

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 9: 24-29

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We'll continue to read Romans Chapter 9, and today we will read verses 24 to 29.

Romans chapters 1 through 8 speak of individual salvation, while chapters 9 through 16 speak of corporate salvation. That is to say, after a person has received grace and been saved, they must join the church and be built together with all the saints into the Body of Christ, functioning as a member within that Body. The church is the gathering of God's New Testament elect, assembled together to bear testimony for Christ.

When speaking of corporate salvation, one must inevitably face the issue of God's Old Testament elect—the Israelites. Especially concerning their position within God's eternal purpose—this is a very serious matter. If it is handled wrongly, it will lead to severe consequences.

After the Reformation, the Bible was opened and translated into many languages. As a result, various interpretations of Scripture began to flourish. On one hand, this is a good phenomenon—believers can choose interpretations that help them grow spiritually, love the Lord more, understand God's will more clearly, and be more willing to commit themselves to serve and offer in the church.

However, on the other hand, this also brings a crisis. Different interpretations should always appeal to each believer's conscience. Just as Paul said, his conscience bore witness together with the Holy Spirit (Romans 9:1), and the truth he received was then applied to his life. The most dangerous situation is when a certain interpretation becomes a trend or even escalates into a mass movement, for then it can easily be manipulated for political purposes, fulfilling the ambitions of politicians.

After the Reformation, the theological trend that became mainstream was Replacement Theology—the belief that the New Testament believers are the true Israel, having replaced the position of the Old Testament Israelites, and that God has abandoned Israel. During World War II, Hitler exploited this very theological concept to justify the persecution and mass slaughter of the Jewish people, resulting in one of the most shameful chapters in human history. Even more heartbreaking is that the German Church, founded under the influence of the Reformation pioneer Martin Luther, remained largely silent, with most Christians saying nothing. This silence itself became a dark mark in church history.

However, according to the book of Romans, we can clearly see that in God’s eternal plan, Israel holds a special position. When Paul deals with the matter of corporate salvation, he does not jump directly to chapter 12 to describe the New Testament church life. Instead, he spends chapters 9 through 11 to address the relationship between the Jews and the Church.

Paul begins from God’s sovereignty—a sovereignty that is rooted in His eternal purpose and plan. In Romans 9:21–23, Paul compares God to a potter who has full authority over the clay. From the same lump, He can make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor. God desires to bestow glory upon the vessels of honor, while the vessels of dishonor will ultimately face destruction.

Yet, before that final judgment, God shows great patience and long-suffering toward the vessels of dishonor—revealing His true intent. As 1 Timothy 2:4 says, “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” And 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Therefore, only God knows who are the vessels for honor and who are for dishonor. We must not despair and label ourselves as vessels of dishonor, nor should we judge others as such.

Verse 24: “even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

Here Paul clearly tells us that God will call vessels of honor both from among the Jews and from among the Gentiles. Then Paul quotes passages from the Old Testament to confirm this truth: in verses 25 and 26, he uses Scripture to prove that the Gentiles are to become vessels of honor; and in verses 27 through 29, he shows that a remnant from Israel will also become vessels of honor.

Verse 25: “As He says also in Hosea: ‘I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.’”

Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was destroyed by the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C. Hosea’s ministry began about thirty years before Israel’s fall and continued for about ten years afterward. The name Hosea means “salvation.” God sent Hosea to warn the people of Israel and to prophesy that if they repented, He would receive them again in His boundless love.

Hosea’s ministry was very unique. God commanded him to marry a harlot, symbolizing that the people of Israel had fallen into spiritual adultery. From this woman, three children were born, and through their names God expressed His dealings with Israel. The first, Jezreel, signified God’s judgment—that Israel would be destroyed as a nation. The second, Lo-Ruhamah, meant “not pitied,” showing that God would no longer have mercy on Israel. The third, Lo-Ammi, meant “not My people,” indicating that Israel would no longer be recognized as God’s people.

