaches that "both Jews and Greeks, are under sin" and that "none is righteous" in the sight of God (Rom 3:9-10). Furthermore, it explains explicitly that the punishment for sin is death (Rom 6:23). Thus, the only way for sinful man to be removed from under the wrath of God due to sin is through personal faith in the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ as declared in the gospel (John 3) and not through any obedience to the Torah. As Paul said, "we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified" (Gal 2:16).

Paul had no reservations that this gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was the only means of salvation for both the Jews and the Gentiles (Rom 1:16). Christians must follow his example. In order for the Jewish people to be saved from their sins, they too must be presented with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in order that they might believe. Paul made this point clear in Romans 10:14-17. Jews cannot call upon the one they have never heard. Richard Freeman pointed out the lack of knowledge that Jewish people have about Christ and the gospel:

Today, on the contrary, the majority of Jewish people have not heard a clear presentation of the gospel message or believe Jesus is Jewish. They don't own or read a New Testament and they rarely read the Old Testament. They stay away

from churches, they don't watch Christian television, and they don't listen to Christian radio. They have not heard of Jesus as their Jewish Messiah.<sup>34</sup>

Paul's words in Romans 1:16 are a strong directive regarding Jewish evangelism. Not only should the Jewish people be pursued with the gospel, they should be the group to whom Christians most fervently seek to share the gospel. Sibley has noted that *πρῶτον* in the phrase "to the Jew first" is a "gnomic present tense" implying not a chronological order but a place of priority.<sup>35</sup> He said there is a "timelessness to this use. It is not an action in progress but makes a statement of general, timeless fact."<sup>36</sup> Thus, the gospel is the power of God for salvation and it should always go to the Jew first. Michael Rydelnik interpreted this same passage a little differently. He understood Paul's declaration as meaning that the "gospel is first and foremost a Jewish message."<sup>37</sup> He believed that the gospel should go "especially" to the Jewish people "because of their privileged status as a chosen people."<sup>38</sup> The common ground that both have is that Paul placed significant importance on the act of Jewish evangelism by the church. The gospel alone saves both Jew and Gentile sinners.

It may be argued that the gospel was meant initially to target the Jewish people, which ended early in the life of the church. With the Jew's continued obstinacy,

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<sup>34</sup>Richard Freeman, *The Heart of the Apostle: A Commentary on Romans 9-11* (InstantPublisher.com, 2007), 51-52.

<sup>35</sup>Jim Sibley, "The Great Conviction Behind the Great Commission" (lecture notes, *Interfaith Evangelism Workshop: Judaism, Pt. 1*, Summer 2002, photocopy), 1-1. Another example of a gnomic present tense where the understanding is "in the first place, above all, or especially" is Matt 6:33.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 1-1.

<sup>37</sup>Michael Rydelnik, "Outreach to the Jewish Community: The Principles and Possibilities," in *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community*, ed. John Fuder (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 279.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

the attention turned from reaching them to reaching the Gentiles. The support for such a position can be found in Acts when Paul himself noted this change. In Acts 13, Luke revealed that Paul shared the gospel, and especially the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the synagogue with Jewish individuals on a Sabbath in Antioch (Acts 13:14, 26-41). The men who heard the message begged Paul to share again the next Sabbath. The text said that on the next Sabbath the whole town gathered to hear the words of Paul (Acts 13:44). As he shared about Jesus, Jewish individuals, filled with jealousy, began contradicting and reviling what he said (Acts 13:45). Paul responded with this sharp rebuke: “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we are turning to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). By his use of the word “necessary” Paul may have had in mind Jesus’ own instructions that the gospel was to go “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). Whether the Jewish people rejected the words of Paul due to their hardening by God or merely out of their own spite towards Christ, Paul turned his attention from engaging the Jews with the gospel to seeking to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles.

Instead of seeing Paul turn his attention away from the Jews, this passage more likely meant that Paul understood that the gospel was now going to the Gentiles too. It is hard to conclude that Paul no longer believed engaging Jews with the gospel was necessary. In fact, even after this declaration, Paul still placed the priority on sharing with the Jewish people. He demonstrated this belief in his own missionary efforts later in the book of Acts. Even though he was an “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13), and he believed that the gospel had now come to the Gentiles, he still made it a priority to go to

the synagogues first in order to share the gospel with the Jews before proceeding to the Gentiles.<sup>39</sup>

Although Paul knew that the Jews were hardened and even though he had experienced hostility from them when sharing the gospel, he still believed in the importance of taking the gospel to the Jews first. As Ralph Gabe noted, Israel was God's "firstborn" (Exod 4:22) and has a place of preeminence among the nations.<sup>40</sup> This preeminence should be displayed still in Christian evangelism efforts today. While it is appropriate to give attention to the various people groups of the world, according to Paul's words and actions, the Jewish people should have a priority in the hearts and minds of people when it comes to engaging the lost with the glorious truth of Christ.

Baruch Maoz pointed this argument out well:

In terms of the gospel, Israel is unlike any other nation. As sinful as any nation, as much in need of the gospel as any nation, as capable of being saved as any nation, yet unlike any other nation, Israel has a past and a future that the Word of God declares is inextricably bound up with the gospel and with its prospects. Those prospects have to do with the covenant between God and Israel.<sup>41</sup>

The right conclusion, then, is that message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ has been, is, and always will be from the Jews and for the Jews first.

### **Southern Baptists and Jewish Evangelism**

As Paul's words and actions clearly teach, the priority in evangelism, even though they may not be receptive, is to seek to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people. This missiological position is derived from the belief that Jewish people need to express

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<sup>39</sup>See Acts 13:14, Acts 17:10, Acts 18:17, Acts 18:19.

<sup>40</sup>Ralph Gade, "Is God Through with the Jew," *Grace Journal* 11 (1970): 26.

<sup>41</sup>Maoz, *Judaism in Not Jewish*, 300.

explicit faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved before he returns. This understanding is the most faithful to the biblical record and is the one that should undergird and drive the interactions between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Jewish people. In fact, not only do the Jewish people need to express faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved, but as a result of the biblical revelation from Paul's letter to the Romans, the Southern Baptist Convention should place a significant priority in seeking to evangelize the Jewish people.

### **A Brief History of the Southern Baptists and Jewish Evangelism**

The resolution at the 1996 Southern Baptist Convention was not the first time that Southern Baptists expressed, either in the form of public discussion or a resolution, engagement with the Jewish people. According to Bobby Adams, from the earliest days, Southern Baptists sought to engage the Jewish people with the gospel:

In 1867, Baptists resolved to 'labor and pray more earnestly for the conversion of the Jews.' In 1873, Abraham Jaeger, a converted Rabbi, addressed the annual convention session on the subject of the conversion of the Jews. Following his address, the Convention was asked to direct the Board of Domestic Missions to employ Jaeger to work among the Jews. He was not employed. In 1875, Crawford H. Toy offered a resolution to direct the Home Mission Board to seek those who would work among the Jews. In 1882, a similar resolution was adopted. This time, however, the Foreign Mission Board rather than the Home Mission Board was asked to 'seek missionaries to Israelites in this and other countries.' Six resolutions were adopted between 1894 and 1921 asking that mission work be begun in Palestine.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to these early measures, the Convention has since passed resolutions in 1972, 1981, and 1996.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, however, only the resolution in 1996 addressed in any

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<sup>42</sup>Bobby Adams, "Analysis of a Relationship: Jews and Southern Baptists" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1969), 86-87.

