

Romans 3. 1-20. Nassau. 12 April 2015.

Last Lord's Day, I closed by quoting a verse of a hymn which we sometimes sing concerning the Lord Jesus, in my home assembly back in Cardiff, UK ...

In *His* spotless soul's distress,
I perceive *my* guiltiness;
Oh how vile my low estate,
Since my ransom was so great!

And I promised that *this* week we would look further at *something* of what God's word says about that 'guiltiness'. And this morning I want to look with you at the first part of chapter 3 of the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans – from verse 1 to verse 20. But for the sake of context and connection, we begin our reading at verse 28 of chapter 2.

He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

What advantage then has the Jew? Or what is the profit of circumcision?
Much in every way. For first, indeed, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

What if some were faithless? Shall their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?
Certainly not! Let God be true and every man a liar, as it is written, 'So that you may be justified in your words, and overcome when you are judged'.

But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who inflicts wrath? (I speak after the manner of men.)
Certainly not! For how then shall God judge the world?

But if through my lie God's truth abounds to His glory, why am I still judged as a sinner?
And why not, as we are slanderously charged, and as some affirm that we say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'? Whose judgement is just.

What then? Are we better? Not at all. For we have previously laid to the charge of both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin, as it is written:

'There is none righteous, not one; there is no one who understands; no one who seeks after God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not so much as one'.
'Their throat is an opened grave; with their tongues they have practised deceit'.
'The venom of asps is under their lips'.
'Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness'.
'Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known'.
'There is no fear of God before their eyes'.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become answerable to God. Because by works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

I suppose it would be true to say that, in the earlier section of his epistle, Paul has got us all well and truly lost. Having first provided evidence that the Gentiles – not only those who were idolatrous and depraved, but those also who self-righteously condemned others – were lost, he also provided evidence that those who were Jews according to the flesh were equally lost.

And our passage for this morning brings to a conclusion the opening section of his letter, throughout which he has been concerned with man's *need* to be right – and to be *in* the right – with God.

In a world which can make a bestseller out of the book entitled, 'I'm OK, You're OK',¹ we may be tempted to ask whether *anyone* would *ever* want to buy a book which loudly declares, 'I'm *not* OK, You're *not* OK. But, as you well know, the bestselling book *of all time* says just that, and nowhere *more* loudly than in the opening section of this letter – and that for the simple reason that, in the sight of God, by nature, it is most sadly true, 'I'm *not* OK, You're *not* OK'.

In the previous section, certainly since verse 17 of chapter 2, the apostle has been addressing those who were Jews, and, before summarising *all* he has covered in chapters 1 and 2, he pauses to voice several objections which he knew a thoughtful Jew might well raise to what he has taught thus far.

Not that this was an unusual device. In the ancient world, philosophers or religious teachers of all kinds would often open a dialogue with their critics or students: first posing, and then answering, their questions and objections.² And Paul has already adopted this method.³ But now he takes it one step further.

I think we can take it that Paul isn't inventing hypothetical objections which some *imaginary* opponent might fling at him, but that, in part at least, he is repeating arguments which he has previously encountered during his regular debates and disputes in the synagogues of Judea, Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia,⁴ and that, to some extent, he is expressing arguments and viewpoints with which he was in any case very familiar ... arguments and viewpoints which he – the well-schooled and militant Pharisee, one-time Saul of Tarsus, remembered all too well as having once been his own.⁵

The opening expression of our chapter, 'what advantage then', alerts us immediately to the fact that the four sets of questions we encounter in verses 1-8⁶ arose directly out of the most impressive demolition job the apostle had performed on Jewish false hopes in the second half of chapter 2, especially in the last five verses.⁷

First, **What advantage then has the Jew? Or what is the profit of circumcision?**

We know that the very name 'Jew' was one of which the people of Israel were immensely proud. 'You *call yourself* a Jew', Paul had reported.⁸ Their very name gave them *a superiority complex!*

And it was widely held among them – and once no doubt by the unconverted Saul of Tarsus – that every circumcised male Jew, as forming part of the covenant-people of God, was assured of eternal life and a place in God's eternal kingdom.⁹ But Paul has just made it crystal clear that the mere 'possession' of God's law *doesn't* provide them with an insurance policy against God's wrath, and that the outward mark of circumcision in the flesh is of value only if it represents inward circumcision of the heart.

But in this case, does the Jew enjoy *no privileged position*? Does his circumcision have *no value*?¹⁰

And if we had followed the argument in the latter part of chapter 2, we might, I guess, have half-expected Paul to answer these questions with a loud, and categorical, 'none at all'. But, in contrast, he replies, **Much in every way.**

What advantage then has the Jew? first ... that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Paul's answer was that, while it was true that the Jews reaped *no benefits* in terms of avoiding God's just judgement, they certainly possessed many *privileges* – in particular, that the Jews had been entrusted with God's 'oracles', with His utterances, His very words.¹¹ And I take it that the 'oracles of God' here in Romans 3 refer not only to God's commandments or His promises, but to the whole Old Testament revelation which had been committed to Israel's care.

And to be the custodians and trustees of God's special revelation was high honour indeed. This surpassed by far anything enjoyed by the Gentiles. We have only to think of the words spoken by Moses to Israel when in the wilderness, '*What great nation is there, that has statutes and judicial decisions so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*'¹² and of the words of the psalmist at the close of Psalm 147; where, having recited many of the physical blessings which God bestowed on His people, he added: 'He (God) *declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judicial decisions to Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation; and as for His judicial decisions, they have not known them.*'¹³ Make no mistake, the Jews are an immensely privileged people.

