

Die Erwählung Israels nach der Heilsverkündigung des Apostels Paulus
Johannes Dalmer
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The main part of this treatise is a discussion of Romans 9-11, which, without giving an exhaustive exegesis, tries to reproduce the line of thought developed by the apostle in these chapters in regard to their central theme, the election of Israel. Inasmuch as this one theme actually dominates the entire section, the rare opportunity here offered itself of conducting a biblico-theological investigation by a purely exegetical method, and the author has happily availed himself of this opportunity. While on many points simply voicing the ordinary exegetical consensus, on a few others, and those of the most important, he has something independent and novel to offer us. Notwithstanding all that has been written on this section of the epistle to the Romans, it cannot be said that even as to the main scope of the argument such unanimity has been reached among expositors as would render all further attempts in this direction a work of supererogation. Dalmer has made a real contribution toward the better understanding of the nexus of the apostle's argument; and this is largely due to the fact that he concentrates his attention upon the one question named in the title of his treatise, a question which in their fullness of exegetical detail the commentaries are frequently as apt to obscure as to elucidate.

It is duly emphasized at the outset that the apostle's treatment of the point in question is not inspired by any theoretical and only in part by a purely apologetic motive. The fact of Israel's rejection of the gospel and of the preeminence gained by the Gentiles over Israel constituted a vexing problem in itself, for which, apart from every apologetic necessity, Paul's mind could not but seek a solution. To all appearances there was no escape from the dilemma: either Israel is not God's chosen people, or Jesus is not the Messiah promised to Israel. In either case the truth of the gospel was endangered—not only in the latter but likewise in the former, for, if Israel be not the people of God, then the entire Old Testament promise becomes void, and the gospel, which professes to be the fulfillment of this promise, a structure without foundation. The solution of this practical difficulty proceeds in three stages. In 9:1-29, the paradoxical unbelief of Israel is explained as being in full harmony with the divine method of sovereign distribution of grace, not to all the physical descendants of Abraham, but to those only who are made his heirs by promise and covenant, no matter whether they stand in physical connection with him or not. In the second section (9:30-10:21), the other side of the problem arising from the preeminence gained by the Gentiles over Israel is dealt with. The problem is formulated in 9:30, 31. In the sequel Paul is intent upon showing how it virtually disappears as soon as the method of salvation is rightly understood to be not by works but by faith (10:3-11). In view of this the paradoxical contrast between Gentiles who inherit and Jews who fail to inherit the promise resolves itself into the simple rational difference between such as believe and as disbelieve (vss. 12, 13, 16, 17). Verses 13, 14 are inserted to indicate the right of the Gentile mission as a necessary correlate of the absolutely universal and impartial character of the gospel message. In verse 16 the Jews appear no longer as a distinct group, but simply as some among the hearers of the tidings of salvation (οὐ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ). Verses 18-21 finally serve to show that Israel's unbelief cannot be excused by the contention that the direct offer of the gospel to the Gentiles placed in doubt the divine character of the gospel. It had been definitely predicted by both Moses and Isaiah that such a direct calling of the Gentiles would take place. In the third section, consisting of chapter 11, Paul returns to the main problem—whether with such understanding of the principles

of election and salvation as had been gained in the two preceding sections, it can still be maintained that God has rejected His people—and proceeds to answer this in the negative.

It is impossible here to enter upon a detailed review of the author's reproduction of the apostle's argument. We must confine ourselves to one or two of the more important questions involved. It is usually assumed that Paul brings to the solution of the difficulty two distinct answers: 1. That notwithstanding the unbelief of the majority of Israel, the divine promises are fulfilled because from the outset these promises relate to the *εκλογη* only and not to the mass, this line of argument being prominent in chapter 9. 2. That notwithstanding the present exclusion of the people of Israel in its collective, national capacity, there will come a time when the organism of Israel as such will be again engrafted into the covenant and the whole of Israel saved, a point of view which is found to prevail in the latter part of chapter 11, especially in verse 26. Dalmer throws all emphasis on the former and reduces the latter to a minimum of importance. In regard to 11:1-15, he seems to us to have made out his case. His reasons for interpreting what is there said of the *ηττημα* and *πληρωμα* of the Jews as referring, not to their numerical decrease and completion, but rather to the spiritual loss of those now unbelieving and the prospective spiritual gain of such of them as may yet be reclaimed, deserve at any rate serious consideration. The whole context favors the view that both in verse 12 and in verse 15 not a future collective salvation of Israel, but a present salvation of individual members of the *εκλογη* is spoken of, and spoken of with reference to its immediate effect upon the Gentile mission (cf. especially vss. 13, 14). A totally different question is whether the rendering proposed of verse 15 is tenable. Dalmer thinks that here Paul controverts the erroneous opinion, as if the rejection of Israel were necessary for the evangelization of the Gentiles, by reducing it *ad absurdum* in this wise: "If their (= the Jews') rejection were the reconciliation of the world, then their (= the Gentiles') adoption would amount to life being produced out of death." To this rendering, already proposed by Luther, two objections must be urged. First, it refers the double *αυτων* to two different antecedents. Dalmer notes this objection, but we do not believe that it can be as lightly disposed of as he seems to think. And secondly, the proposition that life should come out of death cannot have appeared from Paul's general soteriological point of view, so preposterous as to be of itself sufficient for reducing *ad absurdum* any thesis of which it is the correlate or implication. The whole saving work of Christ was, strictly speaking, an exemplification of the principle that life can come out of death. It should be added, however, that this peculiar exegesis of verse 15 is by no means essential to the above-mentioned exposition of the meaning of verses 11-15 as a whole.

