PAUL AND REMNANT IN ROMANS 9–11:
“INCLUSIVELY EXCLUSIVE” OR
“EXCLUSIVELY INCLUSIVE”?

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Introduction

Much of Seventh-day Adventist theological self-understanding of inclusivity, exclusivity, and the identity of those who experience eschatological salvation is shaped by its discourse in regard to the “remnant” (λοιπόν) in Rev 12:17. However, my interest in this article is to examine what Adventism might gain by an exploration of the Pauline conceptualization of “remnant” in Romans 9–11 in relation to its eschatological, ethnic, and ecclesiological perspective of those whom I term the “people of God.”

Definitions

Certain terms need explanation to create a common reference for what follows.

First, the term “exclusive” describes efforts or claims to limit or deny entry into a group based upon certain ethnic characteristics, laws, traditions, acts, or particular religious beliefs that create high barriers of entry unless one assimilates a substantial set of characteristics that fundamentally reshape self-identity or identification by others.

Second, the term “inclusive” describes the establishment of a smaller set of these characteristics or minimal requirements that enable ease of entry into a group identity.

The term “exclusively inclusive” defines a group that maintains high barriers to entry into its distinctiveness for persons outside the group. However, if those barriers to entry are met, then the group is inclusive despite other areas of diversity—or differences between those in-group.1 Given its ongoing claims of exclusivity, an “exclusive” group often works diligently at strengthening and maintaining entry claims of special uniqueness or privilege that define that identity.

The term “inclusively exclusive” defines a group with lower barriers to entry or a narrower set of entry characteristics into its self-identity in relation to other groups. These types of groups create an ease of entry that can result in considerable initial diversity in group formation. However, once within

the group, exclusive claims increase the privilege and uniqueness of being in-group. The elevated status increases the real or perceived value of self-identification as one within the group and increased attractiveness to join for others still outside that group identity.

Consideration of Exclusivity, Inclusivity, and Remnant in Romans 1–8

To consider Paul’s discourse in Romans 9–11, key issues addressed earlier in the letter must be summarized. First, Romans 1–3 introduces and critiques the issue of rival ethnic superiority claims as a basis of salvation, determining that due to “not honoring God, or giving Him thanks,” and not being “doers of the Law,” that “all have sinned and fallen short of glory of God,” and that salvation through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ has been made fully available to both Judean and Greek, both ethnic and religious constructs that Paul uses to shape his monologue on salvation.2

Paul’s discourse further engages in diatribe in relation to the failure of Judeans as practitioners of Judean Law.3 Circumcision, a key identifier of Judean ethnicity, served as a mark of entry into the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant and a salvific relationship with God for many Judeans. It was deemed an essential action for salvation—without which, one was eternally lost. Jubilees 15:26-27 describes a man without circumcision as not being a son of the covenant—to be destroyed and annihilated from the earth because “he has broken the covenant of the Lord.”4

Other rabbis quoted in the Mishnah and Talmud considered God more inclusive of other nations or individuals in final salvation, including one which argues the lost only include “all the gentiles who forget God,” indicating some

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2Rom 1:16-23; 2:5-14; 3:9, 21-31. The term “Judean” is used instead of “Jews” in this article, drawing upon recent studies of ethnic Judean identity in the first century CE. I use the term “nations” instead of the more typical “gentiles” to remove ethnic stigma attached by later Christian interpretation.


4“And every one that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, but to the children of destruction; nor is there, moreover, any sign on him that he is the Lord’s, but (he is destined) to be destroyed and slain from the earth, and to be rooted out of the earth, for he has broken the covenant of the Lord our God. For all the angels of the presence and all the angels of sanctification have been so created from the day of their creation, and before the angels of the presence and the angels of sanctification He hath sanctified Israel, that they should be with Him and with His holy angels” (R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English [Oxford: Clarendon, 1913]); See also Eung Chun Park, Either Jew or Gentile: Paul’s Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 16.
among the nations “do have a portion in the world to come.” Paul rearranged circumcision from the exclusive ethnic claim of right relationship with God to metaphorical symbolism of entry into that relationship based upon circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:27-29). Thus, God enters into relationship with the Judeans and “the nations” based upon actions of faith—a more inclusive basis than ethnic exclusiveness embedded in the Judean understandings of Abrahamic or Mosaic covenant (Rom 2:17-29; 3:21-31).

Romans 8 presents readers with a new, exclusive right relationship extended by God the Father—that of kinship with Christ through the indwelling Spirit—which results in reidentification as children of God. This exclusive intimacy is vocalized in “Abba, Father,” a linguistic dualism that alludes to Judean, Greek, and Roman understandings of God Most High. Furthermore, those who enter into faith with God and Christ are being re-formed in the imago Dei—the likeness of Christ. The entire Godhead is presented as active agents in this re-creative loving act of God expressed in Christ in interaction with all who have faith (Rom 8:12-17, 28-30, 31-39).