The Jew of Paul's day would have been well aware that many of his nation's original neighbours practised circumcision. Indeed, the Philistines were a notable exception.¹⁴ But, if a Jew's way of life ran contrary to the holiness demanded by God's law, in God's sight his physical circumcision was of no more value than the circumcision practised by those nations.

At first sight, it might strike us as strange that, having begun, 'Much in every way', Paul then mentions only one advantage.¹⁵ I suggest that already he plans to return to this point later and to deal it more fully then. Which he does in what we have as chapters 9 to 11, where he raises the question: 'Has God cast away (rejected) His people?'¹⁶ In which case, what has become of the unique blessings promised to the Jews? And where he then begins by relating a fuller list of Israel's glorious spiritual and historical privileges: 'To them', he says, 'belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, and the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever'.¹⁷

But for now, Paul is content to cite just one of their privileges as sufficient to prove that the Jews were indeed an extremely privileged people.

What if some were faithless?¹⁸ Shall their faithlessness nullify¹⁹ (render of no effect) the faithfulness of God?²⁰

Fine, this one-time Saul of Tarsus could hear himself saying, but you are not out of the woods yet, Paul! What if some of Israel were guilty of *unbelief* – in particular in rejecting the promised Messiah – and of *unfaithfulness* to the revelation with which God had entrusted them? If they, on their part, have broken faith with God, does this mean that God will, on His part, break faith with them and cast them away for ever? Will their unbelief in Jesus invalidate God's faithfulness to His promises to them? Paul, doesn't your attitude to the unbelief of those who are Jews by only physical descent call in question, not only God's promises, but His very character?

In passing, it may be worth noting that there is a play on words in verses 2 and 3 which is difficult to reproduce in English. But I will have a shot, 'If some to whom God's oracles and promises of a coming Messiah were entrusted did not respond to them in *trust*, will their lack of *trust* annul God's *trustworthiness*?²¹

Certainly not!²² Paul thunders.

It is not easy to render this expression (literally, 'May it not be!') into English so as to do justice to its proper strength and vehemence. Some translators favour 'By no means' or 'Perish the thought!' One New Testament scholar²³ suggests that 'not on your life' or 'not in a thousand years' gives something of the flavour. Perhaps today a generation younger than his – and mine – would simply respond, 'No way!'

Certainly Paul recoils with horror and indignation from the very suggestion that any unbelief or failure on the part of man would – or could – thwart the declared intention and purpose of God. He will remain true to His word whatever man does.

I pointed out just now that the subject he briefly touches here is the main theme of chapters 9 to 11. There, among other issues, he discusses God's faithfulness to the Jews more fully. Paul makes it clear there that, as he says, 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance'.²⁴

Paul asserts there that God's faithfulness to His promise and to His people has certainly not failed, partly because Israel's present unbelief is not universal,²⁵ and a *remnant* of Jews is even *now* being saved, and partly because at some point in the future, when God will fulfil His promise that 'the Deliverer (our Lord Jesus) will come out of Zion', 'all Israel (all Israel nationally, that is) shall be saved'.²⁶

It is, Paul insists, unthinkable that God's faithfulness to His pledged covenants with Israel should fail. For He is, as Paul says elsewhere, the 'God who cannot lie'²⁷ – the One who, 'if we are faithless ... remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself'.²⁸

In support of his claim that God must be found true in keeping His word, even if every man is found a liar in asserting that God can break His promises,²⁹ Paul appeals³⁰ to the penitent confession of David following his gross sin with Bathsheba.³¹

David first acquits God of any charge of unrighteousness arising from the sentence of condemnation which God had pronounced on him through Nathan,³² and then, speaking as if God Himself is put on trial on account of His dealings with him, David acknowledges that God will be proved guiltless and will prevail.³³ In this way King David was careful, as Paul notes, not only to accept full responsibility for his sin, but to vindicate the righteous character of God, both in His words and in His ways.

But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who inflicts wrath?

But surely, Paul hears a voice saying, this means that our unrighteousness – our sin – provides God with a marvellous opportunity of demonstrating His own attribute of righteousness, both in the displeasure He reveals³⁴ and in the discipline which He exercises³⁵ – as certainly proved true in the case of David which you, Paul, have just cited. And, if our unrighteousness does act as a dark background against which God's righteousness shines all the brighter, is He not unjust in punishing us?

Or, better perhaps, with *our* eye on the context, Paul hears the voice saying, 'since our faults (as Jews) set God's righteousness in bolder relief by contrast, should not God deal more graciously with us in His judgment? You said earlier that "the wrath of God is revealed ... against all ... unrighteousness of men".³⁶ But surely the One who inflicts that wrath would *Himself* be unrighteous if He failed to take into consideration that, in one sense, He owes us Jews a debt, because our unbelief and unfaithfulness only makes His righteousness shine the brighter.