<sup>43</sup>To see each of these resolutions in their entirety, see Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolutions on Jews" [on-line]; accessed 8 August 2009; available from <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/AMResSearchAction.asp?SearchBy=Subject&DisplayRows=10&frmData=jews&Submit=Search>; Internet.

real manner the issue of Jews and their need for faith in Christ. Both the 1972 resolution and the 1981 resolution dealt strictly with anti-Semitism. In fact, in the 1981 resolution, the notion that has been propagated by other denominations was present in SBC life as well. In this resolution, Southern Baptists were encouraged to “seek sincere friendship and meaningful dialogue with our Jewish neighbors.”<sup>44</sup> Nothing was said, however, about seeking opportunities to share the gospel with them. Of these recent resolutions, only the 1996 measure stressed the need for Jews to be saved and for members of the convention to engage them with the gospel.

Resolutions were not the only way that the Southern Baptist Convention sought to express concern for the Jewish people. Two individuals have specifically been helpful in directing the convention in efforts to evangelize Jews. The first individual worthy of mention is Jacob Gartenhaus (1896-1984). Gartenhaus, whose father was a Rabbi, was raised in a home where a strict form of Judaism was practiced. Upon coming to faith in Christ, his family, as is the case with many believing Jews, disowned him. While the action of his family undoubtedly influenced his life, his commitment to Christ remained strong. After becoming a believer, Gartenhaus attended Moody Bible Institute where “he was very active in evangelistic efforts toward the Jewish community.”<sup>45</sup> After his time at Moody, he attended and graduated from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1921, he became the Director of the Jewish Evangelism Department of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He served in this position for

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<sup>44</sup>Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Anti-Semitism” (resolution passed at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA, June 1981) [on-line]; accessed 8 August 2009; available from <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1103>; Internet.

<sup>45</sup>“Jacob Gartenhaus,” [on-line]; accessed 10 August 2009; available from <http://www.swordofthelord.com/biographies/GartenhausJacob.htm>; Internet.



27 years, until he left in 1948. During his time as director, Gartenhaus published many works about the Jewish man and the need to engage him with the gospel.<sup>46</sup> One of his overarching beliefs was that “Paul laid the responsibility for reaching the Jew at the door of the local church, where Christ laid it.”<sup>47</sup>

One reason Gartenhaus left the Home Mission Board was due to the lack of involvement of Southern Baptists concerning the Jews in Europe. During the later days of his tenure, the Holocaust was occurring under the leadership of Hitler. Gartenhaus encouraged involvement by the Southern Baptist Convention to aid the plight of the Jews overseas. His political involvement, however, ultimately led to his leaving the Home Mission Board. Sibley noted, “But, largely due to Gartenhaus’ activism in alarming Baptists to the Nazi threat, resentment grew among the leadership of the Home Mission Board, and Gartenhaus eventually retired in 1948.”<sup>48</sup> After he left the Convention, he began his own ministry called the International Board of Jewish Missions, an independent organization, located in Chattanooga, Tennessee.<sup>49</sup> Reflecting on the aftermath of his departure, Gartenhaus lamented that, “As it happened, soon after I retired

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<sup>46</sup>The more notable works of Gartenhaus include the books Jacob Gartenhaus, *Traitor: A Jew, A Book, A Miracle: An Autobiography* (Nashville: Nelson, 1980); idem, *Famous Hebrew Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979); idem, *The Christ-Killers: Past and Present* (Chattanooga, TN: Hebrew Christian Press, 1975); idem, *Winning Jews to Christ: A Handbook to Aid Christians in their approach to the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963); as well as various pamphlets published by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention addressing Jewish evangelism.

<sup>47</sup>International Board of Jewish Missions, “Distinctives” (foundational beliefs posted on the website of the IBJM which Gartenhaus founded), number 3 [on-line]; accessed 12 August 2009; available from <http://www.ibjm.org/distinctives.htm>; Internet.

<sup>48</sup>Jim Sibley, “The Future of Jewish Evangelism in the Southern Baptist Convention” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship, New Orleans, LA, 10 June 1996), 1.

<sup>49</sup>Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, “Inventory to the Jacob Gartenhaus Collection” (published by the Southern Baptist Historical Library, 2002), AR. 759 [on-line]; accessed 11 August 2009; available from <http://www.sbhla.org/downloads/759.pdf>; Internet.

from the Home Mission Board after twenty-eight years, the Jewish Department was effectively done away with through a merger with other departments.”<sup>50</sup> What developed from this merger was the Interfaith Witnessing Department, which still exists today.

It was not until the 1980s that the Southern Baptist Convention had another leader in the area of Jewish evangelism. This individual was Jim Sibley. The period between Gartenhaus’ departure and Sibley’s leadership was marked by an increased move away from biblical inerrancy within the convention and a desire to pursue ecumenical dialogue rather than gospel presentations with Jewish people in the public square. As the convention fought for a return to biblical fidelity, the desire to share the gospel with Jewish people once again developed in the hearts and minds of Southern Baptists.

Thus, Sibley, who confessed that God called him to work with Jewish people at the age of 14, was appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention as the first foreign missionary to Israel.<sup>51</sup> For fourteen years, Sibley worked among the Jewish people in Israel. Upon returning stateside, Sibley took a position with the North American Mission Board as a coordinator of Jewish ministries within the Interfaith department. Sibley served in this position for ten years and during this time, he “worked to ‘motivate and equip’ Southern Baptists to share the gospel with Jewish people by teaching courses at

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<sup>50</sup>Gartenhaus, *Traitor*, 211.

<sup>51</sup>Bob Allen, “Missionary to Jews Leaving NAMB,” *Ethics Daily*, 7 March 2006 [on-line]; accessed 13 August 2009; available from <http://www.ethicsdaily.com/news.php?viewStory=7055>; Internet.

seminaries, leading workshops in churches and writing articles.”<sup>52</sup> In March of 2006, Sibley left as coordinator of Jewish ministries with the North American Mission Board to become the head of Pasche Institute of Jewish Studies located at Criswell College.

As with Gartenhaus, the North American Mission Board chose not to fill Sibley’s position when he left. John Avant, the vice president for evangelization at the North American Mission Board at the time of Sibley’s departure said that the organization’s intention “at this time is not to attempt to replace Jim, but to continue to use him on a contract basis to assist NAMB and our mission partners to better understand and share our faith with Jews throughout North America.”<sup>53</sup> Expressing Christian grace, Sibley acknowledged that he was disappointed that his position would not be filled. He did express, however, that he believed the decision to refrain from hiring another person “was sincerely motivated and may yield even greater opportunities for cooperation in Jewish ministries in the future.”<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately, this hope has not been made reality as of yet. The following questions were posed to an individual on the interfaith team at the North American Mission Board in a recent email:

1. Is Jim Sibley still associated with NAMB in any way? Does he function like a “subcontractor” while serving at his other position? If he does not serve NAMB, is there another individual who does address questions regarding Jewish evangelism?

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid. One of Sibley’s great works during his time with NAMB was the 1996 resolution on Jewish evangelism. Along with Phil Roberts, the head of the Interfaith Witness Department at the time, Sibley penned the words that encouraged Southern Baptists to once again focus on evangelizing Jewish people.

