

**Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 10:16-11:10  
to Explain Israel's Unbelief in Jesus**

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In Rom 10:16-11:10, Paul cites a large collection of OT passages to explain Israel's unbelief in Jesus. The meaning and implications of these Scripture citations are at the heart of his argument. Structurally, he uses a method similar to many rabbinic homilies in which he asks a series of rhetorical questions which he answers with quotations from Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Many scholars believe that Paul misinterprets the Scriptures he cites or that he simply uses them as convenient and familiar words to express his ideas. For example, Sanday and Headlam claim, "the passages are quoted without regard to their context or to the circumstances under which they were written."<sup>2</sup>

Yet a close examination of the context of these OT passages shows that Paul's interpretations are reasonable, if his Christological presuppositions are accepted. He often assumes details from the OT context that are essential to his interpretation. In many cases he assumes the literal meaning and then explores implications and contemporary applications of the principles taught in the passages. Since Rom 10:16-11:10 has a large collection of Old Testament citations, it is a good test case for understanding Paul's interpretive methods.

**Context and Overall Argument**

In Rom 9-11, Paul explores the perplexing question of how Israel could be God's chosen people and yet the majority of Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah. The promise to Abraham's descendants has not failed (9:6), since the promise is for the true Israel, the elect of God (9:1-29). Paul shows that salvation comes from believing in Jesus as the resurrected Lord (9:30-10:15). Yet the majority of God's covenant people do not believe the Gospel because they are disobedient to God and as a result they have been judicially hardened. Thus God is blessing the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy so they will turn to God (10:16-31). Now God is working with a faithful remnant of Israel as he has done in the past (11:1-10). The believing Gentiles have been added to this remnant to form the Church so that people of the whole world may be blessed (11:11-32).

**The Old Testament Citations in Romans 10:16-11:10**

**1. Romans 10:16 (=Isa 53:1)**

Paul's first OT citation supports the fact that not all Israelites have believed the Gospel. As is typical of Paul,<sup>3</sup> in Romans 10:16 he quotes the LXX rendering of Isa 53:1: "Lord, who has believed our report?" On the surface it appears that Paul simply uses this verse as an example of the unbelief of the Israelites.

However, the significance of this citation is deeper when seen in its context, which is the fourth Servant song (Isa 52:13-53:12). The early Christians widely believed that Jesus the Messiah is the Servant referred to in Isa 53.<sup>4</sup> The poetic parallelism of Isa 53:1 shows that the unbelief is about the divine "message" concerning the

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<sup>1</sup>E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker, 1957) 218-9. However, Paul's questions primarily come out of the contemporary situation with Israel rather than the texts themselves.

<sup>2</sup>William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (5th ed.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902) 303; cf. Winfield Scott Hall II, "Paul As a Christian Prophet in His Interpretation of the Old Testament in Romans 9-11" (ThD Dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1982) 196; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989) 74. Hays says Paul interprets "innovatively."

<sup>3</sup>Out of the 84 OT citations in Paul's writings, 70 are taken directly from the LXX and 12 show some affinity for the LXX (Sanday and Headlam 302).

<sup>4</sup>John 12:38 also says that the unbelief of the Jews in Jesus fulfills Isa 53:1. Many other NT authors say Jesus' life fulfilled Isa 53: Matt 8:17 (Isa 53:4); Luke 22:37 (Isa 53:12); Acts (Isa 53:7-8); 1 Pet 2:22 (Isa 53:9).

“arm of the Lord.” In Isaiah, the “arm of the Lord” refers to God’s mighty power at work in history for the salvation of his people or in judgment on his enemies.<sup>5</sup> In this passage, it refers to his work of redemption from sin (e.g. Isa 53:5-6, 10). Thus Isa 53:1 predicts that Israel will not believe the message about the Servant-Messiah, who does this work of redemption. In Rom 10:16-17 Paul calls this message “the word of Christ” (ῥῆματος Χριστοῦ, v. 17)<sup>6</sup> and “the Gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον, v. 16; cf. εὐαγγελιζομένων, v. 15). Hence Isa 53:1 perfectly suits Paul’s theme that Israel has not accepted the good news about Jesus.

The original context in Isaiah also contrasts the unbelief of Israel with the positive response of the Gentiles to the Servant. Isa 52:15 says that the Gentiles will benefit from the Servant’s work and positively respond to him. He will “sprinkle many nations”, which refers to a purifying rite.<sup>7</sup> The kings of these nations will “shut their mouths” at him, which suggests they will be silent in awe and honor.<sup>8</sup> The response of the Gentiles to God’s Servant in contrast to the response of Israel fits Paul’s theme in Rom 10-11.

## 2. Romans 10:18 (=Ps 19:4(18:5))

Paul now reaffirms the theme of 10:9-13 that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (v. 17), i.e. the Gospel (v. 16). This raises the question of whether Israel’s unbelief is because they have never heard the message (v. 18). Paul refutes this with a quotation from Ps 19:4: “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

In the original psalm, this statement refers to the general revelation of God’s nature and majesty – “the heavens are telling of the glory of the Lord” (Ps 19:1).<sup>9</sup> How then, can Paul apply verse 4 to the Gospel?

Some believe that Paul ignores the original meaning of the psalm. For example, Sanday and Headlam argue that Paul simply adopts the language of Scripture to express his ideas in familiar language.<sup>10</sup> Käsemann

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<sup>5</sup>Salvation of God’s people (spiritual or physical): 40:10, 11 (tender care); 51:5; 52:10; 59:16; 62:8?; 63:5, 12. Judgment against God’s enemies: 30:30; 48:14. Both: 51:9.