And I note that, before ever Paul issues his strongly worded response to such twisted reasoning, he is swift to distance himself from the blasphemous suggestion.³⁷ Determined to leave nobody with the impression, even for a moment, that such a profane and impious question came out of his *own* mind, he immediately interjects, **I speak after the manner of men.**

'Pardon me for even using such language', he seems to say; 'I speak according to the ignorant and perverse thoughts which some men entertain of God'.³⁸

Certainly not! Perish the thought! No way!

For on that reasoning God would be unable to judge the world.³⁹ The fact that God is able to overrule evil actions to good ends does not relieve man of his responsibility, his guilt, or his exposure to God's judgement.⁴⁰

The apostle will make lengthy mention of Abraham throughout the following chapter, and here he may well already have in mind the words of Abraham's great intercessory prayer in Genesis 18, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'⁴¹

Paul has spoken in chapter 2 of 'the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ'.⁴² And Paul knew very well, as (with his eye no doubt on the last verse of Psalm 96⁴³) he once informed the philosophers at Athens, 'God has set a day on which He will judge the world *in righteousness* by the man He has appointed'.⁴⁴

But the one-time Saul of Tarsus hasn't given in yet. Persistently, he restates his objection in different words⁴⁵ ... if my lie – possibly a reference back to verse 4 ('and every man a liar') – if my falsehood causes the attribute of God's truthfulness to shine more brightly by way of contrast, then surely it enhances His glory. Why then does He insist on bringing me into judgement, and on condemning me as a sinner?

Paul the apostle responds by asking, 'Why not extend this blasphemous argument even further? If we reason that the more wicked we are the more conspicuous will be the mercy of God in our pardon, then let us furnish God with still richer opportunities of displaying His goodness by sinning more freely'.⁴⁶

But you cannot miss that Paul delays his response with what must have been to him a most painful recollection, 'and *that is precisely* what some people insist that my gospel of salvation by faith amounts to'.⁴⁷

And he is compelled to crush this 'slanderous' allegation (this 'blasphemous' allegation – as is suggested by the word Paul uses) of his accusers with his sharp retort, 'They deserve what's coming to them'.⁴⁸ If you will excuse the pun, he will 'return to the charge' in chapters 6 and 7.

At this point, the apostle turns from the charges laid by some against him to the charges 'previously laid' by him against all – against 'both Jews and Greeks' – against both Jews and gentiles, that is.

Having, in verses 1-8, raised, and responded to, possible objections to his teaching at the close of the previous chapter, he now summarises all he has covered in *both* of the earlier chapters.⁴⁹

Shortly,⁵⁰ he will survey the divine courtroom and see all mankind (Jew as well as Gentile)⁵¹ standing speechless in the dock, silenced by the weight of evidence which has been brought against them.⁵²

But speaking for now, as it were, not from the bench (as in effect he will then) but from the bar, he says, 'we have previously filed charges against both parties that they are equally guilty'⁵³ – both being under⁵⁴ the domination and the condemnation of sin – both being subject to the authority⁵⁵ of sin as that of some cruel despot.

And, in passing, how thankful we should be this morning, that, as some of us will see, God willing, this coming Wednesday, the same apostle is able to sound the challenge towards the close of chapter 8, 'Who shall (who dares!) bring any charge against God's elect?'⁵⁶

As we have seen, the apostle taught in the opening verses of the chapter that, in comparison with the Gentiles, the Jews were certainly *better off*. But now he makes it equally clear that they were certainly not **better!**⁵⁷ If, in answer to the question, 'What advantage has the Jew?' Paul responded, 'Much in every way', now, in answer to the question 'Are we better?', he responds, 'Not at all'. The Jews may have been – and were – *more spiritually privileged* than the Gentiles, but, for all that, they were certainly *not spiritually superior!*

And I note that, whereas in chapters 1 and 2, Paul has laid the charges first against the Gentiles and then against the Jews, here he reverses the order, with the Jews named first in accordance with his present purpose, namely, to show that the Jews were no less guilty before God than were the Gentiles. And Paul is at great pains to do this

because, as we saw earlier, they (the Jews) commonly claimed immunity from God's judgement solely on the grounds that they were, by birth and circumcision, the children of Abraham.⁵⁸

But if Paul had earlier – in chapter 2 – brought an indictment of sinfulness against those who prided themselves on being Jews, he now sets out – in verses 10 to 18 – to prove that the consistent testimony of *their own* scriptures served to condemn them, and to confirm the charges he had laid at their door. To establish his point he raids no less than seven separate passages or verses from his Old Testament.⁵⁹ And in doing so, he followed the standard procedure of Jewish preachers of stringing scriptural passages together like so many pearls.⁶⁰

The fourteen statements⁶¹ which comprise Paul's quotation-chain divide naturally into two sections. The first six prove the *universality* of the ruin,⁶² with the remaining eight illustrating the *totality* of the ruin.⁶³

The first six contain *four negative*,⁶⁴ and *two positive* statements.⁶⁵ In the second list, several members of the human body are spoken of, as yielded, Paul would say later, 'to sin as instruments for unrighteousness'.⁶⁶

Verses 13 and 14 describe the harm which can come from words, and verses 15 to 17 the harm which can come from deeds. Words can be deceitful, actions can be destructive. In verses 13 to 18, the throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet and the eyes are specifically mentioned. A clear case, if you like, of spiritual 'foot and mouth' disease.