However, when Israel repents, God will grant restoration. Paul quotes Hosea 2:23, “I will sow her for Myself in the land; I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; Then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’”

Originally, this verse referred to Israel’s condition after their restoration—God would again have mercy on them and call them His people. But Paul applies this verse to the Gentiles. Paul’s interpretation goes far beyond what we might expect, giving the Old Testament passage a new meaning through the revelation of the New Covenant.

The Gentiles were not originally God's people. However, in the New Testament, after the grace of Christ's redemption was accomplished, the Gentiles also could be accepted as God's people through repentance and faith. This is entirely according to God's sovereignty, and we who have received mercy can only give thanks. As for those who do not believe, they have nothing to say, for God has absolute sovereignty.

The Gentiles, who once were not beloved, are now called beloved—this speaks of God's eternal love. In fact, even before Abraham was called to enter the good land, God had already foretold this in Genesis 12:3, "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Yet there is an order to this blessing: it came first to the Israelites, and then, after Christ accomplished redemption in the New Testament, it began to reach the Gentiles. This was the plan God developed in His eternal purpose. Likewise, those who are beloved can only give thanks, while those who do not believe and reject the gospel of love have no ground to speak against it.

Verse 26: "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."

This is a quotation from Hosea 1:10, "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass, in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.'" Likewise, this verse was originally spoken by the prophet Hosea concerning the Israelites—that after they repented, God would once again receive them. Yet Paul used this verse to refer to the Gentiles who have received grace and salvation.

Paul's spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament is truly impressive. Upon careful reflection, we realize this was entirely by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Where, then, had God previously said to the Gentiles that they were not His people? I believe Paul had in mind the Most Holy Place in the temple—the place of the mercy seat.

In former times, when Gentiles came to the temple in Jerusalem, they could only enter the court of the Gentiles. They were not permitted to go into the temple itself, much less enter the Most Holy Place. However, through His death on the cross, Jesus Christ opened a new and living way into the Most Holy Place.

The veil that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom. Now, we Gentiles who have received Christ's salvation may come boldly to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. There—in Christ Jesus—we become sons of the living God.

Here Paul emphasizes the dispensing of life. When Gentiles believe, they receive eternal life, and through the continual dispensing of this life, they grow and mature to become sons of God. In this way, the Gentiles can also become vessels of honor.

Next, from verses 27 to 29, Paul turns his focus back to the Israelites. At this point, Paul quotes from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah. His ministry overlapped somewhat with that of Hosea, but it lasted much longer. He was called by God in the year that King Uzziah died, and his prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of five kings. The record of his faithful service is preserved in the Book of Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah contains 66 chapters, arranged in a way that strikingly parallels the structure of the entire Bible. The first 39 chapters speak of God's judgment, corresponding to the Old Testament, while the last 27 chapters speak of God's comfort, corresponding to the New Testament. Isaiah is one of the most important prophetic books in Scripture. It is quoted in the New Testament more than 50 times, making it the most frequently cited prophetic book in the New Testament.

Verse 27-28: "Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.'"

Paul here quotes Isaiah 10:22–23, “For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, A remnant of them will return; The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land.” Isaiah prophesied that Israel would be destroyed, and after the destruction, only a remnant would return. The first fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy occurred after Judah’s captivity. During the Persian Empire, there were three returns: The first return was led by Zerubbabel, who brought back the first group of exiles and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. The second return was led by Ezra, who brought back the Levites and priests; they restored the Law and reestablished priestly service. The third return was led by Nehemiah, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

In Abraham’s time, God had promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand of the sea. Yet after Israel’s captivity, those willing to return to Jerusalem were only a small remnant. Paul quoted Isaiah’s words to show that in the New Testament age, those Israelites who would turn and believe in Christ were likewise a remnant—thus fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy a second time.

Here we see the principle of the remnant, which appears repeatedly throughout God’s plan of redemption—both in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah complained to God that Israel had forsaken His covenant, torn down His altars, killed His prophets, and now sought Elijah’s life. But God told him there were still 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Compared to the whole nation, these 7,000 were a remnant.