<sup>6</sup>“Word of Christ” (ῥῆματος Χριστοῦ, v. 17) probably refers to the message about Christ, i.e. the Gospel (objective genitive or genitive of contents; e.g. Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Romans. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Bible Commentary 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 598; Sanday and Headlam 298). Vv. 8-9 define the “word of faith which we are preaching” as a message involving specific beliefs about Jesus as the resurrected Lord. Some argue that ῥῆματος Χριστοῦ uses a subjective genitive, “the message from Christ” (e.g. M. J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul: Épitre aux Romains* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1950) 261). Cranfield, says the hearing of the message comes about “through Christ’s speaking the message by the mouths of His messengers” (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; *The International Critical Commentary*; eds. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975) 2:537). The expression may be intentionally ambiguous: “Christ is content and author” (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16 (Word Biblical Commentary 38B; eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin; Dallas: Word, 1988) 623).**

<sup>7</sup>BDB says that *nazah* in the Hiphil means “to sprinkle” in a ceremonial sense.

<sup>8</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah. The English Text, With Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1972) 3:339.

<sup>9</sup>Paul expresses a similar idea in Rom 1:20: “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

<sup>10</sup>Sanday and Headlam 289.

believes that Paul interprets Ps 19:4 as a prophecy of the “worldwide success of Christian preaching.”<sup>11</sup>

A better solution is that the psalm teaches the principle that God does not leave himself without a witness. Paul extends the biblical principle of God’s widespread revelation to a new situation. Since God’s way of working is to reveal himself to people, it would not be like God to leave his chosen people, the Israelites, without a witness to the Messiah. Bruce says “The dissemination of the Gospel is becoming as world-wide as the light of the heavenly bodies.”<sup>12</sup> However, Paul does not use an adverb of comparison in the introductory formula as he does in 11:5 and 8.

The significance of the citation is even deeper when viewed in light of the original context. Paul assumes his readers are familiar with the whole of Ps 19. Although the first half of the psalm focuses on God’s revelation through nature (vv. 1-6), the second half focuses on God’s verbal revelation (especially vv. 7-11). It refers to God’s verbal message to humanity in several ways: “law” (v. 7), “testimony” (v. 7), “precepts” (v. 8), “commandments” (v. 8) and “judgments” (v. 9). Ps 19, therefore, extolls both nonverbal and verbal forms of God’s revelation.<sup>13</sup>

Paul sees the Gospel to be the current phase of the verbal revelation of God that the psalm praises.<sup>14</sup> The ῥήματα (Ps 19:4) of the heavenly bodies and the Law are aspects of God’s transcendent revelation, which includes the Gospel of Christ.<sup>15</sup> The concept that the Gospel is the revelation of God is, of course, a presupposition held by Christians. If this idea is accepted, then the Gospel is also part of the verbal revelation of God that is extolled in Ps 19.<sup>16</sup>

How does this citation refute the charge that Israel has not heard the Gospel (v. 18)? Ps 19:4 says that the message of God “has gone out to all the earth.” Certainly Paul does not believe that the Gospel had been preached to all the nations (Mk 13:10). Yet he knows that the Gospel had been widely proclaimed throughout the Mediterranean world.<sup>17</sup> In Paul’s own mission he had already preached the Gospel “from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum” (Rom 15:19) and he looks forward to taking the Gospel to Spain (Rom 15:21). Since the Gospel has been proclaimed widely in places where Jews commonly lived in the Roman empire, the Israelites as a group have had opportunity to hear the word of Christ and thus they are accountable for their response to the message.

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<sup>11</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1980) 296.

<sup>12</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans. An Introduction and Commentary (The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 6)*; ed. R. V. G. Tasker; Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1963) 209.

<sup>13</sup>Ps 19:3 says the heavenly bodies have no words (λόγους), but they still speak in some sense.

<sup>14</sup>V. 17 links the citations of Isa 53:1 and Ps 19:4 so that the two Scripture passages are interpreted in light of one another (J. W. Aageson, “Scripture and Structure in the Development of the Argument in Romans 9-11,” *CBQ* 48 (1968) 278).

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Dunn, *Romans* 624.

<sup>16</sup>Perhaps ῥήματα in Ps 19:4 (18:5 LXX) reminded Paul of the “word of Christ” (ῥήματος Χριστοῦ, v. 17) and the “word of faith” (τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως, v. 8). However, the link between Isa 53:1 (Rom 10:16), Ps 19:4 (Rom 10:18) and Deut 30:14 (Rom 10:8) is deeper than an argument based on a “pattern of verbal and thematic associations” with ῥῆμα and ἀκοη/ἀκοῆς (Aageson 277-8). There is an important conceptual link between all of these citations. In these passages, the ῥῆμα is the very message of God to His people, which in light of the coming of the Messiah, is now embodied in the “word of Christ” (10:16) and the “word of faith” (10:8). This same message was also anticipated in the report (ἀκοη) redemption through God’s Servant in Isa 53.

<sup>17</sup>“World” (οἰκουμένη, Rom 10:18; cf. Ps 19:4 LXX) usually refers to the inhabited earth or typically the Roman empire (BAGD).