<sup>53</sup>Staff, “Sibley to lead Jewish studies at Criswell after 10 years with NAMB,” Baptist Press, 3 March 2006 [on-line]; accessed 13 August 2009; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=22776>; Internet.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

2. Did any of the following reasons (biblical, missiological, or financial) lead NAMB to move away from having a coordinator or consultant for Jewish evangelism?
3. Are there any upcoming conferences, trainings, or seminars where the theme is focusing on outreaching to Jewish individuals?

The following were the responses given to the questions:

1. Jim Sibley is no longer associated with NAMB. We still have high regard for him and the work he does at the Pasche Institute. We have not utilized him in any official capacity since he left NAMB a few years ago but would consider doing so if the opportunity arises. Currently, we have no one focusing on Jewish ministries as did Jim.
2. I do not know the reasons that NAMB no longer has that emphasis. As far as I know there are no biblical or missiological reasons why NAMB no longer has staff or missionary personnel who focus primarily on Jewish evangelism. We are definitely committed to reaching every people group with the Gospel of Christ including Jewish. I do not know what, if any, financial considerations may be involved.
3. At present we do not have any conferences planned for outreach to Jewish individuals or evangelism training for reaching Jewish individuals. We do have some material on our Apologetics/Interfaith website addressing Jewish evangelism.

While it is not necessarily a foregone conclusion that history will repeat itself, it should be noted that after Gartenhaus left the Home Mission Board, Jewish evangelism deteriorated for many years. The fear is that if intentional effort is not exerted today, the same may be the case following Sibley's departure for subsequent years within the Southern Baptist Convention.

The history of the Southern Baptist Convention demonstrates a concern for the Jewish people and their need for salvation. Currently, however, this belief is not finding much action on the part of Southern Baptist leadership or churches within the denomination. While the SBC was correct in presenting the resolution on Jewish evangelism, merely passing a resolution was not enough. These words need implementation that demonstrates real and measurable action. Therefore, in an effort to curtail any long term gap in ministry to the Jewish people following Sibley's transition,

the following paragraphs will make suggestions as to how to keep Jewish evangelism a priority in Southern Baptist life.

### **SBC Strategies for Evangelizing the Jewish People**

In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul proclaimed that God has given the church elders in order to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Although many ministries could fit under the umbrella of “the work of ministry,” none is any greater than the work of evangelism. Christ’s last instruction to his followers before ascending to His father was the command to share the good news of His life, death, and resurrection with all the people groups of the world (Matt 28:19-20). Therefore, as a pastor, the top priority of equipping the saints must be teaching, preaching, and training them so they are able to fulfill the Great Commission by actively sharing their faith with the lost.

One group the church has largely failed to impact with the gospel is the Jewish people. In fact, some argue, “Jewish evangelism has been one of the most neglected areas of Christian ministry.”<sup>55</sup> It has been said, “How odd of God to choose the Jews, but not so odd as those who choose the Jewish God and spurn the Jews!”<sup>56</sup> One reason for the lack of intentional ministry is that the church is inadequately prepared to engage in Jewish evangelism. Pastors, especially those in Jewish communities, have not received training or support in Jewish evangelism and in turn, they fail to equip their congregations with the tools necessary to present the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with

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<sup>55</sup>Susan Perlman and C. David Harley, “To the Jew First,” *World Evangelization* 13, no. 43 (June 1986): 1.

<sup>56</sup>David Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1995), 93.

their Jewish neighbors. The cumulative result is that churches either ignore the Jews or develop erroneous theological presuppositions about their spiritual condition.

Therefore, developing a proper understanding of the Jewish people and the biblical priority of evangelizing them is essential for American pastors and churches to capture. Of the thirteen million Jews worldwide, according to the most current estimates, an estimated six million live in the United States.<sup>57</sup> Jews typically reside in large, urban or metro areas. For example, nearly two million live in New York City or the surrounding boroughs. An estimated eight hundred thousand live in the South Florida region. Almost five hundred thousand live in Los Angeles. Two hundred and fifty thousand live in both Chicago and Philadelphia.<sup>58</sup> In these major areas, there is little Southern Baptist work being attempted towards reaching the Jews. Other parachurch ministries, such as Jews for Jesus and Chosen People Ministries, are engaging these communities. Nevertheless, the responsibility biblically falls on churches, not parachurch ministries, to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people. In this context, Southern Baptist churches who are seeking to reach Jews are few and far between.

Many urban churches located in areas of high Jewish concentration do not attempt to evangelize the Jewish people because of a lack of training. Therefore, the following sections of this paper will offer ideas as to how SBC entities and its churches can develop a strategy for reaching the Jewish people. Central to this mission would be

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<sup>57</sup>North American Mission Board, *Judaism*, Interfaith Evangelism Bulletin Board PDF [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2004, available from [http://www.namb.net/evangelism/iev/belief\\_bulletins/Default.asp](http://www.namb.net/evangelism/iev/belief_bulletins/Default.asp); Internet.

<sup>58</sup>World Jewish Congress, *The Jewish Populations of the World* (Lerner Publication Company, 1998) [on-line]; accessed 12 November 2004, available from [http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com\\_judaism.html](http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com_judaism.html); Internet.

the development of a comprehensive strategy that educates Southern Baptists regarding the basic theological presuppositions and misconceptions surrounding the Jewish people. The goal of such training would be to equip the denomination to make better strides at evangelizing the Jewish people. Once churches are equipped to do the work of this evangelistic ministry, it is more likely they will feel empowered to seek out their Jewish neighbors and share the gospel with them.

**North American Mission Board.** Currently the North American Mission Board (NAMB) employs coordinators to the following people groups: Asian and Multiethnic, Hispanic and Multiethnic, and African American and Mutiethnic.<sup>59</sup> While these people groups are important and coordinators should be employed who seek to engage these groups, none seem to have biblical priority like the Jews from Romans 1:16. Therefore, the first suggestion would be to enlist a worker who will engage the Jewish people specifically. As was demonstrated with both Gartenhaus and Sibley, when an individual works in this specific area, churches and the convention as a whole are more likely to focus on the task of evangelizing the Jewish people than when there is not a coordinator.

As stated before, there are millions of Jews who reside in the United States. In fact, as many Jews live in America as in Israel. Therefore, while the results or fruit of the ministry may not be as noticeable or measurable as other areas or with other groups due to the hardening that currently exists, it seems from Paul's example that outreach to the

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<sup>59</sup>NAMB, "People Group/Interfaith Team"[on-line]; accessed 13 August 2009; available from [http://www.namb.net/site/c.9qKILUOzEpH/b.1333527/k.3E47/People\\_Group\\_\\_Interfaith\\_Team.htm](http://www.namb.net/site/c.9qKILUOzEpH/b.1333527/k.3E47/People_Group__Interfaith_Team.htm); Internet.

Jews is a non-negotiable and that the Southern Baptist Convention would do well to pursue these lost individuals. Having a coordinator would ensure that this people group stays a focus for Baptists.