During the Babylonian captivity, men such as Daniel and his three friends, and the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, stood faithfully for God—they too were the remnant. Later, when the Israelites were permitted to return to Jerusalem, those who actually returned were again only a remnant.

In the New Testament, those who awaited Christ’s birth—Mary, Joseph, the shepherds in the field, Simeon, and Anna who served in the temple—were also a remnant who longed for the coming of the Messiah. After Jesus finished His earthly ministry, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and poured out the Holy Spirit,

the church was produced. Although the Jerusalem church once flourished, the number of Jews who were saved was still only a remnant among the entire Jewish people. When the gospel turned to the Gentiles, the number of saved Jews became even smaller.

When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, there were some Jewish believers in the church at Rome. These Jewish believers were also part of that remnant. Even though many Gentiles had received grace and salvation in the New Testament age, those saved Gentiles were still only a remnant among all the nations. Dear brothers and sisters, to follow the Lord faithfully, we must recognize and accept this principle of the remnant.

Christians, in the societies where they live, have always been the remnant. Whenever the church grows into a large tree, as mentioned in Matthew 13:32, birds come and nest in its branches. These birds represent the evil one, who devours the seeds sown by the wayside. Only when Christ returns, judges the nations of the world, and reestablishes His kingdom on the earth, will the children of God become the majority.

Here Paul focuses on the Israelites. In the Old Testament, they were God's chosen people, but by the time of the New Testament, they could no longer keep up. Those Israelites who were saved became only a small remnant. The Lord is working on the earth to fulfill His word, so that His word will be accomplished and brought to a swift conclusion. Paul is quoting from Isaiah 10:23, where Isaiah prophesied that the kingdom of Judah would be destroyed—and indeed, the Babylonian Empire arose and destroyed Judah. God's word will certainly be fulfilled, and it will be completed swiftly.

In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar led his great army to capture Jerusalem and took the people of Judah into captivity in Babylon, thus swiftly fulfilling God's word. Paul specifically quotes Isaiah's prophecy to show that those Israelites who received grace and were saved were but a remnant, and that the door of the gospel would soon be closed. From Paul's time until now, nearly two thousand years have passed,

and the number of Jews who have received grace and been saved has remained very small. It seems that the door of the gospel has been closed to the Jews.

Verse 29: “And as Isaiah said before: ‘Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah.’”

Here Paul is quoting Isaiah 1:9, “Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.” In the time of Abraham, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were filled with wickedness, which stirred up God’s wrath. God came down to examine the situation personally, as recorded in Genesis chapters 18 and 19. Through Abraham’s intercession, the angels rescued Lot and led his family of four out of Sodom. After that, God rained down brimstone and fire, destroying both cities. The prophet Isaiah warned that if it were not for God’s mercy in leaving a remnant among the Israelites, they would have perished just like those two cities.

Dear brothers and sisters, in Romans chapter 9 Paul emphasizes the sovereignty of God to reveal the progress of His plan—that the gospel would turn from the Jews to the Gentiles. The Gentiles, who were not God’s people, would become His people; those who were not beloved would become beloved. In contrast, the Israelites, who were God’s chosen people in the Old Testament, by the New Testament became only a remnant who received grace and salvation. As Gentile believers, we can only offer our gratitude and praise to God.

Let us pray together: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your will and for the plan You have determined within Your will. We are Gentiles who originally had no part or share with You, yet through simple faith we have received grace and salvation, becoming Your children, Your people, and the beloved ones. What a great grace this is! As we give thanks and praise, help us to recognize Your sovereignty. In Your sovereignty You not only chose us and granted us the wisdom to be saved, but You also provide various circumstances in our lives to help our spiritual growth. May we partake of Your divine nature in our souls and bear the fruit of the Spirit. Thank You

for Your provision and guidance in Your sovereignty, and help us, through our free will, to make a response of obedience, so that Your will may be fulfilled in us. This prayer, petition, and thanksgiving we offer in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!