Paul introduces his string of quotations with the familiar formula, '**as it is written**' – literally, 'as it stands written'.⁶⁷

The apostle was well aware, of course, that, in their original contexts, many of his quotations had specific and limited reference, but here he applies them more generally, yet always with his eyes on their particular application to the Jews – since, as soon becomes clear, the major object of these quotations is to provide scriptural proof that the Jew in no way lagged behind the Gentile in terms of his guilt.

Clearly I do not have time this morning to work through each of the quotations – the majority of which are, in any case, self-explanatory. But let me highlight just three.

From verse 11, 'no one who seeks after God'. I have read that, towards the end of the 19th century, one Bible scholar wrote a book entitled "Seekers After God". The book was in considerable demand at the time, and one bookseller ran out of copies. So he sent a telegram to the dealers in New York requesting a further supply. The telegram which came back read, "No seekers after God in New York. Try Philadelphia".⁶⁸

Well, Paul's point here is that, by nature, there were no 'Seekers after God' in Israel either!

From verse 12, 'together they have become worthless (or 'useless', 'good for nothing')'. I understand that the idea behind the relevant Hebrew word used in the source of Paul's quote, in Psalm 14 verse 3, is 'to go bad or sour' like milk.⁶⁹ Indeed, I note that the New Jerusalem Bible actually renders the expression in Psalm 14 as 'all alike turned sour'.⁷⁰

And from verse 13, 'the venom of asps is under their lips'. I couldn't help noting the claims of two American Bible scholars of a bygone day to the effect that the venom of an asp is actually stored in a small bag 'under the lips' at 'the root of the tooth'.⁷¹ But this is a salutary warning not to believe *everything* we read in Bible helps! Because, in point of fact, the venom-secreting glands of the only two real candidates for the snake in the mind of the Psalmist are located either behind the eyes or at the back of the head, with the venom in both cases being conveyed through a small tube to fangs concealed in the upper jaw.⁷² Both the apostle, and the Psalmist whose words he is quoting, were, of course, referring to *human* lips – not to those of asps! They were both speaking of the pain and grief which can so easily be inflicted by the malicious words of men.

Although, as I said, when 'stringing his quotation pearls', Paul had his eye particularly on the Jews, there is nothing he said which, sadly, is not true of mankind in general – which is not true of you and me by nature. And, frankly, it is *not* a flattering picture which the apostle has painted of us.

I think it is still correct to say that the most expensive portrait to be sold to date fetched a mere \$135 million in 2006 – that's about \$160 million at today's prices.⁷³

But if you want to see your own portrait by nature as God sees it, you can study it here, and it won't cost you a cent. And, believe me, it is a far cry from the Bible's description of man and woman as the Lord God first created them.⁷⁴ Well, it's *not* 'very good' now; it's 'very bad'!

One great Bible scholar observed that it was the tendency of Rabbinical teachers in the apostle's time to apply passages such as Paul has cited *to the Gentiles*.⁷⁵ The Jews of Paul's day had perfected the knack of explaining away any Old Testament verses which condemned them, and of maintaining their belief that, whatever might

happen to the 'wicked and lawless Gentiles' when God's wrath fell, they (God's chosen nation) were certain to escape. And, knowing this better than most, Paul therefore adds ...

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks⁷⁶ to those who are under the law,⁷⁷

Given that Paul's Old Testament proof-texts were lifted from no book earlier than the Book of Psalms, it is clear that the words 'the law' refer here, not to the Law of Moses, but, as often in the New Testament, to the Old Testament in general.⁷⁸

Paul's point is simple. That which is written in the 'law' in this wider sense applies necessarily to the people of the law. In other words, *that which is 'written in the law' naturally 'speaks' to those who are (literally translated) 'in the law' – to those, that is, who are within the range and sphere of the law – that is, to the Jewish nation.*⁷⁹

As we noted earlier, the Jews commonly claimed exemption from God's judgement on the grounds that they were, by birth and circumcision, the children of Abraham. But, as Paul has demonstrated, this simply won't wash!

Having established that the Jews come under the condemnation of God's word no less than the Gentiles, Paul draws his conclusion, **'that every mouth (Jew as well as Gentile)' is 'stopped,⁸⁰ and that all the world' becomes 'answerable (is held accountable) to God'**, subject to His righteous judgement.⁸¹

Paul has already shown that both the '*unrighteous*'⁸² idolater, by his rejection of the witness of creation,⁸³ and, the *self-righteous* moralist, by his rejection of the witness of conscience, are altogether 'without excuse'.⁸⁴ Now he brackets together the whole of mankind as being without excuse.

And so, having earlier listed out 'no righteousness' and 'no understanding' in verse 10, 'no desire for God' in verse 11; 'no goodness' in verse 12; 'no peace' in verse 17: and 'no fear of God' in verse 18: he now adds the crowning predicament which faces all mankind, 'and no defence' in verse 19.

Graphically then, Paul paints the verbal picture of the defendant in court who, though given every opportunity to speak in his own defence, is speechless on account of the weight of the evidence which has been brought against him.⁸⁵ With nothing to say in his defence, he can only wait for the verdict to be announced and for the sentence to be executed.

And the sinner's case is altogether hopeless, the apostle insists, 'because'⁸⁶ no number of 'works of the law' (this time, the Law of God as given to Moses on Sinai⁸⁷) ... no number of 'works of the law' will ever prevail on God to rule in the sinner's favour ... will ever prevail on the Lord 'the righteous Judge'⁸⁸ to pronounce – to declare – righteous one who clearly *isn't*.