Secondary ideas include providing resources and materials that allow for training at the local church. If a major obstacle for evangelizing the Jewish people is lack of information and lack of training, providing resources would help equip and fulfill this need. For example, NAMB has developed and produced video resources to help churches engage Mormons (*The Mormon Puzzle*), Jehovah Witnesses (*In the Name of Jehovah*), and Muslims (*The Cross and the Crescent*). Noticeably absent is any material providing training for engaging Jews with the gospel. Thus, NAMB could make a video discussing the people, theology, general myths, and specific hindrances that may arise when sharing the gospel. Additionally, it could include insights about ways to build relations with the goal being to engage the Jews with the gospel by local churches.

A third way that NAMB could support Jewish evangelism within the Southern Baptist Convention is by hosting teaching conferences that include Jewish evangelism or specifically train about reaching Jewish individuals. Periodically, NAMB hosts seminars that discuss reaching interfaith groups. In fact, there will be a specific conference held later this year to focus on reaching Muslims. NAMB should provide similar conferences for preparing individuals to reach the Jewish people. The last major conference by the interfaith department on Jewish evangelism was held prior to the Southern Baptist Convention in St Louis in 2002.

The last way that NAMB could help the SBC engage Jewish individuals is by appointing home missionaries specifically to Jewish areas with the intention of reaching



Jewish persons. Part of NAMB's strategy is to appoint missionaries throughout the nation to engage people groups and start church plants. NAMB could fund and support a missionary to South Florida or Los Angeles with the goal being to have an impact in the community. The missionary could strategically focus, along with local churches, on seeking evangelism opportunities as well as developing methods and curriculum that would allow churches to be better equipped in sharing the gospel with Jewish persons. The issue that would need addressing ahead of time is that the position would not be judged, and thus funding reduced or cut, based solely on results. There would need to be a biblical ideology that believes our convention should be committed in both resources and funds to reach Jewish persons despite their response.

**SBC Seminaries and Colleges.** Another entity that could have a positive impact for Jewish evangelism is the seminaries and colleges of the Southern Baptist Convention. At these schools, future pastors, missionaries, and educators are learning and preparing for ministry. Offering degrees that focus on Jewish issues such as evangelism will have a healthy impact in the future.<sup>60</sup> If entire degree programs are not possible, at least having courses from time to time that expose students to the priority the Jewish people should have is important. Speaking to the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship, Sibley noted, "We must gain a hearing on the seminary campuses. Unless

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<sup>60</sup>This idea was the dream behind the Pasche Institute associated with Criswell College. The Institute offers both bachelors and masters degrees in Jewish studies. Sibley, who acted as one of the founders, currently serves as the director of the degree program. The vision of the ministry is "to multiply and strengthen Kingdom leaders for ministry to the Jewish people and to significantly contribute to the scholarship of Jewish studies." Currently, it is the only degree program in Southern Baptist life in the area of Jewish studies. For more information about the school or degree tracks, see <http://www.pascheinstitute.org>; Internet.

we reach the seminaries, we have no future in Southern Baptist life.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, seminaries and colleges might seek opportunities to offer classes, both over the course of a semester and through internships, that provide specific training in Jewish evangelism.

**State Conventions.** State conventions where large numbers of Jewish individuals reside should consider how they might coordinate with local churches to minister to Jewish individuals. While the state convention of Florida has divisions of ministry aimed at engaging African Americans, Haitians, and Hispanics, for example, it does not have a person who coordinates ministries to reach the estimated 800,000 Jewish persons that reside in the state. Florida’s State Convention is not alone in this omission. Therefore, state conventions could hire a person who oversees ministries to the Jewish people. This person would develop materials, conferences, and assist churches in heavily populated Jewish areas in ways to engage the community.

As well, the state conventions could offer specific conferences that educate individuals on the Jewish people. From time to time, interfaith training will occur. Usually seminars on Jehovah Witnesses, Muslims, Mormons, and even New Age religions are discussed. Rarely, however, does a conference have seminars on the Jewish people. The result of such gaps is that the people in the local churches are not getting educated and are in turn not reaching Jewish people. While the argument will always be made that the Jews are less responsive and thus should not receive the attention that other peoples get, it could be argued that if more emphasis was placed on preparing and equipping individuals to share the gospel with Jewish people, more may come to faith.

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<sup>61</sup>Sibley, “Future of Jewish Evangelism in the Southern Baptist Convention,” 5.

As has been argued in this paper, the Jewish people must hear the gospel and respond to the gospel in order to be saved. If more people were sharing with Jewish persons, more Jewish persons would likely come to faith. There is a Jewish remnant who, upon hearing the gospel, will turn to Christ and be saved.

**Local Churches.** One way the local church can develop an intentional strategy for reaching Jewish people is by first addressing some of the common misunderstandings Christians have about this people group. Often ignorance on issues regarding what Jewish people believe causes many false assumptions and fear that in turn hinders evangelism.<sup>62</sup> The first commonly held myth within churches is that all Jewish people are devoutly religious. This common misconception stifles evangelism in that it puts fear into believers' hearts that the Jewish people are extremely religious and will be hard to engage with the gospel. Movies, media, and literature showing Jews as those who wear black suits, hats, and prayer shawls and having long beards propagate this notion. In reality, however, the Jewish people are very secular. Only a small minority of Jews in America claim to be devoutly religious. In fact, "many Jews claim to be atheists or agnostics and are anti-religious."<sup>63</sup>

It is important to note that there are three main branches of Judaism in America: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. Orthodox is the most religious of the three and is typically the group that Christians picture when they think of Jewish people. It is true that they are devout in their study and observance of the Torah. Of the three

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<sup>62</sup>For a good book addressing general fears related to witnessing, see Timothy Beougher, *Overcoming Walls to Witnessing* (Minneapolis: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1993).

<sup>63</sup>Moishe Rosen, *Witnessing to Jews* (San Francisco: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 1998), 25.

groups, however, they are the smallest in number residing mainly in the suburbs of New York City and are unlikely to be encountered by the average church.

Reform Jews, on the other hand, are quite numerous. They put little emphasis on traditional Jewish theology instead stressing issues like social ethics, justice, and becoming the best person one possibly can in order to better society as a whole. Reform Jews deny the supernatural and “consider the traditional laws and customs of their ancestors unimportant and often treat them as mere superstition.”<sup>64</sup> It is not hard to conclude, therefore that they are the most liberal of the three branches. Sibley noted that they have “embraced modernity, liberalism, and humanism in an effort to enhance a sense of relevance. Although there are a variety of beliefs within Reform Judaism, it generally maintains a more inclusive position regarding feminism, homosexuality, and agnosticism.”<sup>65</sup>

The last major type of Judaism in America is the Conservative branch. They get their name, not based on political affiliation but by trying “to make allowances for modern culture, while ‘conserving’ as far as possible, traditional Judaism.”<sup>66</sup> Moishe Rosen said that Conservative Jews accomplish this relevancy by trying to “retain those elements (of Judaism) they feel are meaningful and eliminate religious practices they consider too antiquated for this day and age.”<sup>67</sup> This balance between the other two

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>65</sup>North American Mission Board, *Judaism*.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Rosen, *Witnessing to Jews*, 21.

branches of Judaism in America is probably why the Conservative group is the second largest and the fastest growing of the three.