### 3. Romans 10:19 (=Deut 32:21)

Next Paul deals with the objection that perhaps Israel did not understand the message.<sup>18</sup> No – The problem is that Israel is obstinate and disobedient to God. As a result, God is seeking to make Israel jealous by bringing Gentiles to faith, so Israel will turn to God and accept the message of Christ. The problem is not with Israel's understanding but their will. He cites three OT verses that provide a theological explanation for the current situation: Deut 32:21 shows that God will use the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy (v. 19). Isa 65:1 says that although the Gentiles did not seek God, they found him (v. 20). By contrast, Isa 65:2 shows that Israel is obstinate and disobedient to God (v. 21).

First he cites Deut 32:21: "I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, by a nation without understanding will I anger you."<sup>19</sup> This citation makes sense if Paul's readers know the context of the Song of Moses (Deut 32), which describes Israel as disobedient to God, idolatrous and "perverse and crooked" (Deut 32:5; cf. 6, 15-18). Paul does not quote the first part of Deut 32:21, which says: "They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols." The Hebrew uses a powerful play on words: They have made God jealous with a "non-God" (Heb. *lo 'el*), so God will make them jealous with a "non-people" (Heb. *lo 'am*). Israel regarded the Gentiles as a "non-people" because they were not part of the covenant people of God (cf. Rom 9:25, citing Hos 2:23). The implied purpose for which God provoked Israel to jealousy was to encourage them to return to God.

Several factors suggest that this message is applicable at any time that Israel persists in rebellion against God's covenant: (1) The Gentile enemy is not specifically identified in Deut. 32, so it is difficult to place the fulfillment at a specific time.<sup>20</sup> (2) The Song of Moses uses a *rîb* pattern (from Heb. *rîb*, meaning lawsuit). This ancient literary form was used by a suzerain confronting a vassal state that had violated the vassal treaty. In one common form, the document ends with an ultimatum, warning of coming judgment if the vassal does not correct its errors.<sup>21</sup> Although there may have been an historical rebellion of Israel in view when the Song of Moses was written, this *rîb* form promises specific consequences if Israel violates the covenant at any time. (3) The Song of Moses was probably sung at a regular covenant renewal ceremony that witnesses to the terms and implications of the covenant.<sup>22</sup>

If the promises of the Song of Moses are timeless, then they may be fulfilled whenever Israel persists in rebellion against God. Such a period of disobedience was punished by the Exile. The Qumran sectarians believed

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<sup>18</sup>In this context, ἐγνώ refers to intellectual comprehension, not consent of the will (; Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel* (trans. Ingeborg Nixon; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) 99-100).

<sup>19</sup>The text is from the LXX, except that Paul changes "them" (αὐτοὺς, LXX) to "you" (ὁμᾶς) to add vividness and to reproach Israel for their present unbelief. (Cf. Gleason L. Archer and Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 49).

<sup>20</sup>P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy (The New International Commentary of the Old Testament)*; ed. R. K. Harrison; Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1976) 374.

<sup>21</sup>In Deut 32, the *rîb* pattern is: (1) calling heaven and earth and declaration of God's character (vv. 1-4); (2) interrogation and accusation (vv. 5-6); (3) recollection of God's mighty acts of Israel's behalf (vv. 7-14); (4) direct indictment (vv. 15-18); (5) the sentence (vv. 19-25). Deut 32 also includes (6) an added section of hope that promises Israel's restoration and vengeance against Israel's enemies, if Israel returns to God (vv. 26-43). This section is not normally found in the secular *rîb* pattern Cf. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy. An Introduction and Commentary (The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)*; ed. D. J. Wiseman; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1974) 296-7.

<sup>22</sup>Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 141.

the Song referred to the apostasy of their day.<sup>23</sup> Thus Paul's application of Deut 32:21 to Israel's rejection of Jesus is quite reasonable, given the assumption that Jesus is the promised Messiah. God has not rejected his covenant people (11:1), but he is using the fact that Gentiles now experience God's blessing to provoke Israel to jealousy, so they will turn to God and accept the Gospel (11:11).<sup>24</sup>

#### 4, 5. Romans 10:20-21 (=Isa 65:1-2)

The next two quotations are taken from Isa 65:1-2. Paul quotes Isa 65:1 as a description of the Gentiles who are turning to God in his day: "I was found by those who sought Me not, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me." Although the Gentiles were not explicitly seeking God and were not God's covenant people, God reached out to them in his grace so that they found him as they accepted the message of Christ. By contrast to the Gentiles, Israel is rebellious against God and rejects the message about Christ. Paul cites Isa 65:2 to show that God knew this disobedience would happen: "All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." The irony is that God's covenant people reject God's message in their rebelliousness, while those who were outside the covenant turn to God when given the opportunity (cf. 9:30-31).