And in these words, God has totally blocked the route to righteousness by way of keeping His law with a clearly worded notice: 'No through road'!

And the reason, Paul tells us, that no-one will ever be justified by law-keeping is that the function of the law is to convince of sin and not to erase it.

For through the law, he says, comes the knowledge of sin.

It successfully identifies the disease, but it provides no cure.⁸⁹

The American evangelist D L Moody expressed it very simply, 'The law does not ... remove, but simply reveals, the evil in man's heart: just as a plumbline'.⁹⁰

In itself then the law offers no ray of light, no flicker of hope, no prospect of rescue.⁹¹

There was a Roman poet of the first century BC, graced by his parents with the delightful name Quintus Horatius Flaccus⁹² – but known to his friends, and to the English speaking world, as Horace. In one of his poems,⁹³ Horace set out clear guidelines for writers of tragedies. Just less than half-way through his poem, he laid down the rule, 'A god must not be introduced, unless there is a knot worthy of a god's unravelling'.⁹⁴

I have read that 'Luther once said that the forgiveness of sin is a knot that needs God's help to unravel'.⁹⁵ How very, very true!

And what Paul tells us in the following verses of our chapter is that the problem has been solved – the knot has been unravelled! *Exactly how*, we will discover, God willing, next week.⁹⁶

Footnotes

¹ I'm OK, You're OK, by Thomas A Harris MD, is one of the best selling self-help books ever published. From its first publication during 1967, the popularity of I'm OK, You're OK gradually increased until, during 1972, its name made the New York Times Best Seller list and remained there for almost two years. It is estimated by the publisher to have sold over 15 million copies by 2004 and to have been translated into over a dozen languages. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I'm_OK,_You're_OK

² See, for example, John Stott, page 95.

³ Rom. 2. 1, 17. This is characteristic of this particular epistle. Seven times we read, 'What shall we say?' – an expression we do not meet elsewhere in Paul's letters – Rom. 3. 5; 4. 1; 6. 1; 7. 7; 8. 31; 9. 14; 9. 30. Compare, 'You will say (to me) then', Rom. 9. 19; 11. 19.

⁴ Acts 9. 22, 29; 13. 45; 17. 2-3, 17; 18. 4-6, 19; 19. 8-9 ... 'reasoning, disputing, persuading'.

⁵ In other words, that at some points he is expressing objections which he himself had once voiced – and no doubt voiced loudly!

⁶ In order:

(i) What advantage then has the Jew? Or what is the profit of circumcision?

(ii) What if some were faithless? Shall their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?

(iii) But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who inflicts wrath? And

(iv) But if through my lie God's truth abounds to His glory, why am I still judged as a sinner?

⁷ Rom. 2. 25-29.

⁸ Rom. 2. 17.

⁹ Key quotes :

It is a maxim among the Jews, 'All Israel have a portion in the world to come, for it is written: Thy people are all righteous', Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1, Talmud Sanhedrin 90a.

One midrashic passage reads, Said R Levi, 'In the age to come Abraham will sit at the gate of Gehenna [hell], and he will not permit a circumcised Israelite to go down there'. Translation taken from Jacob Neusner, ed. Genesis Rabbah ("Vayera" 45:8), Volume II (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 182.

'[The wicked Jews] are at that time under sentence to suffer in Gehenna, but our father Abraham comes, brings them up, and receives them', the Talmud (b. Eruvin 19a).

The final blessing that is made at a 'Covenant of Circumcision' ceremony (performed on the eighth day of a male infant's life) includes the words: 'as a reward of this (circumcision), the living God, our Portion, our Rock, has ordained that the beloved of our flesh be saved from the abyss, for the sake of the Covenant which He has set in our flesh.' <http://thetorah.com/abraham-circumcision/>

'Those who are descendants of Abraham according to the flesh will most certainly share in the eternal kingdom, even though they be faithless sinners and disobedient to God'. To Trypho of Jewish false teachers (Just. Mart. ' Dial. c. Tryph.,' chapter 140.)

¹⁰ Doesn't this put Jews and Gentiles on exactly the same footing?

¹¹ The word translated 'oracles' means any sayings of divine origin. It was used by the Greeks of the prophetic utterances supposedly spoken by their gods through their messengers – often by way of response to men's queries. This is the usual word in the Greek Old Testament for any divine revelation, being used of the 'word of the Lord' no less than seventeen times in Psalm 119 alone. (Five times in Isaiah and frequently in the Psalms. See too Num. 24. 4, 16.)

¹² Deut. 4. 8.

¹³ Psa. 147. 19-20.

¹⁴ 1 Sam. 14. 6; 17. 36; 31. 4.

¹⁵ Some take the word 'first' in the sense of being 'first in importance, of indicating the Jew's chief and main advantage. But I have my doubts. I note that normally the word translated 'first' indicates the first of a series of events or the first item in a longer list, leading us to expect other items to follow. Personally, I doubt very much that the apostle would have ranked even possession of God's word as a greater privilege than the last and crowning distinction of the Jewish race, namely that of providing the channel through which the Messiah entered the world.

¹⁶ Rom. 11. 1.

¹⁷ Rom. 9. 4-5.