An implication from this information is that many Jews in America are not religious, much less devout. In fact, in one recent study, “1.4 million Jews, another quarter of the population, say they are secular or have no religion at all, leaving just 51 percent of American Jews to say they are Jewish by religion.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Christians need not fear that Jewish people whom they encounter will be extremely religious and thus difficult people with whom to share the gospel. It can be induced that they are no more or no less religious than any other lost person in society and thus need not be feared as such.

A second myth that hinders churches from evangelizing the Jewish people is the belief that all Jewish individuals have an in-depth knowledge of the Old Testament. This misconception leads Christians to believe that if they were to share the gospel with the Jews, they would be overwhelmed by the Jew’s knowledge. In other words, people ignore Jewish evangelism fearing the possibility of getting into a discussion with a Jew and not being able to compete with their knowledge of the Bible or being able to answer their objections. This myth is wrong on many fronts. First, based on the evidence of the first myth, almost half of all Jews are not religious and thus have little or no knowledge of the Bible. Second, few Jews still believe in the authority and necessity of the Bible for

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<sup>68</sup>Debra Nussbaum Cohen, “Jews Turning from Judaism: Those Choosing Other Faiths Doubles in a Decade, Poll Finds,” *The Jewish Week*, 2 November 2001[on-line]; accessed 10 November 2004; available from <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=5301>; Internet.

their lives today: “Relatively few Jews believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and that they have an obligation to study them.”<sup>69</sup> This belief has resulted in biblically ignorant Jews. Rosen said even more pointed with regard to this myth that “few Jewish people today are well versed in even the Old Testament portion of the Scriptures, and just the basic knowledge that led you to become a Christian probably surpasses what most Jews know about the Bible.”<sup>70</sup> Some Jews do not even know that Jesus was Jewish himself.<sup>71</sup>

An offshoot of this myth about Bible knowledge is that all Jews are well versed in Hebrew and that unless an individual knows Hebrew, that person will not be able to present the gospel to them. Again, as stated before, most American Jews are secular and have no concern for the Bible and how it should impact their daily lives. Therefore, one would be correct in concluding that very few Jews have a working knowledge of Hebrew: “Most Jewish people are not able to translate biblical Hebrew. Even those who have a Jewish education often do not know the Hebrew Bible very well.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, the church member who has allowed this myth to hinder efforts to evangelism the Jewish people should take comfort; it is just as foreign to them as many in the Christian church.

The only right conclusion surrounding the Jewish people is that they are just like every other lost people group. They have no special means of forgiveness with God

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<sup>69</sup>Rosen, *Witnessing to Jews*, 24.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>71</sup>Rydelnik, “Outreach to the Jewish Community,” 285.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 283.

because they are Jews. They are blinded to their own sinfulness and need for a savior. They are doomed to spend eternity in Hell unless they hear and believe in the gospel. Add to this equation the biblical impetus placed upon the church to make sharing the gospel with the Jewish people a top priority (Rom 1:16), and there is no excuse for the church to continue to deny this group of people the message that forgiveness for sins is found by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. As one completed Jew has said, “I believe with all my heart that the most anti-Semitic thing a Bible-believing Christian can do to the Jewish people is deny them access to the good news of Messiah Jesus.”<sup>73</sup>

Having shown the necessity of sharing the gospel with the Jewish people based on Scripture and the rebuttal of certain misconceptions, the question of how to engage in Jewish evangelism still lingers. In other words, how should one approach a Jewish person with the gospel? The most foundational suggestion is to pray for the opportunity to share your faith with a Jewish person. If a person does not know any Jewish persons, prayer for the Jewish people in general is a good practice. For those who do know a Jewish person or people, praying specifically for them is a good idea. God has ordained prayer as a means to accomplish his purposes and Christians should make fervent intercession for Jewish friends. This discipline would include praying for the Jewish person by name, praying for opportunities to share, praying for words to say, praying for wisdom to answer questions, praying against any fears the person would have by coming to a church, and praying that the person would not let family issues, and even possible rejection, be a reason that Christ is put off. The Lord told his followers that the “harvest

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<sup>73</sup>Stan Telchin, *Abandoned: What Is God's Will for the Jewish People and the Church?* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1997), 172.

is great” and this is especially true with regard to the Jewish people (Matt 9:37).

Therefore, prayer asking God not only to send Christians out into the harvest but also asking the Lord to bless the labors is a significant action.

Second, one should strive to be humble when addressing a Jewish person. One should not approach any evangelistic encounter with a haughty or arrogant attitude, especially in the case with Jewish people. Christians should always be mindful that their being able to claim Christ as their Savior is a byproduct of God’s grace and the Jewish rejection of Jesus (Acts 13:46-48). Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. He himself said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 15:24). As Paul tells us, if God had not hardened the heart of the Jews, it would be the Gentiles who would be separated from Christ without hope of eternal life (Rom 11). Therefore, one should seek to share the gospel in a spirit of love and gentleness.

Third, Christians should try to be culturally sensitive. Much damage and death has accumulated over the centuries with Christian evangelism of Jews, to which most of the church is completely ignorant. Edward Flannery was correct in saying, “The vast majority of Christians, even well educated, are all but totally ignorant of what happened to the Jews in history and of the culpable involvement of the church.”<sup>74</sup> Even if Christians are unaware of it, Jewish people certainly know it. For example, the cross, which seems to be a symbol of life and hope for the Christian is a symbol of death and persecution for the Jews. It was under the sign of the cross that many Jews lost their lives

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<sup>74</sup>Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 1.



or were forced to make “conversions.”<sup>75</sup> As Adolph Saphir said, if Christians are going to be effective in ministry with the Jewish people, they must “look upon Israel with the eyes with which Jesus looked upon them, and with the eyes with which Jesus wept over them.”<sup>76</sup>

One way to be sensitive is in the words that are used. Common words in Christian terminology are often offensive or create feelings contrary to those that a Christian intends to communicate. For example, one should refer to Jesus’ death as “atoning for sins” rather than “dying for sins.” The reason is that “the word atonement is more familiar to Jewish people since the Day of Atonement is an annual observance. Jesus’ sacrifice was the fulfillment of this holy day.”<sup>77</sup> Again, one should use the term “Jewish person” or “the Jewish people” instead of the word “Jew” when sharing. For many, “Jew” carries prejudicial connotations that are offensive and builds walls when trying to share the gospel with Jewish people.

An additional suggestion for local churches is to be intentional about looking for ways to present the gospel with the Jews. Being culturally sensitive does not mean that an individual or a church should withhold the gospel for fear of offending the Jewish person. Christians must share with the Jewish people, being cognizant of the historical tragedy of the Holocaust, but also holding firmly to the belief of Scripture regarding the necessity of hearing for faith to develop. As Rich Robinson noted, “How can one

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<sup>75</sup>For a thorough history of the atrocities performed on the Jewish people by those who claim the name of Christ, see Michael Brown, *Our Hands Are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the Church and the Jewish People* (Pensacola, FL: ICN Ministries, 1992), 1-173.

<sup>76</sup>Aaron J. Kligerman, *The Gospel and the Jew* (Baltimore: King Brothers, 1969), 99.