There is little difficulty with Paul's use of Isa 65:2, which clearly describes the rebelliousness of Israel. Although this probably originally referred to Israel's disobedience which led to the Exile, this type of rebellion was also exhibited in Paul's day in response to God's new message about the Messiah. So Paul applies to his day this description about a behavior that Israel exhibited at several times in its history.<sup>25</sup>

Further, in the context of the same section of Isaiah, God promises the restoration of Israel in cosmic terms as a "new heavens and a new earth." This is accompanied by extraordinary prosperity, longevity of life and a transformed natural world (Isa 65:17-25; cf 66:19-23). This goes far beyond the conditions after the return from the Exile and suggests an eschatological significance for both the rebelliousness of Israel and the universal blessings of God after Israel repents. In Rom 9-11 Paul sees eschatological significance in Israel's rebellion and hardness of heart, which suggests he sees this as an eschatological fulfillment of the prediction of Israel's rebellion in Isa 65.<sup>26</sup>

The bigger question is whether Paul's use of Isa 65:1 is legitimate, since in the original setting the verse appears to refer to Israel, not Gentiles. Some see Paul's interpretation of Isa 65:1 to be "totally at odds with the Old Testament setting."<sup>27</sup>

There are several indications that 65:1-2 contrasts the response of the Gentiles and Israel in the original context, even as Paul understands the passage. (1) The Hebrew uses "nation" (*gôy*) in v. 1 and "people" (*am*) in v. 2. Although there is an overlap between the two words, in the later writings of the Hebrew Bible *gôy* is frequently

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<sup>23</sup>CD 5 cites Deut 32:28 concerning the contemporary apostasy of Israel. 4Q372 1:12 says "foreigners" will "make for themselves a high place on a lofty mountain to provoke Israel to jealousy" (Fitzmeyer, *Romans* 600).

<sup>24</sup>Hays claims "Deuteronomy 32 contains Romans *in nuce*," because it describes Israel's lack of faith and ultimate restoration as well as God's intention to use the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy through embracing the Gentiles. (Hays 164). It is more accurate to say that these themes in Deut 32 are an important background to Rom 9-11, rather than the whole of Romans (cf. J. Christiaan Beker, "Echoes and Intertextuality: On the Role of Scripture in Paul's Theology," *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (eds. Craig A. Evans, and James A. Sanders; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 65).

<sup>25</sup>Israel's disobedience that led to the exile may be a type of their eschatological rejection of the Gospel.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. 1 Pet 3:13, which alludes to the promise of a new heavens and earth in Isa 65:17 (and 66:22?). The author sees the present age as a period in which God is patiently allowing people to repent before he brings judgment and the new heavens and earth.

<sup>27</sup>Hall 196; cf. Kasemann, *Romans* 297; Hays 74-5.

used for the “Gentiles” or “heathen” in contrast to the covenant people (*‘am*) of God.<sup>28</sup> God frequently calls the Israelites his “people” (*‘am*)<sup>29</sup> to stress God’s ownership and the intimacy of their relationship with God.<sup>30</sup> In Isa 40-66, *gôy* almost exclusively refers to the nations of the world, with a stress on universality and usually with the implication that they are Gentiles in contrast to the Israelites. Out of the 38 occurrences in Isa 40-66, only 3 are used of Israel and these have the generic sense of “nation.”<sup>31</sup> In the immediate context (Isa 65-66), *gôy* always refers to the Gentiles and *‘am* always refers to the Israelites, except for 66:8 (which is a generic use of *gôy*).<sup>32</sup> Paul’s interpretation apparently draws on this distinction between *gôy* and *‘am*, which especially makes sense when he reads it in light of Deut. 32:21 (the Gentiles are called a “non-people” (*lo ʿam*) because they are not related to God).

(2) The meaning of *nidraštî* (v. 1) is “I allowed myself to be inquired of” (Gesenius calls this *Niphal tolerativum*).<sup>33</sup> This implies that God *allowed* these people to find him, whereas Scripture normally represents God as actively choosing Israel, not making himself available to be found by them.<sup>34</sup>

(3) The expression “a nation which did not call on My name” (v. 1) would be an odd description for Israel, which was a nation associated with the name of the Lord (Isa 43:7; Jer 14:9).<sup>35</sup>

(4) There is the intriguing hint in Isa 65 of a group of people that God will bless in the future, in contrast

<sup>28</sup>“Once the descendants of Abraham had become a distinct, recognized, political, and ethnic group of people who were in a specific covenant relationship with Yahweh, the term *gôy* and *gôyim* increasingly takes the meaning of ‘gentiles’ or ‘heathen,’ in reference to the non-covenant, non-believing peoples considered as national groups.” (TWOT 1:154). Sometimes *gôy* is used when Israel is viewed as a nation by others (Deut 4:6) or when taking possession of territory (Josh 3:17). But in religious contexts where the relationship with and responsibility to God is in view, *‘am* is typically used.

<sup>29</sup>E.g. Is 1:3 (in poetic parallelism to “Israel”); 3:12, 15; ; 5:13; 10:2; 10:24; 26:20; 32:13, 18; 40:1; 43:20-21; 51:16; 52:5-6; 53:8; 57:14; 65:22; Ps 78:52-66; 95:7; etc.

<sup>30</sup>TWOT 2:646.

<sup>31</sup>Nations other than Israel: Is 40:15, 17; 41:2, 42:1, 6; 43:9; 45:1, 20; 49:6 (?), 7, 22; 52:10, 15; 54:3 (in the sense of territories rather than people); 55:5 (twice); 60:3, 5, 11, 12 (twice), 16, 22; 61:6, 9, 11; 62:2; 64:1; 65:1; 66:8, 12, 18, 19 (twice), 20. Is 55:5 is an interesting parallel to 65:1: “you will call a nation you do not know, and a nation which knows you not will run to you.” This refers to Gentiles as people not in a relationship with God, much like Is 65:1 which calls the Gentiles “a nation which did not call on My name.” The only exceptions in 2 Isaiah are 58:2 and 60:22 (both generic--Israel is a particular kind of nation) and 65:1 (can a nation be formed in a day).