¹⁸ Do these words refer to 'unbelief' or to 'unfaithfulness' ? Probably the former : because (i) the main point in the context is Israel's disbelief in the promises of the O. T. and the refusal to accept them as fulfilled in Christ; (ii) chapters 9-11 show that the problem of Israel's unbelief weighed heavily on the Apostle's heart and mind; (iii) ' unbelief is the constant sense of the Greek word.

¹⁹ To render of no effect, inert or inactive: a characteristic word with Paul, occurring twenty-five times in his writings, and only twice elsewhere (Luke and Hebrews).

²⁰ Scholars tell us that the way Paul frames the question, 'Shall their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?' shows that he expects a negative answer. Something like, 'The unbelief of some Jews does not mean that God is unfaithful, does it?' ... in itself paving the way for his vehement reply in the following verse.

²¹ Again, we should note that the word translated 'some' signifies 'part of a whole', but not necessarily a small part of it – which it certainly doesn't indicate here, given that, as Paul knew well, the vast majority of Israel were undoubtedly guilty of unbelief. And we can compare the use of the word by the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 3 of his epistle, where, referring to the rebellion of the children of Israel in the wilderness, he wrote, 'some, having heard, provoked (provoked God that is) ... with whom was He provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?' Heb. 3. 16-17 literally. And we know that, out of a nation numbering between two and three million people, that word 'some' covered all the males over 20 years of age when they left Egypt, with the exception only of Joshua and Caleb, Num. 32. 11. Cf. also 1 Cor. 10. 5-10.

²² This is Paul's first use in this letter of the expression, which he uses ten times in all:

Rom_3:4 By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."

Rom_3:6 By no means! For then how could God judge the world?

Rom_3:31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Rom_6:2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Rom_6:15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Rom_7:7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

Rom_7:13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Rom_9:14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

Rom_11:1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

Rom_11:11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.

Indeed, I note that all occurrences save one in the New Testament are to be found in his epistles. Outside of Romans, 1 Cor. 6. 15; Gal. 2.17; 3. 21. Else only in Luke 20.16.

²³ Professor John A. Ziesler (Tutor in New Testament at Trinity College, Auckland), Paul's Letter to the Romans, page 97.

²⁴ Rom. 11. 29.

²⁵ 'Hardening *in part* has come upon Israel', Rom. 11. 25.

²⁶ Rom. 11. 26. 'It is impossible to entertain an exegesis which takes 'Israel' (in v26) in a different sense from 'Israel' in verse 25', F F Bruce, Tyndale Commentary on Romans, page 221.

²⁷ Tit. 1. 2.

²⁸ 2 Tim. 2.13.

²⁹ **Let God be true and every man a liar ...** Anything then is more possible than that the God 'who cannot lie' should be found a liar.

³⁰ This is the third of fifteen times he uses the expression 'it is written' in his letter:

Rom_1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Rom_2:24 For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Rom_3:4 By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."

Rom_3:10 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;

Rom_4:17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Rom_8:36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Rom_9:13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Rom_9:33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Rom_10:15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Rom_11:8 as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

Rom_11:26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";

Rom_14:11 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

Rom_15:3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

Rom_15:9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name."

Rom_15:21 but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

³¹ Psa. 51. 4. The title of the Psalm reads, 'A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba'.

³² 'Justified [declared righteous] in your words'.

³³ 'Overcome when you are judged'. 'God always wins His case when He enters into judgment', F F Bruce, Tyndale Commentary on Romans, page 96.

³⁴ 2 Sam. 11. 27.

³⁵ 2 Sam. 12. 10-12.

³⁶ Rom. 1. 18.

³⁷ Even though, again, the form of the question, in the Greek, implies that the answer must be negative.

³⁸ Gal. 2. 15; 1 Cor. 9. 8; Rom. 6. 19.

³⁹ **For how then shall God judge the world?**

⁴⁰ The guilt of a sinful action is not removed, because it is God who overrules evil to promote good results which the sinner never contemplated. Cf. Gen. 45. 5-8; 50. 20; Luke 22. 22; Acts 2. 23.

⁴¹ Gen. 18. 25.

⁴² Rom. 2. 16.

⁴³ 'He will judge the world in righteousness', Psa. 96. 13. Cf. Psa. 9. 7-8.

⁴⁴ Acts 17. 31.

⁴⁵ **But if through my lie God's truth abounds to His glory, why am I still judged as a sinner?** Verse 7 returns to the objection stated in verse 5; restating and expanding it. This makes the sentiment of verse 6 somewhat premature, logically considered. The apostle, in the energy of his conception, repels the objection with abhorrence and argues against it, before he has fully concluded the statement of it.

⁴⁶ **And why not ... 'Let us do evil that good may come'?**

⁴⁷ **As we are slanderously charged, and as some affirm that we say.**

⁴⁸ **Whose judgement is just.**

⁴⁹ **What then?**

⁵⁰ Rom. 3. 19.

⁵¹ Arraigned before the divine court to answer the charges laid.

⁵² And this whether the two parties enjoyed the benefit of the God-given witness by way of (i) creation, Rom. 1. 18-32; (ii) conscience, Rom. 2. 1-16, or (iii) commandment, Rom. 2. 17-29.

⁵³ **For we have previously laid to the charge of both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.**

⁵⁴ The force of the Greek expression. Cf. J N Darby's New Translation, ISV, LITV, MKJV, and YLT.