**Consideration of Exclusivity, Inclusivity and Remnant in Romans 9–11**

In Romans 9, Paul commences to compare and contrast the state of Judean, Greek, and Roman Christ-followers, who, in Rom 8:39, are described as inseparable from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus in contrast, in 9:3, with his “kinsmen according to the flesh.” Paul’s Judean “kinsmen” claimed an exclusive salvific relationship with God as “Israelites” based upon characteristics linking them to their forefathers and Sinai covenant-making. That Judean insistence on ethnic adaptation as the basis of right relationship is apparent in the example of Seneca’s vitriol against how non-Judean persons in Rome changed their way of life and self-identity to being Judean and that Romans actually engaged in the process, despite the high barriers of entry into Judean ethnic and religious identity.

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6For understandings of God the Father in Greco-Roman and Judean comparison, see Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 489-492; see Elizabeth Leigh Gibson, *The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosporus Kingdom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 109-152.

7Thus, Paul contends, “adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers” (Rom 9:4-5, NASB).

8For Seneca’s comments in “On Superstition” that despise Judean-law observation for eroding Roman cultural superiority claims, see Donaldson, 514-515.
However, exclusive Judean claims of being the sole “people of God” are offset by Paul’s statement that “not all descended from Israel are Israel,”—arguing that “Israel,” as the people of God, were only those who were “children of promise,” tangentially revisiting his earlier argument in Rom 4:13-25 (cf. Rom 9:6, 8).

Paul’s argument results in a negotiation of competing exclusive claims. The exclusive claims of ethnic Israel expected compliance with the characteristics of the entire Judean “way of life” to enter into right relationship with God. In contrast, Paul redefined “Israel,” in Rom 9:8, as those brought into divine relationship based upon the “exclusive” promise of God.

In Rom 9:9-18, Paul argues that God’s promise is defensible as the basis of salvation based upon God’s sovereign right to have mercy and compassion on whomever he chooses. The shift exchanges exclusive assimilation of Judean ethnic characteristics to attain salvation with one of dependence on the promises of God to bring persons into right relationship with him based upon faith-making and faith-keeping in Christ.

Romans 9:19-25 reiterates this as God revealing the “riches of His glory”—in persons “whom he also called, not only from the Jews,” but also from the nations (Rom 9:25). As a result, Paul’s gospel is inclusive of individuals who may have adapted or adopted a range of Judean characteristics, from Judeans by birth to those who had not become Judeans through circumcision—a step recognized as full Judean adherence, thus representing a Christ-following population with a range of personal adoption of various life practices. Additionally, there may have been non-Judeans who adopted or adapted a minimal range of Judean customs. The divine prerogative of including those “not my people” in “Israel” outside of full adoption of Judeanism is apparent in the “sons of the living God” citation of Hos 2:23 in Rom 9:26.

Remnant in Romans 9:27

The first remnant reference in Romans comes in 9:27, which clearly intimates that only a small part of ethnic Israel will be saved based upon the sovereign choice of God. The dichotomy of ethnic Judean exclusivity is reversed by God who includes “the nations” in salvation, yet only a small group of ethnic Judeans enter into right relationship with God, as intimated in Rom 9:29 in the citation of Isaiah’s Sodom and Gomorrah passage.

The basis of divine inclusiveness of non-Judeans is reiterated in Rom 9:30-33 as their gaining righteousness by faith, but ethnic Israel does not attain entry into right relationship given their pursuit of righteousness through “works of the Law” and stumbling on not having faith in Christ. In summary, “remnant” in 9:27 applies to a minority group within those who make up “the people of God.” The divine prerogative has lowered barriers

\(^9\)See the critical apparatus in the NA 27 for Rom 9:32 for the alternate reading.
to inclusiveness so that a larger population from all the nations may be the people of God. This is radically different than the competing criteria for exclusive entry preached by other ethnic Judeans.

This becomes apparent in Romans 10, in Paul’s prayer to God to draw more from ethnic Israel into a relationship with Christ—who is the goal or embodiment of what satisfies the Law’s obligations and objectives in Rom 10:4. Paul’s exclusive claims of salvation through Christ culminates with “if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom 10:9-10).

This passage makes apparent the exclusive claim of Paul’s basis of right relationship with God—the confession of Jesus as Lord, and to have faith in the heart that God raised him from the dead—the fulfillment of God’s promises. The barriers to entry into living these claims are lower than living out Judean Law and conversion to ethnic Judean practices. This dichotomy remains the focus of Judean and non-Judean entry into right relationship with God for the peoples of the world in Rom 10:14-19. It is this inclusive relationship with God that brings all peoples’ entry into salvation; yet, it makes an exclusive claim focused singularly on Christ as the basis of right relationship that I suggest exemplifies “inclusive exclusivity.”