<sup>32</sup>*gôy*: 66:12, 18, 19, 20. *‘am*: 65:3, 10, 18, 19, 22.

<sup>33</sup>GKC §51c.

<sup>34</sup>E.g. Is 41:8; 43:20 65:9, 12, 15. Munck says, “In respect to the Jews it is not simply a question of God’s allowing himself to be found, of his becoming manifest to them, but of an untiring activity on his part; he strives with love for his people, even though said people respond to his love with disobedience and contrariness.” (Munck 104).

<sup>35</sup>Delitzch notes that it does not say they are not *called* by the Lord’s name, which would use the Niphal of *qara*’, but that they did not *call on* his name (F. Delitzch, *Isaiah* (vol. 7 of *Commentary on the Old Testament*; eds. C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzch; trans. James Martin; 10 vols.; 1871; repr., Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1973) 476). Nevertheless the fact that they are not associated with the name of the Lord is a significant hint of their identify as Gentiles, in light of how frequently Israel is associated with the name of the Lord in the OT.

to Israel. The disobedient Israelites will be excluded, but “my servants” shall be abundantly blessed (65:13-15).<sup>36</sup> The future blessings will encompass the entire earth (65:17-25). In 66:18-20 this future time of blessing explicitly includes the Gentiles as well as the faithful remnant of Israel and it is associated with the new heavens and earth (65:22; cf 65:17).

These features point to an interest in the Gentiles in Isa 65 and suggest that the contrast between the response of the Gentiles and Israel that Paul sees in vv. 1-2 is not foreign to the context. Paul’s interpretation also suggests an awareness of details from the Hebrew text, even though he quotes the LXX.

#### **6. Romans 11:2 (=1 Sam 12:22; Ps 94(93):14)**

Paul now asks whether this implies that God has rejected Israel (11:1). He emphatically denies this, citing himself as an example of a full fledged Israelite who has believed God’s message about Christ.

Dunn argues that the statement “God has not rejected His people” in 11:2 is a quotation of 1 Sam 12:22 and Ps 94(93):14.<sup>37</sup> It is better to see it as an adaptive paraphrase, in which Paul changes the language of these verses to fit into the flow of the sentence.<sup>38</sup> Since Paul was steeped in the words of Scripture, he easily adopts biblical language to express his ideas.<sup>39</sup> He changes the future tense in the LXX (“will not abandon,” ἀπόσεται) to an aorist (“has not abandoned,” ἀπόσεται).

Through these adaptations, Paul takes the general principle of 1 Sam 12:22 and applies it to a new situation. Since God promises not to abandon his people, it follows that God has not abandoned his people *today*, no matter how it might appear.

#### **7. Romans 11:3 (=1 Kings 19:10) and 8. Romans 11:4 (=1 Kings 19:18)**

Paul further supports his claim that God has not rejected his people (11:1), by arguing that God is dealing with a remnant chosen by grace, even as he has done at other times in Israel’s history. To support this, he quotes two verses from the story of Elijah. During Elijah’s day, apostasy was rampant. After the miraculous demonstration of the superior power of Yahweh to the power of Baal (1 Kings 18), Elijah hid in the desert from Jezebel’s murderous rage. He became very depressed and despaired that he was the only one remaining faithful to God in Israel. Paul quotes his complaint from 1 Kings 19:10: “Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.” But God told Elijah that there were actually many more faithful to God than he knew. Paul quotes from God’s response in 1 Kings 19:18: “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

This story illustrates that God always reserves for himself a remnant who are faithful to him, even in times of great rebellion. Paul does not imply that 1 Kings *prophesies* about his day, but he uses this story to illustrate a *principle* that he applies to the current situation. The conclusion he draws from the Elijah quotations begins with the connective οὕτως (v. 5), which is an adverb of comparison meaning “in the same way” (BAGD). The exact number is not significant. What matters is the principle that even in times of great disobedience, God does not reject his people (v. 2), but he preserves some that remain faithful.

Paul stresses that the remnant exists by God’s gracious choice (v. 5), not their meritorious righteousness (v. 6). This concept is implicit in the Hebrew of 1 Kings 19:18, where God says he has left 7000 who have been not bowed to Baal. The verb *shā’ar* (“left”) in the Hiphil means “to leave over” or “to spare” (BDB). This is an active choice, in contrast to the Qal, which simply means “to remain.” God actively chose some as a remnant. This is clearer in the Hebrew than in the LXX, suggesting that Paul was familiar with the Hebrew, even though he

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<sup>36</sup>This is similar to the remnant concept (cf. Rom 11:5).

<sup>37</sup>Dunn, *Romans* 636; cf. Fitzmeyer, *Romans* 604. Since Paul uses a Scripture quotation after every other rhetorical question in this passage, a citation is expected here.

<sup>38</sup>There is no introductory formula that marks this sentence as a quotation.

<sup>39</sup>Paul changes “Lord” to “God”. He typically changes references to God as κύριος in LXX citations to ὁ θεός, since he prefers to reserve the title ὁ κύριος for Jesus. (Dunn, *Romans* 636).

quotes the LXX. Even as a modern preacher may quote a translation while making a point based on the original language, Paul draws his conclusion from implications of the Hebrew while quoting the LXX translation that is more familiar to his Greek-speaking readers.