⁵⁵ Under the authority of. In Matt. 8. 9, the centurion says: "I have soldiers under me." That is, I have soldiers under my command. A schoolboy is under a pedagogue, under the direction of the slave who is in control of him.

⁵⁶ Rom. 8. 32-33.

⁵⁷ What does the verb (mean? In the active voice it means "surpass, excel, be superior to, have an advantage, have a head start." But here it is either middle or passive voice. Seen as passive, it would mean, "Are we surpassed? Are we at a disadvantage?" Seen as middle, it would mean, "Are we trying to excuse ourselves? Are we trying to put forward a defence?" "Do we Jews have any defence? None whatsoever!" Are we Jews at a disadvantage, then, in light of 3:4-8? No, you are still no worse off than the Gentiles." "Do we Jews have an advantage, then? In light of 3:1-2, you have an advantage in one way, but not in every way." "Do we Jews have an advantage, then? None at all!" The fact is that any of these views is compatible with Paul's main point.

⁵⁸ It is a maxim among the Jews, 'All Israel have a portion in the world to come, for it is written: Thy people are all righteous' - Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1, Talmud Sanhedrin 90a.

One midrashic passage reads, Said R Levi, 'In the age to come Abraham will sit at the gate of Gehenna [hell], and he will not permit a circumcised Israelite to go down there'. Translation taken from Jacob Neusner, ed. Genesis Rabbah ("Vayera" 45:8), Volume II (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 182.

'[The wicked Jews] are at that time under sentence to suffer in Gehenna, but our father Abraham comes, brings them up, and receives them', the Talmud (b. Eruvin 19a).

The final blessing that is made at a brit milah ceremony includes the words: 'as a reward of this (circumcision), the living God, our Portion, our Rock, has ordained that the beloved of our flesh be saved from the abyss, for the sake of the Covenant which He has set in our flesh.' <http://thetorah.com/abraham-circumcision/>

'Those who are descendants of Abraham according to the flesh will most certainly share in the eternal kingdom, even though they be faithless sinners and disobedient to God'. To Trypho of Jewish false teachers (Just. Mart. ' Dial. c. Tryph.,' chapter 140.)

⁵⁹ No less than five of which he culls from the Book of Psalms.

Romans 3	Quotation	Greek Old Testament reference
Verses 10-11	There is none righteous, not one; there is no one who understands; no one who seeks after God.	Eccles. 7. 20 (cf. Psa. 143. 2)

Verse 12	All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not so much as one.	Psa. 14. 1-3 (// Psa. 53. 1-3)
Verse 13	Their throat is an opened grave; with their tongues they have practised deceit. The venom of asps is under their lips.	Psa. 5. 9 Psa. 140.3
Verse 14	Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.	Psa. 10. 7
Verses 15-17	'Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.	Isa. 59. 7-8
Verse 18	There is no fear of God before their eyes.	Psa. 36. 1

⁶⁰ 'A favourite method was that which derived its name from the stringing together of pearls (Charaz), when a preacher, having quoted a passage or section from the Pentateuch, strung on to it another and like-sounding, or really similar, from the Prophets and the Hagiographa [the third part of the Old Testament canon, comprising all books not included in the Pentateuch and the Prophets]' (Edersheim, Life and Times, Book 3, Chapter 10, third paragraph from the close.

⁶¹ It could be said that, in this section, Paul describes the sinner's character, 10-12, communication, 13-14, and conduct, 15-17. *Three not Seven Seas!*

⁶² Rom. 3. 10-12.

⁶³ Rom. 3. 13-17.

⁶⁴ There is none righteous, not one; there is no one who understands; no one who seeks after God. no one does good, not so much as one.

⁶⁵ All have turned aside; together they have become worthless.

⁶⁶ Rom. 6. 13.

⁶⁷ The perfect tense. The formula occurs fourteen times in the Roman Epistle. In each case the apostle quotes only so much as his immediate purpose requires.

⁶⁸ 'Near the turn of the 19th century F. W. Farrar wrote a book entitled Seekers After God. The book was a popular seller and was in considerable demand. A certain western bookseller had a number of requests for the volume but had no copies available. He sent a telegram to the dealers in New York requesting them to ship him a number of the books. After a while a telegram came back which read, "No seekers after God in New York. Try Philadelphia". D. Edmond Hiebert, Working with God: Scriptural Studies in Intercession, pp. 100-101. Quoted by Thomas Constable on Gen. 6. 5.

⁶⁹ 'The idea of the original ... seems to be "to go bad or sour" like milk'. J B Lightfoot, Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul', page 268.

⁷⁰ See http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=23&bible_chapter=14.

⁷¹ 'The poison ... is contained in a small bag which is concealed at the root of the tooth. A. E. Barnes, New Testament Notes, published mid-19th century.

'The poison of the asp lies in a bag under the lips', A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures of the New Testament, published 1927.

⁷² The horned viper has hollow venom-conducting fangs in the upper jaw 'Doses of venom are produced in venom glands located at the rear of the head', Encyclopedia of Deserts, edited by Michael A. Mares, Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 1999, page 108. Accessed at ...