The contrast to Paul’s inclusive exclusivity is the Judean claim of relationship with God by “works of the law”—the adoption of Judean ethnicity that forms the basis of “exclusive inclusivity.” The exclusiveness is apparent in the Judean insistence on the “works of the Law” or adoption of Judeanism as “way of life,” epitomized in circumcision as the basis for inclusion in the “people of God.” Divine contention with this Judean claim of exclusive inclusivity is apparent in Paul’s recitation in 10:21: “All the day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Rom 10:21). This application of disobedience appears in contrast to the “obedience of faith” that is seen “among the nations” in their acceptance of Christ by faith (Rom 1:5-6; 15:25-27).

Remnant in Romans 11:5

Given the divine critique of Judean exclusive inclusiveness, Rom 11:1-4 reconsiders whether God is rejecting ethnic Israel. However, Paul forcefully argues God is not, pointing to his own ethnicity, and the divine answer to Elijah, which refers to the 7,000 who had not bent the knee to Baal. Paul’s reference to Elijah’s experience reaffirms that God has reserved a remnant of Judeans who have accepted Jesus as Lord according to God’s calling of

grace, which Paul briefly uses as a critique of works—inerring, in 11:5, that the entire system of ethnic practice is a failed basis for exclusive claims to salvation.

Romans 11:6 definitively differentiates between the remnant chosen by grace and not by works of the law—seemingly an allusion back to Rom 9:32 and, perhaps, 3:20, 28. Thus, competing systems of inclusive exclusivity and exclusive inclusivity are in focus. Paul is arguing that the approach of inclusive exclusivity also applies to ethnic Judeans who become the people of God by a relationship of faith through Jesus Christ—initiated by God's choosing them by grace. The ethnocentric Judean approach of exclusive inclusivity is condemned.

However, in Rom 11:7-11, Paul makes the point that God has not given up on ethnic Israel, despite its predominant rejection of God's call. He argues that they intentionally have been made to stumble over the stumbling block—an oblique reference back to Rom 9:30-32 and an allusion to Christ as the “stumbling block,” and an indirect reference to “the one who has faith in Him will not be put to shame.”

Yet, stumbling by ethnic Israel is not seen as an “irrevocable fall” in 11:11-15, but intentionality by God to make ethnic Israel zealous/jealous since salvation has come through God's inclusion of “the nations” in the “people of God.” It is divine action that brings zealousness/jealousness to ethnic Israel to result in the fullness or fulfillment of God's call to ethnic Israel as those “saved from the dead.”

Romans 11:16 refers to first fruits as an allusion to the current remnant of ethnic Israel, in 11:5, who are chosen by God's grace to be holy—with perhaps a further inference to Rom 1:7 or 6:22-23. The symbolism of the root in 11:16 does not seem to be ethnic Israel or the Abrahamic forefathers as generally assumed by many commentators, but from my perspective seems to be an allusion to Christ—the point of contention between the two approaches to salvation for the people of God and the Father's focal point and agent of salvation for all peoples.11

Additionally, the imagery of being grafted into or broken off of the root/olive tree in 11:17-24 is an action based on either the faithfulness—or unfaithfulness—of the nations or ethnic Israel. Paul clarifies that ethnic Israel has resisted or been hardened to God's calling until the “fullness of the nations” receive Christ as Savior. In 11:26, “all Israel being saved” is not divorced from the preceding argument of inclusion in (or with) Christ based upon faith. The persons of ethnic Israel are from one of the nations grafted into Christ based upon Paul's continuation in 11:26-27, which emphasizes

11This is a tentative conclusion based upon the references to faith or unfaithfulness in the following verses (11:20-23) and other Pauline discourse elements. The explanation of full support for the thesis falls outside the scope of this paper.
the Deliverer. The interplay of reference to ethnic Israel and the “Israel” of God—which includes those of all nations who accept Christ as Lord by faith—recalls Paul's symbolic use of Israel as representative of those who accept God's promise in Rom 9:6-8.

The reference to the gifts and call of God to ethnic Israel reaffirms what God has done for the Judeans described in Rom 9:4-5, yet purposely undercuts ethnic Israel's claim of exclusive inclusiveness as the way to God's provision of salvation. This approach has been identified as an act of disobedience since it denies God's call to faith. Yet, God is depicted as giving all who have been disobedient, both of Israel and the nations, equal opportunity to be included in the people or “Israel” of God based upon his mercy in 11:28-32.

Conclusion

By following Paul's discourse in Romans, it seems reasonable to conclude that Paul positions the gospel of right relationship with God the Father as one of inclusive exclusiveness, one in which all peoples are brought to eschatological salvation by faith in Christ regardless of ethnic or “way of life” differences. The Pauline gospel was only exclusive in its faith-making and faith-keeping in relation to recognition of Jesus as Lord, resurrected from the dead.

On the other hand, Paul portrays God as rejecting an approach of exclusive inclusivity—of expecting people to adhere to or enter into full ethnic assimilation as members of ethnic Israel. In both processes, Paul has upheld the sovereignty of God the Father as the agent of salvation of all peoples, with God refusing to be bound by exclusiveness except in relation to Christ, and actively inclusiveness of a diversity of peoples in his salvific acts.