<sup>77</sup>Barry Rubin, *You Bring the Bagels, I’ll Bring the Gospel: Sharing the Messiah with Your Jewish Neighbor* (Baltimore: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1997), 97.

surmise from Scripture that it is insulting to speak to Jews of the love of Jesus, who came as a Jew? How can it be insulting to tell of the great sacrifice He made for all people? How can it be insulting to offer the abundant life He gives?"<sup>78</sup>

Various ways are possible for being intentional in sharing the gospel. This idea is especially important for those churches that minister in areas with high concentrations of Jewish persons. One way does not work with all, just as in the case with non-Jewish evangelism. Therefore, multiple nets should be cast in prayerful expectation that the means will bring about conversion fruit. One method of intentionality is confrontational evangelism. This type of evangelism is where believers travel to Jewish areas and hand out tracts and flyers with the intent of striking up gospel conversations. Jews for Jesus is known for this type of in your face, confrontational witnessing.<sup>79</sup> They will put on shirts with catchy slogans about Jesus and then enter into large Jewish communities where they hand out pamphlets and seek to engage individuals with conversation. While this type of confrontational evangelism may not be for all, the leadership at Jews for Jesus has found that it is effective in reaching not only Jews but also Gentiles.

A less aggressive measure is to seek to build friendships with Jewish people. This practice is a good model to use especially with Jewish people for a couple of reasons. First, it allows the Jewish person the opportunity to see the genuineness of the believer's faith in Jesus. Second, it is less confrontational and more relational. Jewish

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<sup>78</sup>Rich Robinson, *The Messianic Movement: A Field Guide for Evangelical Christians from Jews for Jesus* (San Francisco: Purpose Pomegranate Productions, 2005), 172.

<sup>79</sup>Jews for Jesus, "Witnessing" [on-line]; accessed 1 November 2009; available <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/resources/witnessing>; Internet.

people are leery of Christians and the more relational Christians can become with them, the more likely it is that they will show curiosity. This method is not without dangers, however. On the one hand, there must be a sincere friendship on the part of the believer with the Jewish person. More damage than help will be done if the Jewish person believes that the “friendship” is only a means of procuring a conversion. Additionally, believers often clam up and fail to share the gospel with their friend fearing that it will push them away. Although there is a balance between being a friend and an evangelist, Christians should pray that God would give them a heart for their lost friend. Christians should be willing to have the friend grow angry with them because they loved enough to share rather than allowing their friend to suffer the eternal torments of hell because they did not share.

Another good idea in order to be equipped to share the gospel with a Jewish person is to memorize a gospel presentation based on the Hebrew Bible. Presentations like *The Roman’s Road* can be effective but may be less so with a Jewish person because they will think that this is merely Christian propaganda from the New Testament. If one is able to share with the Jews from the Jewish Scriptures what God says about the need to be saved, they might be more likely to listen. Although this model is not the only presentation of its kind, the following outline is a good tool to consider memorizing<sup>80</sup>:

1. The Reality of Sin: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Eccl 7:20).
2. The Results of Sin: “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation

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<sup>80</sup>The elements of this evangelistic tool are not original. Sibley noted this tool in his lectures in St. Louis in 2002 at the Interfaith Evangelism Conference on Judaism. As well, Michael Smith also expressed this tool as a useful method. See Michael Smith, “Jewish Evangelism: Methods and Hindrances” (classroom notes, 32966—*Missions: SBC Judaism*, Summer 2002, photocopy), 1.

between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isa 59:1-2).

3. The Removal of Sin: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev 17:11).
4. The Remedy for Sin: “But He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:5-6).
5. The Repentance of the Jewish People: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (Zech 12:10).

### **Conclusion**

Rydelnik rightly argued that believers “are often frustrated by their own ineffectiveness at communicating the gospel with the Jewish people.”<sup>81</sup> The purpose of this chapter was to offer a solution to this dilemma. If the SBC entities would put more emphasis on training and reaching and if more pastors would take leadership in teaching and equipping their church members in sharing the gospel with Jewish people, more Christians would undoubtedly step out in faith and share the gospel. Christians must find comfort knowing that while this people group is experiencing a divine hardening, there is a remnant of Jews who will respond by faith when the gospel is presented to them. As well, once Christians address the common myths regarding the Jewish people, it is likely that more Christians would be able to echo the words of Paul when he said his prayer was

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<sup>81</sup>Rydelnik, “Outreach to the Jewish Community,” 275.

that they (the Jewish people) would be saved (Rom 10:1) and then attempt to fulfill it by action.

## CHAPTER 7

### FINAL THOUGHTS

The Jewish people's connection to the early church is undeniable. Jesus was born into a Jewish home (Matt 1:1-17). His first disciples were of Jewish descent. His mission was specifically to the Jewish nation (Matt 15:24). He initially commanded his disciples to avoid Gentiles and Samaritans and instead go only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6). Furthermore, in the initial development of the Christian church, the book of Acts reveals that the first converts to Christianity after Jesus' resurrection were of Jewish descent (Acts 2). Outside of a few recorded confessions by Gentiles scattered throughout the early chapters of Acts, the great majority of the individuals who composed the early church were Jewish.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the demographics of the early church being predominately Jewish, the great majority of Jews in that day rejected the message as either foolishness or promoting a form of idolatry.<sup>2</sup> Paul, himself a Jewish man who believed in Christ, chided his own people saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). While Paul did turn his attention primarily to the proclamation of

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<sup>1</sup>Some examples of early Gentile individuals who came to faith include the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39), Cornelius (Acts 10-11), and the proconsul Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-12). It was not, however, until Acts 13:48 and following that large numbers of Gentiles turned to Christ.

<sup>2</sup>See Acts 15 and the discussion that occurred as Gentiles began entering the Jewish dominated church.

the gospel to the Gentiles, he still desired to see the Jewish people come to faith in Christ. Even after his statement in Acts 13:46, Paul made it his practice to go first to the local synagogue and proclaim the gospel there before he turned his attention to the Gentiles in many of the towns to which he traveled. Although Paul accepted his commission as a missionary to the Gentiles, his heart longed for the salvation of the Jews. Paul's passion and concern for the Jews was seen most clearly in his own confession to the Gentiles that, "inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them" (Rom 11:13-14).

Unfortunately, the early church's mission, and Paul's passion, to reach Jews with the gospel did not continue. As more Gentiles came to faith, and fewer Jews did the same, the Church began to see this people differently. Andrew Wakefield noted, "With regard to Romans 9:30–10:21, Christian commentators have routinely vilified the Jewish people for their willful stubbornness and rebellious rejection of Christ, as though there were no barrier to their acceptance of the gospel other than their own sinful pride. To be sure, Paul himself quotes Isaiah to call Israel "a disobedient and contrary people (10:21, NRSV)."<sup>3</sup> He continued saying, "What is far too often overlooked or underemphasized, however, is the passionate concern of Paul for his own people, his attestation that they have zealously sought God (10:2), and especially the puzzle of how the Jews are to blame for something that God apparently has done to them."<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the notion that what Israel is experiencing is something divine, or as Wakefield put it, "something God apparently had

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<sup>3</sup>Andrew Wakefield, "Romans 9-11: The Sovereignty of God and the Status of Israel," *Review and Expositor* 100 (2003), 77.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

done to them.” From the arguments presented in this paper, one should not conclude that the hardening was placed upon the Jewish people as a form of judgment. Instead, one should see the hardening by God as an act that has allowed salvation to go to the nations. Mark Kinzer’s thoughts about the content of Romans 9-11 summarize extremely well the heart and understanding of this dissertation regarding the Jewish people. He said, “Whereas a traditional reading of Romans 9-11 has seen the hardening of nonremnant Israel as exclusively punitive in nature, the texts we have been exploring point in another direction. They depict Israel’s partial hardening as a form of suffering imposed by God so that God’s redemptive purpose for the world might be realized.”<sup>5</sup> Israel’s hardening was predicated by God who “has mercy on whomever he wills and who hardens whomever he wills” (Rom 9:18) and serves to promote the glory of Christ in the salvation of all peoples, including ultimately the Jewish people.