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=g3CbqZtaF4oC&pg=PA108&lpg=PA108&dq=cerastes+cerastes+produce+venom&source=bl&ots=uXFtIseWNz&sig=nVkfVIsGhmE1f0sbPpuAVKxEE&hl=en&sa=X&ei=utsBU-vYGpKqhAeyplDACw&ved=0CIEBEogBMAg#v=onepage&q=cerastes%20cerastes%20produce%20venom&f=false>

The Egyptian Cobra has glands located behind its eyes which produce a deadly neurotoxic venom that's released through its large fangs. The venom of an Egyptian Cobra is so deadly it can kill a full grown Indian Elephant in 3 hours. In humans its venom causes paralysis and death due to respiratory failure. The venoms affects the nervous system, stopping the nerve signals from being transmitted to the muscles and at later stages stopping those transmitted to the heart and lungs as well, causing death due to complete respiratory failure.

<http://goafrica.about.com/od/africasafariuide/tp/Africansnakes.htm>

[On March 26, 2011, the Bronx Zoo informed the public that their reptile house was closed after a venomous adolescent female Banded Egyptian cobra was discovered missing from its off-exhibit enclosure on March 25. The Cobra is actually a Banded Snouted cobra, *N. annulifera*, formerly considered conspecific to the Egyptian Cobra. Zoo officials were confident the missing cobra would be found in the building and not outside, since the Egyptian cobra is known to be uncomfortable in open areas.[8] The snake's metabolism would also have been impacted by the cold weather outdoors at that time in the Bronx. The cobra was found in a dark corner of the zoo's reptile house on March 31, 2011, in good health. After a contest, she was named "Mia" for "missing in action."]

⁷³ February 2014. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_expensive_paintings ... [photo on PC under people] painted 1907, sold 2006 for \$135 million. (about \$160 = £97 million now). Adele Bloch-Bauer by Gustav Klimt

⁷⁴ 'And God saw ... and behold, it was very good', Gen. 1. 31.

⁷⁵ 'It was the tendency of Rabbinical teachers in St Paul's time and afterwards to apply all such passages to the heathen', J B Lightfoot, The Epistle to the Romans (in Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul, page 269).

⁷⁶ Scripture is not a dead word; it is a living speech.

⁷⁷ The word 'law' occurs over 70 times in this epistle, but not always in the same sense.

⁷⁸ See John 10. 34; 12. 34; 15. 25; 1 Cor. 14. 21.

⁷⁹ And nobody knew better than Paul that this insight ran totally contrary to the claims of Judaism, and that, in the ears of many of his fellow-countrymen, his handling of these Old Testament quotations would prove something of a bombshell.

⁸⁰ Said physically of the mouths of lions, Heb. 11. 33.

⁸¹ Rom. 3. 19.

⁸² Rom. 1. 18, 29.

⁸³ Rom. 1. 19-25.

⁸⁴ Rom. 1. 20; 2. 1.

⁸⁵ 'Of the defendant in court who, though given the opportunity to speak in his own defence, is speechless because of the weight of the evidence which has been brought against him', C E B Cranfield, vol. I. pp. 196f.

⁸⁶ **Because by works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him.**

⁸⁷ See Rom. 7. 12, 14; 10. 5 with Lev. 18. 5. Also see Exod. 31. 18.

⁸⁸ 2 Tim. 4. 8.

⁸⁹ The law then is altogether impotent to save. Indeed, according to chapter 7, 'The presence of law can positively stimulate sin – as a prohibition may tempt people to do what is prohibited whereas they might never have thought of doing it if the ordinance forbidding it had not been brought to their attention', FFB, page 28. Market toast! 'One of my greatest difficulties, which I hadn't for one moment foreseen, is with discipline with the younger children. The second I tell them not to do something they immediately want to do it', Kirsty Magee, email of 25 January 2014.

⁹⁰ 'The law does not ... remove, but simply reveals, the evil in man's heart: just as a plumbline. It does not alter or improve man's nature or impart power to meet its demands'. D L Moody, Notes from my Bible, 1895.

⁹¹ What a grim situation faces fallen man. He cannot save himself, and the law cannot save him.

⁹² Quintus Horatius Flaccus (8 December 65 BC – 27 November 8 BC).

⁹³ Ars Poetica, lines 191-192.

⁹⁴ '*Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus incidit*'.

Compare the English translations by:

(i) Charles Anthon, 'Nor let any deity interfere, unless a difficulty present itself *worthy of a god's unravelling*', page 607.

(ii) Kline, 'No god should intervene *unless there is a problem that needs that solution*'.

(iii) Smart, 'Neither let a god interfere, unless a difficulty *worthy a god's unravelling* should happen'.

(iv) Fairclough, 'Let no god intervene, unless *a knot* come *worthy of such a deliverer*'.

(v) F F Bruce, 'Do not bring a god on to the stage, unless the problem is one that deserves a god to solve it', Romans, Tyndale, page 101.

The words are paraphrased by D M Baillie, '*A god must not be introduced* into the action unless the plot has got into such a tangle that only a God could unravel it', God was in Christ, page 171.

⁹⁵ H R Glover, Jesus in the Experience of Men, page 72. Compare F F Bruce's paraphrase, 'Luther took up these words and applied them to the forgiveness of sins: here, he said, is a problem which needs God to solve it (*nodus Deo vindice dignus*). True, for sinful man cannot solve it, though he desperately needs a solution to it', Romans, Tyndale, page 101.

⁹⁶ If there is salvation, it must come from God. Upon this dark, dreary background a righteous God now flashes forth the wonderful story of redeeming love.