

## Chapter 44

### Israel Enlarged

(Romans 9:24–29)

‘God’s saved Israel’ is not to be identified with the entire nation of Israel but rather with an ‘elect’ group within it. Only the elect within Israel are God’s saved and never-to-be-lost people. In Romans 9:24 Paul introduces a surprise. *These objects of mercy include us whom God called not only from among the Jews but also from among the gentiles.* His new point is that God’s elect Israel, ‘inner’ Israel, may have elect gentiles added to it! Paul has defined God’s spiritual Israel not as a whole nation but as an elect within a nation, but now he is saying that God’s elect may include gentiles. God’s elect ‘Israel’ is the elect everywhere including elect gentiles, with a remnant of elect Jews as its first generation. If it is only through God’s mercy that anyone is saved at all, then it follows that God can save gentiles as easily as he can save Jews.

In Romans 9:25–29 he introduces quotations to show that the receiving of the gentiles (9:25–26), the rejection of Israel (9:27–28) and the principle of the remnant (9:29) were all anticipated in the Old Testament. His point now is not so much to deal with the **procedure** of election (as in 9:6–23) but rather with the **objects** of election.

Despite all the preparation for the gospel in Israel, when Jesus finally came, most of Israel did not want him. At first conversions came from among the Jews, then after a few years Jews were coming to Jesus only in small numbers but gentiles were

being saved in their hundreds and thousands. This should cause no surprise since these principles are all to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Paul quotes first of all Hosea 2:23.

*<sup>25</sup>As he says in Hosea,*

*‘The one named “Not-My-People”  
I will call “My-People”  
and the one named “Not-Beloved”  
I will call “Beloved”.’*

Then he quotes Hosea 1:10.

*<sup>26</sup>And it shall be, in the place it is said to them,  
“You are not my people”,  
there they shall be called “sons of the living God”.’*

Hosea was a prophet to northern Israel, and northern Israel became ‘Galilee of the gentiles’, ‘the people who sat in darkness’. Hosea predicted that God would reject northern Israel and they would virtually become a pagan area (see also 2 Kings 17:6–18). But also in the prophecy of Hosea there was a prediction of a surprising reversal. Hosea 1:10 predicted the day when this paganized area would come back to the Lord again.

1. **God’s people Israel could as a community fall aside and become a community of unbelievers.** This had happened in the story of northern Israel. Anyone who knew the story of the nation of Israel should not be too surprised at a mass rejection of God’s purpose and a massive falling aside from his gospel. It had happened before.

2. **God has a habit of saving those who are impossibly locked up in sin and seem to be beyond salvation.** God’s electing grace can bring out anyone from anywhere into God’s marvellous

salvation. The people of northern Israel to whom Hosea preached became virtually paganized people, but God promised they would be rescued. God's predestinating grace can take people from anywhere. People without the slightest knowledge of God and his ways can be reached. Those named 'Not-My-People' can be incorporated into God's people. Those never known for being loved by God can be called 'Beloved'.

It is interesting to note the reference to location in Hosea 1:10, and in Romans 9:26. 'In the place where it is said to them, "You are not my people", **there** they shall be called "sons of the living God".' In the dark and pagan areas of northern Israel, people in that place would come to salvation. Paul applies the matter to the gentiles. Gentiles can come to be called 'sons of the living God', without having to take up residence in Israel. Wherever they are – even in Rome – people may be called by God's Holy Spirit to become 'sons of the living God'. This is part of the teaching concerning predestination. Because of God's choosing grace, he is able to take some very surprising converts, even to the astonishment of the previous generations of his people.

3. **The thought of God's blessing only a part of the Israelites ought also not to be a new idea.** Paul quotes Isaiah 10:22, 23 to make this point. God never promised that the entire nation of Israel had a guaranteed salvation. Isaiah taught that when Assyria would be used to judge Israel, a 'remnant' would no longer rely on the Arameans. Instead they would rely on the LORD (Isaiah 10:20). Paul refers to the Greek translation.

<sup>27</sup>*And Isaiah calls out concerning Israel,*

*'Though the number of the sons of Israel were as the  
sand of the sea,  
the remnant shall be saved.*

<sup>28</sup>*For the Lord will execute his word upon the earth,  
finishing it and cutting it short.'*

Isaiah's prophecy said that God's judgement would come upon Israel and Judah. He would destroy northern Israel as a nation, but there would be some who believed and who trusted in the God of Israel. When God acted he would act thoroughly. 'Finishing it' in 9:28 (Isaiah 10:23) means 'thoroughly accomplishing what he had planned to do'. 'Cutting it short' means 'acting swiftly, taking very little time'.

Paul also quotes Isaiah 1:9 from the Greek translation:

<sup>29</sup>*And as Isaiah said before [earlier in the prophecy],*

*'If the Lord Sabaoth had not left us a seed  
we should have become as Sodom,  
and we should have resembled Gomorrah.'*

'Lord Sabaoth' uses the Hebrew word; it means 'Lord Almighty'. The Greek has 'a seed'; the Hebrew has 'a remnant'. The two words mean much the same thing, 'a small number of people' who have experienced God's rescuing and saving grace. As far back as eight hundred years before his day all the principles of what he had been teaching were to be found in Isaiah's prophecy and in the situation of Isaiah's time.

At the end of Romans 9:29 we have come to the end of Paul's first answer concerning the fall of Israel; Romans 9:30–33 is a kind of 'bridge' leading into the second answer he is about to give in Romans 10:1–21. Has God failed to keep his promise to Israel? No, it never was true that God was held to any commitment that the entire nation of Israel should always in every generation experience God's salvation. In generation after generation, from Abraham onwards, only a portion of Abraham's descendants had experienced salvation. It had often happened that the bulk of any one generation of Israelites were unbelieving and only a smaller number were God's saved people. So in what happened when Jesus came and Israel fell aside from

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God's purpose, at least temporarily, there was nothing altogether new happening. God is the one who determines the people to whom the promises of salvation come with power. God is sovereign in his mercy. Over the course of human history he chooses to exercise his mercy in the way he decides.