Dunn argues that Paul sees the Elijah story not simply as an example of God's way of working, but also as typological event.<sup>40</sup> Typology means that God established patterns in persons, events and institutions that point forward to something that God will bring about in the eschatological age. When God preserved a remnant during the rebellious time when Elijah was a prophet, he established a pattern that points forward to the eschatological climax of salvation-history. God is again working through a remnant to establish the people of God under the new covenant. The goal of the preservation of the remnant is that ultimately the Gentiles and "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:11-15, 25-32).

However, the connection between the 7000 in Elijah's day and the remnant today is deeper than a mere pattern that is replicated. There is an *organic connection* between the remnant of Elijah's day and the remnant today, in that they are all part of the same people of God that have been faithful to God throughout the ages. Paul's metaphor of the olive tree (11:17-24) shows this connection between the root (those faithful to God in Israel in OT times), the branches that remain (the faithful remnant of Israel in Paul's day), and the branches that were grafted in (the Gentiles who believe in Christ). So although the pattern is replicated as God works with a remnant through the ages, the remnant from the past through today consists of one unified people (v. 8, "down to this very day").

### 9. Romans 11:8 (=Deut 29:4(3); Is 29:10)

Sadly, because of their rebellion against God, Israel as a whole did not obtain the righteousness and divine acceptance that they sought (11:7; cf. 9:31-32; 10:2-3). Yet the chosen remnant did receive God's acceptance by grace.

The corollary of the remnant selected by grace is that God has judicially hardened the hearts of those Israelites who are disobedient to God (11:7). This explains theologically why Israel failed to obtain what it seeks.

Paul paraphrases a conflation of Deut 29:4(3) and Isa 29:10 to support this concept: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day."<sup>41</sup> This is essentially the LXX of Deut 29:3, with the "spirit of stupor" added from Isa 29:10.<sup>42</sup>

The context in Deut 29 is a reminder of God's gracious care of the Israelites during the wilderness wandering. Moses says that God did great signs and wonders during the 40 years in the wilderness, but he did not give Israel the insight to understand the deeper significance of these events. For Paul, this illustrates the principle of divine hardening of those who are disobedient to him. Even as the Israelites were judicially hardened during the wilderness wandering, so the Israelites today are judicially hardened against seeing the truth of the Gospel. Fortunately, this hardening is only partial and temporary. It will end when the appointed number of Gentiles have been saved (Rom 11:25-26).

The tone of divine judgment is stronger in Isa 29:10 than in Deut 29:4(3). Paul's adaptive paraphrase inserts part of Isa 29:10 to express divine judgment more strongly. In order to fit the phrase from Isa 29:10, he changed the negative ("God did not give") in Deut 29:4(3) to the positive ("God gave"). This suggests an active judicial hardening as in Isa 29:10, rather than simply withholding an undeserved grace as Deut 29:4(3) suggests.

### 10. Romans 11:9-10 (=Ps 69:22-23(23-24))

Paul also quotes Ps 69:22-23(23-24) to support the judicial hardening of unbelieving Israel: "Let their

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid. 638.

<sup>41</sup>The portion added from Isa 29:10 is in the middle of a portion of Isaiah frequently quoted in the NT to explain Israel's blindness: Isa 28:11 (1 Cor 14:21); 28:16 (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6); 29:13 (Mark 7:6-7); 29:14 (1 Cor 1:19). Isa 6:9-10 also expresses the same judicial hardening and was frequently quoted by the early Church to explain Israel's unbelief in Jesus (Matt 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:26-27; John 12:40).

<sup>42</sup>He also changed "you" to "them" and changed it from negative to positive ("God did not give" becomes "God gave"). None of this substantially changes the basic meaning.



table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever.”

This psalm is not David’s cry for retribution against his personal enemies. Since he is king of Israel, his enemies are also the enemies of God.

The early Church widely understood this psalm in messianic terms.<sup>43</sup> King David was seen as a type that points forward to Jesus as the Messiah. The descriptions of David and the kings in his line are often idealized and set a pattern only perfectly fulfilled in the Messiah (e.g. Ps 2, 45, 110; 2 Sam 7:14).<sup>44</sup> Thus the opposition against Jesus the Messiah was divinely prefigured in the opposition against David described in Ps 69 (e.g. vv. 4, 7, 9, 19, 26).

Paul assumes the OT context of Ps 69, which includes the opposition that David faced. Since Israel (apart from the remnant) has opposed Jesus the Messiah, they have placed themselves in the position of the enemy of the Messiah and hence the enemy of God. This explains the ironic situation in which Israel, the chosen people, end up as the enemy of God. “From the standpoint of the Gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Rom 11:28).

As a result of their opposition to the Messiah and their resistance to God’s plan, God has judicially hardened Israel. This blindness<sup>45</sup> and the hardening of their hearts are a divine retribution since the Israelites have rejected the message of Christ (Rom 9:31; 10:2-3, 16; 11:7).

### Paul’s Interpretive Methods

Paul uses several sophisticated interpretive techniques in this passage (see Table 1):

1. **The interpretation assumes the context of the original passage.** In many cases, Paul’s interpretation is only clear to readers who are familiar with the OT passage. Often details in the context are essential to his interpretation. The few lines he cites are designed to bring to mind the entire context. C. H. Dodd notes that this is typical of other Jewish and Christian testimony collections: “These sections were understood as *wholes*, and particular verses or sentences were quoted from them rather as pointers to the whole context than as constituting testimonies in and for themselves.”<sup>46</sup>

In 10:16, Paul assumes the context of Isa 53 which says that Israel’s unbelief is about the divine message concerning the Servant/Messiah. It also contrasts the unbelief of Israel with the positive response of the Gentiles. The context of Ps 19 extols the verbal revelation of God, which in 10:18 Paul extends to include the Gospel. Paul’s contrast between Jewish unbelief and Gentile belief in 10:20-21 is supported by the context of Isa 65-66. Eschatological overtones in the passage take the meaning beyond the post-exilic period to suggest eschatological worldwide and cosmic blessing.