We are not so sure about the author's success in eliminating the promise of a collective salvation from 11:25, 26. Against the commonly accepted view that *πας Ισραηλ* means the majority of Israel in its national capacity, Dalmer urges the twofold consideration that Paul would thus contradict his own statement of chapter 9, to the effect that only a part of Israel inherits the promises, and that by thus teaching the apostle would have set himself at variance with the universal belief of early Christianity, that Christ's second advent was to be immediately preceded by a general apostasy and not by a universal ingathering of Jews and Gentiles. Consequently he undertakes to give to the phrases *πας Ισραηλ* and *πληρωμα των εθνων* a less numerical sense by pointing out how Paul claimed in Romans 15:19 "to have fulfilled (*πεπληρωκεναι*) the preaching of Christ from Rome to Illyricum," and that *πας Ισραηλ* need imply no more than that in the course of time the division between a believing and unbelieving Israel will cease to exist through the inbringing of large numbers of Israel. Whilst at the time of writing there were two bodies of Israelites, there would be then again

a united, undivided (πᾶς) Israel. We do not see how this new turn given to the meaning of the verse escapes from the main objection which the author has himself brought against the ordinary interpretation. If the schism within Israel is to cease, this can come about only by the conversion of the great majority of the hardened ones, so that the apparent conflict with chapter 9 remains unsolved. If on this point the author's reasoning fails to satisfy, it is so much the more convincing on the other closely connected point, that nothing is taught here by Paul concerning a future national prerogative of Israel. Whoever are to be converted, whether individuals or the organic body, will become saints on an equal footing with the Gentiles.

In a closing section the author compares the results obtained from Romans 9-11 with the other more brief and incidental statements of the apostle on the same subject. The view of Pfleiderer, as if the epistle to the Romans reflected a later, more conciliating attitude in reference to the destiny of Israel than Galatians, is rejected, and the substantial agreement between both writings shown. The reverse opinion of Clemen, as if Galatians marked a subsequent more developed stage of opinion on the subject, is shown to be likewise without foundation. At the same time Dalmer believes that a change of expectation is clearly perceptible between 1 Thessalonians 2:16 on the one hand, and the later epistles on the other hand, a change, to be sure, not to be explained from natural development, but from a special divine revelation (cf. Rom. 11:25, μυστηριον).

There is one other point on which we must briefly touch. It is entirely correct to say that Romans 9-11 is not primarily intended as a *sedes doctrinae* for the truth of predestination, provided this means no more than that the idea of predestination occupies here a subordinate place and is brought in to throw light on another problem. Nevertheless we cannot believe that the advocates of the principle of sovereign predestination have erred in deriving the data for the construction of the dogma from this source. Though made for an ulterior purpose, the statements show what Paul taught on this question. Dalmer does not seem to have done justice to their bearing in this respect. In itself this might be considered quite excusable, in so far as it lies outside of the scope of his discussion. But the matter assumes a somewhat different aspect in view of his going out of his way to defend the apostle's teaching from what appear to him possible objections to the same. The considerations urged for this purpose are not derived from the context, but from the writer's own dogmatic consciousness. His standpoint in this matter is virtually that of the Lutheran orthodoxy of the *Formula Concordiae*. While election is made entirely sovereign and the maintenance of its independence of any antecedent work or disposition in man leaves nothing to be desired, the author refuses to draw from this the simple logical inference that there is a corresponding predestination of the non-elect to ἀπώλεια. Even if the contention should be right that what Paul says in these chapters about σκληρυνειν and πορωσις is not final but leaves open the possibility of future conversion—even then it remains true that Paul at the beginning of the argument clearly teaches the *intention* of the promises for some and not for all, and it is not necessary to point out at length that every understanding of the sequel which protests against the exclusion of any from the divine purpose to fulfill the promise, is irreconcilable with this explicit statement. Unfortunately, between the standpoint of monergistic grace in virtue of absolute election and the rejection of both fundamental principles *tertium non datur*, and, we may add, in the logical mind of Paul, *dari non potuisset*.