Therefore, the following paragraphs provide some biblical applications regarding the Jewish people and attempts at evangelizing them. A major application from the material presented in this dissertation is that one should not assume that the texts that speak of the hardening of Israel mean that Christians should not seek to engage the Jewish people with the truth regarding Jesus. Although the Jewish people do seem to be hardened to the gospel message, Christians must still share the gospel with them for many reasons. The first reason is that, according to Romans 11:25, this hardening is not total. The use by Paul of the word “partial” means that not every Jew is hardened to the claims of Christ. While the majority of Jewish people do reject Christ, some today are

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<sup>5</sup>Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 129.



turning to Jesus by faith and are being saved. Although a day is coming when large numbers of Jews will turn to Christ by faith, even now God saves a remnant showing that his promises to Abraham stand.

The same concept used to explain unconditional election and the gospel call is relevant with Jewish people and the gospel. Since one does not know who is elect and who is not elect, a Christian should share with all individuals, as divinely prompted, knowing that the elect will respond by faith as the Holy Spirit effectually calls them. This same concept is true with Jews and the issue of hardening. Even though one may not know if God has hardened or softened a particular Jewish person's heart to the gospel, one should share with that individual knowing that if he or she does respond by faith, it is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians should always remember that Paul said, "As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:28-30). Thus, there are elect Jews who, upon hearing the gospel, will respond by faith and be saved. Reaching this remnant should be the priority of believers everywhere. Stanford Mills puts this idea into context:

God's eternal purpose is the motivating factor in the blinding and hardening of Israel. Because of God's great love for Israel, upon which His purposes for her salvation are based, the Gentiles are made to be the recipients of God's love, mercy, and grace . . . . What we need to remember is that we are not to despair or neglect our witness because of this "hardening process" which is still Israel's lot under God. Let us rejoice that there is still "a remnant according to the election of grace," and preach the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike.<sup>6</sup>

A second reason Christians must share the gospel with Jews is that this act

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<sup>6</sup>Stanford Mills, *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1968), 71.

fulfills God's desire for them to be made jealous. How will they want what they do not know? How will they be jealous if this jealousy is not stirred up in them by sharing the gospel? Again, as Paul said in Romans 10:14, "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" In order for the Jewish people to be saved from their sins, they too must be presented with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in order that they might believe. What the Jewish people need are more believers in Jesus Christ to confront them with the claims of the gospel. The Jewish people are counting on Christians to share with them the gospel in order to make them jealous. They need Christians who are equipped and willing to endure hardships in order to present the Jewish Messiah to the Jewish people in hopes that they will receive him by faith.

Another application of the doctrine represented in this dissertation is that Christians should pray for the full number of the elect Gentiles to come to faith so that the partial hardening upon the Jews will be removed. Not only should we pray for the salvation of the nations, as John Piper argued, we should actively seek to bring it to fruition through missions and evangelism.<sup>7</sup> As 2 Peter 3:12 implies, Christians can hasten the coming Day of the Lord by taking the gospel to the nations. In fulfilling the Great Commission, Christians are helping move forward the day when the hardness of heart will be removed from Israel and they too will be saved. Piper provided insights concerning the reason for praying for the hardhearted:

Since God's grace can take for himself any one he chooses, therefore pray with boldness and confidence that God is able to save the most hardened unbeliever you love--Gentile or Jew. Sovereign grace is a great incentive to pray with hope for hardened people. If God must wait for the initiative of the lost--if God must wait for the blind to see and the deaf to hear and spiritual corpses to raise themselves the

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<sup>7</sup>For more insight into his missionary beliefs, see John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993).

dead - then you may as well hang up the telephone to heaven. But if God is able to raise the dead, give sight to the blind, cause the deaf to hear, and grant repentance to those taken captive by the devil (2 Timothy 2:24-26), then you may ask him and believe that he will work the wonders of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

A last application derived from the doctrine presented in this dissertation is that while Jews may be hardened to the gospel by God, this does not absolve them of repenting and believing. No Jewish person can blame God for his or her hardening. All Jewish persons, like all persons, are sinners and must repent and believe in order to be saved. Again, this idea is similar to the dichotomy of telling individuals to repent knowing that only the elect will be made able to do so. Nevertheless, all men are instructed and held accountable for repenting and believing. Thus, while God may indeed harden a Jewish person's heart, Christians must confess that if a Jewish person repents, he or she will be forgiven. Piper summarized this teaching when he said, "God hardens unconditionally and those who are hardened are truly guilty and truly at fault in their hard and rebellious hearts. Their own consciences will justly condemn them. If they perish, they will perish for real sin and real guilt. How God freely hardens and yet preserves human accountability we are not explicitly told."<sup>9</sup>

The good news is that more Gentile individuals and churches are obeying the biblical commandment and are beginning to engage the Jewish people with the gospel in a more serious manner. The result is that Jews are coming to faith! In fact, Gentile churches are having more success in leading Jews to Christ than even Jewish

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<sup>8</sup>John Piper, *For God's Sake, Let Grace be Grace*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

<sup>9</sup>Piper, *The Hardening of Pharaoh and the Hope of the World*, in *Sermons from John Piper, 2000-2008* [CD-ROM], The John Piper Sermon Manuscript Library (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 2007).

paraministries. Murray Tilles noted this trend in a recent paper at the national convention for the Lausanne Committee on Jewish Evangelism. He said, “Gentile Christians are reaching our people. And, they are doing a better job than our Jewish organizations are. They are using terms like ‘Christ’ and ‘convert.’ They are talking about ‘salvation’ and ‘coming to the Lord.’ The statistics are irrefutable. The Gentile cultured church is reaching our people. They are touching more Jewish lives than any Jewish mission agency or Messianic congregation.”<sup>10</sup> He continued, “Gentiles are engaged with our people on a daily basis. They are the neighbors, business associates, friends, and even family of Jewish people. They are rubbing elbows with the Jewish community in the market place. And they are doing it their way. Preaching the gospel and bringing a relevant message to those who are searching.”<sup>11</sup> Two great issues are worthy of note from this statement. The first is that God is at work in the lives of Jewish people bringing them to faith through the efforts of Gentiles. Second, God is at work honoring the labors of humble people who might not know all the right answers or terminology to do Jewish evangelism, and yet are communicating to the Jews of the need to repent. This passion for lost Jews is the same passion that drove Paul and should be the same passion for each Christian believer and church

### **Areas for Further Study**

In the process of research for this dissertation, a few issues developed that were not addressed specifically in this work but that deserve future study. One such issue

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<sup>10</sup>Murray Tilles, “Jewish Ministry through the Local Church” (paper presented at the annual North American meeting of the Lausanne Conference on Jewish Evangelism, Phoenix, AZ, March 2009), 1.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

that arose is why God needed to harden the Jewish people at all? If they, like all people outside of Christ, are already dead in their sins and trespasses and will not respond naturally to the gospel unless God sends forth an effectual call bringing them from death to life, what purpose did the hardening really serve? Would it have been possible for the Jewish people, if left unhardened, to turn to Christ and thus be saved all the while hindering salvation from going to the Gentiles? In other words, what purpose was served in hardening spiritually dead people? Why did Jesus speak in parables so that they would not believe? If he spoke plainly, would the Jews have listened and trusted in him?