2. **The interpretation may imply an awareness of details from the Hebrew text, even though the Greek of the LXX is quoted.** Even as a modern preacher may quote a translation while making a point based on the original language, Paul sometimes draws conclusions from implications of the Hebrew text while quoting the

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<sup>43</sup>In Rom 15:3, Paul sees Jesus’ willing suffering of the reproaches of his enemies as a fulfillment of Ps 69:9b(10b): “The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell on me.” John 2:17 explains Jesus’ cleansing of the temple as a fulfillment of Ps 69:9a(10a): “zeal for thy house will consume me.” In John 15:25, Jesus explains the hatred of the Jews against him as a fulfillment of Ps 69:4(5): “They hated me without a cause.” In Acts 1:20, the apostles explain the gory death of Judas as a fulfillment of the imprecation against God’s enemies in Ps 69:25(26): 20 “Let his homestead be made desolate, and let no man dwell in it.”

<sup>44</sup>Ps 2: Acts 4:25-26; 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5; Rev 2:26-27. Ps 45: Heb 1:8-9; Ps 110: Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:34-35; Heb 1:13; 5:6, 10; 7:17, 21; 1 Sam 7:14; 2 Cor 6:18; Heb 1:5.

<sup>45</sup>Paul sees the reference to darkening their eyes (Ps 69:23a(24a)) as the spiritual blindness of Israel to the truth of the Gospel.

<sup>46</sup>C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures. The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952) 126.

Greek translation that is more familiar to his readers. This is apparent in Paul's stress on God's active choice of the remnant (11:4-5), which is implied in the Hiphal of *shā'ar* ("left") in 1 Kings 19:18. Paul's view that Isa 65:1-2 contrasts the Gentiles and Israel are based on details clearer in the original Hebrew than the Greek of the LXX, such as the usage of *gōy* for the "Gentiles" in contrast to the covenant people (*'am*) of God. Paul's use of Deut 32:21 in 10:19 may in part be based on an awareness of the play on words between "non-God" (Heb. *lo'-'el*) and "non-people" (Heb. *lo'-'am*) in the original verse.

**3. He may use the passage as an illustration or example of a principle.** This could also be called an argument by analogy. In this type of citation, the OT passage does not predict the contemporary situation, but Paul uses it as an example of the concept he is teaching. The comparison between the historical event and the present situation may be expressed (11:3-5) or implied. In 10:16, Paul uses Isa 53:1 as an illustration of the unbelief of Israel. In 11:3-4, he uses the Elijah story as an example of God preserving a faithful remnant (1 Kings 19:10-18). In 11:8, he uses the wilderness wandering (Deut 29:4) as an example of a judicial hardening of rebellious people.

**4. He may apply a biblical principle to the contemporary situation.** In many cases, Paul assumes the literal interpretation of the passage and then explores its significance for the current situation.<sup>47</sup> If this is not recognized, it may appear that Paul is "reading things into" the text. Yet even though Paul's application may be quite different than the original application of the passage, it is a legitimate implication of the teachings of the passage. Since Ps 19 shows by God's revelation through nature and the Law that God does not leave himself without a witness, God can be expected to make his Gospel widely proclaimed, since it is part of God's revelation (10:18). Since God promises that if Israel is rebellious, he will provoke them to jealousy through Gentiles (Deut 32:21), this explains what has happened today (10:19). Israel was disobedient to God several times in history as it is today (10:21). Since God promises to never abandon his people (1 Sam 7:22; Ps 94(93):14), he must not have rejected Israel today (11:2). God is working with a remnant today, even as he did in Elijah's time (11:3).

**5. The biblical principle may provide a theological explanation for a contemporary situation.** Israel's obstinance and disobedience to God (Isa 65:2) explains why the Israelites do not understand that God is now working through Jesus the Messiah (10:21). Since God judicially hardened Israel (Deut 29:4; Ps 69:22-23), this explains why Israel has not obtained the righteousness and divine acceptance they seek (11:7-10).

**6. Some passages contain predictive prophecy which has been fulfilled.** Scripture predicts Israel's unbelief and disobedience to the Covenant (10:16, 19, 21), the eschatological blessing of the Gentiles (10:20), and God's provocation of Israel to jealousy through the Gentiles (10:21).

**7. The historical event described in some passages points to an eschatological typological fulfillment.** Typology assumes that God intends the historical event to be a pattern that points to something that will happen in the future. Since David is a type of the Messiah, the call for divine judgment on his enemies sets a pattern for the judicial hardening of the enemies of the Messiah (11:9-10). Israel's rebellion that led to the exile is a pattern repeated in their eschatological rejection of the Gospel (10:21). The remnant in Elijah's day points to the eschatological remnant that accept the Gospel (11:3), although there is also an organic connection between both groups since they are both part of the people of God.