When did the hardening come upon Israel? This issue is a second question that arose that could use further examination. According to Jim Sibley, the hardening has its roots in connection to Isaiah 6 and his task to bear the message of blindness to Israel all of which occurred prior to the Babylonian captivity. C. A. Evans also commented about the timing of this obduracy from Isaiah:

It would appear, then, that obduracy in the book of Isaiah is meant to be understood as a condition, brought on variously by arrogance, immorality, idolatry, injustice, and false prophecy, that renders God's people incapable of discerning God's will. This inability leads to judgment and calamity. However, it is also understood to be a condition that God brings about himself, as part of his judgment upon his wayward people.<sup>12</sup>

He believed that a hardening came upon the Jewish people at that point and he said, "we have no record in the Scripture of it being lifted."<sup>13</sup> He backed this position on Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 3:14 which says, "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only

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<sup>12</sup>C.A. Evans, "To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6:9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 64 (1989): 37.

<sup>13</sup>Jim Sibley, "Hear O Israel: Spiritual Obduracy and the Jewish People" (paper presented at the 51<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA, 17-19 November 1999), 1.

through Christ is it taken away.” Questions that need further addressing include whether the hardening Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians is connected to Isaiah or if it goes back even further to the time of Moses? Furthermore, one might pursue thinking about whether the hardening in Isaiah 6 is the same hardening that Paul spoke of in Romans 11. If these hardenings are the same, this conclusion provides additional evidence that allow some to reject any type of argument that the blindness in Romans 11 is a punishment towards the Jewish people for the rejection of Jesus.

A last question that is worthy of future study is the connection between the believing remnant and their incorporation into a body of believers. As opposed to other groups like Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah Witnesses, Jews who come to faith in Christ can still participate in many traditionally Jewish events (i.e., Passover). Rather than giving up such holidays, Jewish believers are able to find the greatest meaning of the festival or celebration through Christ. While some Jewish individuals opposed to Christ will disagree, Jewish believers in Christ are still Jews. Their history, culture, and traditions are an essential part of who they are.

McGavran noted, “Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.”<sup>14</sup> This idea presents readers with a dilemma: should Jewish individuals who come to faith be incorporated into the local body that is predominately Gentile acting and worshipping? Or should believing Jews have their own messianic congregations where they can invite other Jewish friends to learn and experience Christ while at the same time celebrating their Jewishness? McGavran expressed that this issue was present in the early church:

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<sup>14</sup>McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 198.

As long as Jews could become Christians within Judaism, the Church could and did grow amazingly among Jews, filling Jerusalem, Judea, and Galilee... When the Church began to grow in the synagogue communities around the Mediterranean, the first to become disciples of Christ were devout Jews who had been eagerly expecting the Messiah. These, becoming Christians within the synagogue, could do so without crossing racial and class barriers. As soon as numerous Gentiles had become Christians, however, to be a Christian involved for a Jew leaving the Jewish people and joining a conglomerate society. Admitting Gentiles created a racial barrier for Jews. Indeed, it is a reasonable conjecture that as soon as becoming a Christian meant joining a house church full of Gentiles and sitting down to agape feasts where on occasion pork was served, would-be Jewish converts found the racial and cultural barriers too high and turned sorrowfully away.<sup>15</sup>

Southern Baptists have stayed away from starting Messianic congregations. While there are Southern Baptist Churches that have as their targeted group cowboys, African Americans, Spanish speaking individuals, and even deaf persons, Southern Baptists have left the starting and facilitating of messianic congregations to such groups as the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), Association of Messianic Congregations (AMC), and Chosen People Ministries. Taking McGavran's thoughts into consideration, however, an area for future study could include addressing whether the Southern Baptist churches plant Messianic congregations.<sup>16</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Jewish people are counting on Christians to share with them the gospel. They need Christians who are equipped to present the Jewish Messiah to the Jewish people in hopes that they will receive Him by faith. These believers need to be willing to endure hardships, both from the culture around them as well as from the Jewish

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>16</sup> The Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship is a group loosely associated with the SBC that focuses on Jewish evangelism and congregations. For more information about this group, see <http://www.sbmessianic.net/index.shtml>; Internet.

people themselves. In the end, however, the ministry would not be in vain. I close with this remark by Rabbi Stephen Wise, who said, “For 1800 years, certainly for most of that time, Jews have not been given an opportunity to know what Christianity is, or to know what the Christ means. The ignorance of the Jew concerning Christianity condemns not the Jew, but Christendom.”<sup>17</sup> May this not be so of this generation’s pastors and churches! May the partial hardening that is upon Israel not be a reason why Jews are neglected. Instead, may the church provoke Israel to jealousy and may many Jews come to faith in Jesus as a result. Last, may this remnant of believing Jews remind all people of God’s promise that the hardening will one day be lifted at which point “all Israel will be saved” due to God’s great mercy.

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Rydelnik, “Outreach to the Jewish Community: The Principles and Possibilities,” in *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community*, ed. John Fuder (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 292.



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## ABSTRACT

### A PARTIAL HARDENING HAS COME UPON ISRAEL: DIVINE HARDENING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR JEWISH EVANGELISM

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This dissertation explores the hardening mentioned in Romans 11:25 and its role in Israel's rejection of the gospel. Chapter 1 describes the difficulties faced when addressing the issue of hardening. Additionally, the thesis states that in the case with the Jewish people, the partial hardening has divine origins and serves a glorious purpose.

Chapter 2 provides three arguments from Romans 9-11 explaining Israel's rejection of Jesus. These three arguments underline the belief that although vast numbers of Jewish people have rejected Jesus, God's word has not failed. The chapter concludes with the primary argument offered in that Israel's rejection is due to a partial hardening.

Chapter 3 presents the argument that God is the primary cause of Israel's hardening. After exploring Scriptures where man seems responsible for his own hardening, the chapter argues that based on Romans 9-11, and especially the statement that God has mercy on whom he wills and he hardens whom he wills, the hardening Israel is experiencing has God rather than man as its cause.

Chapter 4 explores the various reasons Paul gave in Romans 11 for the divine hardening. After refuting the idea that the hardening is a demonstration of God's

rejection of Israel, that chapter examines three reasons why Israel is experiencing this hardening.

Chapter 5 looks at Israel's future once the hardening is removed. The chapter focuses specifically on what the phrase "all Israel will be saved" means. Examined in this chapter are the three traditional interpretations regarding this statement. Strengths and weaknesses are provided for each position.

Chapter 6 discusses the implications for evangelism for SBC entities in light of this divine hardening. After examining the history of the SBC's efforts to evangelize the Jewish people, discussion surrounds future strategies for the SBC at the national, state, and local levels.

Chapter 7 provides a brief summary of the work and restates the thesis and major issues discussed within the context of the paper. It also offers some suggestions and unanswered questions for further study on this topic.

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