**8. Christological presuppositions govern the interpretation.** These often unstated presuppositions are shared by Christians and affect Paul's understanding of the interpretation and contemporary significance of the passages. These are revelational presuppositions in that are explained elsewhere in Paul's writings. The interpretation of Isa 53:1 in 10:16 is governed by the belief that the Servant of Isa 53 refers to the Messiah and that Jesus is the Messiah. If Jesus is the Messiah, Israel's rejection of the Gospel is disobedience to God (10:19; 11:8-10). The assumption that the Christian Gospel is the current phase of God's verbal revelation is behind the understanding of Ps 19 (10:18). Throughout the passage Paul assumes that the Church, which consists of Jews and Gentiles, is the people of God today. He explains this in detail in the olive tree metaphor (11:17-24). This assumption is especially significant in understanding Paul's application of the remnant principle in the Elijah story, since he sees a continuity between the remnant of Elijah's day and the Church (11:3-4).

**9. He may use an adaptive paraphrase to emphasize a point.** In most cases Paul is very faithful to the wording of the LXX, with an occasional change of a word for emphasis (10:19; 11:2). In one instance (11:8) he

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<sup>47</sup>Cf. Hays 160: "His comments characteristically emphasize the immediacy of the text's word to the community rather than providing specific rules for reading."

conflates two passages and slightly adapts the language to stress the judicial hardening of Israel. The adaptations, however, do not change the basic teachings of the passage.

Table 1: Paul's Interpretive Methods

Rom	OT	Content	Assumes OT Context	Illustration of Principle	Application of Principle	Theological Explanation	Predictive Fulfillment	Typological Fulfillment	Adaptive Paraphrase	Presupposition
10:16	Is 53:1	"Lord who has believed our report?"	Servant passage; positive response of Gentiles contrasted to unbelief of Israel.	Unbelief of Israel about the Servant/Messiah.			Unbelief of Israel about the Servant/Messiah.			Jesus is the Servant/Messiah.
10:18	Ps 19:4	"Their voice has gone out into all the earth..."	Nature and verbal word of God are both parts of God's revelation.	God does not leave himself without a witness, as is shown in revelation through nature.	The Gospel is widely proclaimed.					The Gospel is the current phase of God's verbal revelation.
10:19	Deut 32:21	God will make Israel jealous by the Gentiles.			If Israel is disobedient, God provokes them to jealousy through the Gentiles.		Israel's unbelief and disobedience to the Covenant led God to provoke Israel to jealousy through the Gentiles.			Jesus is the promised Messiah, so to reject him is to rebel against God.
10:20	Is 65:1	Those who did not seek God found him.	Contrast between Israel and Gentiles				Eschatological blessing of the Gentiles			The Church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, is the people of God today.
10:21	Is 65:2; cf. Jer 35:17	Israel is obstinate and disobedient to God.	Eschatological nature of the restoration of Israel is suggested by the worldwide/cosmic blessing.		Israel was disobedient to God several times in history.	Explains why Israel did not understand and accept the Gospel.	Israel's unbelief/disobedience to the Covenant	The pattern of Israel's pre-exilic rebellion is repeated in their eschatological rejection of the Gospel		Jesus is the promised Messiah, so to reject him is to rebel against God.
11:2	1 Sam 7:22; Ps 94(93):14	"God has not rejected his people."			God will never abandon his people				Expresses a biblical concept in biblical language worked into the sentence.	

Rom	OT	Content	Assumes OT Context	Illustration of Principle	Application of Principle	Theological Explanation	Predictive Fulfillment	Typological Fulfillment	Adaptive Paraphrase	Presupposition
11:3	1 Kings 19:10, 14	Elijah says "...only I am left"		God reserves a remnant, even in the times of great unbelief of Israel, as he did in Elijah's day.	God is working with a remnant today.			An eschatological remnant pointed to by the remnant in Elijah's day.		The Church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, is the people of God today.
11:4	1 Kings 19:18	"I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."		(same as 11:3)	(same as 11:3)			(same as 11:3)		(same as 11:3)
11:8	Deut 29:4; Is 29:10	"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not, ears to hear not."		Election and judicial hardening of the heart of the unbelieving and rebellious.		Judicial hardening explains why Israel has not obtained what it seeks (v. 7)			Conflation of two passages. Adaptive paraphrase stresses judicial hardening	Jesus is the promised Messiah, so to reject him is to rebel against God.
11:9-10	Ps 69:22-23	"Let their table become a snare...let their eyes be darkened..."				Judicial hardening explains why Israel has not obtained what it seeks (v. 7)		David is a type of the Messiah. His call for divine judgment on his enemies is a pattern for the judicial hardening of the Messiah's enemies.		Jesus is the promised Messiah, so to reject him is to rebel against God.

### Conclusions

Paul shows that Scripture anticipated Israel's unbelief and the blessing of the Gentiles. Paul's insights from Scripture help illuminate the perplexing rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the majority of Jewish people. God is using the faith of the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy so they will turn to God and accept the message of Jesus the Messiah. Predictive prophecies and typological patterns in Scripture point to these events.

Paul respects the original meaning of the biblical passages that he cites. In fact, a familiarity with the original context is essential for Paul's interpretations to make sense. At times he *assumes* the meaning of a passage and explores theological *implications* and practical *applications* of the principles taught in the passage. His presuppositions about the people of God, the Gospel and the Messiahship of Jesus govern his application of various passages. Yet his presuppositions and interpretive methods do not result in interpretations that are at odds with the original meaning of the passages.