

Romans and Paul's reference to the Tanakh with respect to Gentile inclusion:

Romans 15:1-12

1 We who are **strong** ought to bear with the failings of the **weak ('stumbling')** and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

4 **For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs

9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49)

10 Again, it says,

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." (Deut. 32:43)

11 And again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.:" (Psalm 117:1)

12 And again, Isaiah says,

"The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." (Isaiah 11:10) - (NIV)

This section of Paul's Letter to the Romans is pivotal in helping to appreciate how Paul understood the Hebrew Bible's prophecies regarding Gentile inclusion in the family of God, and how he saw Yeshua as central to these prophecies.

Firstly it is imperative that we appreciate his intended audience and the context into which he spoke. As explained in detail by Prof Mark D Nanos in 'The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters', and summarised in my short article "The Mystery of Romans: A Torah and Shema Centric View"; the 'strong' here are Gentile believers in Yeshua as the Messiah and 'the weak' (as Nanos explains this term is more properly translated 'the stumbling') and faithful Jews to do not, at this time, accept that Yeshua is the Messiah.

So Paul here is speaking to the 'strong', the Gentile believers and telling them that the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible (the only Scriptures that existed in Paul's day) contains truth from God to teach and encourage these Gentiles as well as the Jewish people to whom it was specifically given. This truth that he is sharing with regards the Gentiles is a confirmation of the promises given to the patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He then goes on to quote some five portions of the Tanakh (**Torah/Nevi'im/Ketuvim**) that relate to this truth. Interestingly as well, in doing so, Paul quotes from the Torah (Duet 32:43), the Prophets -Nevi'im (2 Sam 22:50 & Isaiah 11:10) and the Writings Ketuvim (Psalms 18:49; 117:1).

Let us consider each of them. First the quote as given in Romans and then it's wording in the Tanach and some comment:

Romans 14:9: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

2 Samuel 22:50:

50 *"For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.*
51 *Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever."*

Psalm 18:49:

"49 For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.
50 *Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever."*

Clearly Paul sees this *'praise among the nations'* as meaning that not only are the Jewish people praising God, but Gentiles are also praising God and thanking Him for the redemption He has instituted through his King; his Anointed, Son of David. Given the context of this reference, it would also seem clear that the King and anointed 'Son of David' or 'Mashiach ben David', is Yeshua.

Next Paul quotes from the famous 'Moses song' passage:

Romans 15:9 *"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."*

Deut. 32:43:

"Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land."

This passage is a prophecy from the Almighty to his Chosen People that if they turn from Him they will suffer terribly (for a season), but that ultimately God will restore His people and cleanse His Land (Israel). Note then, that Paul recognizes the nations ('O Heavens'), or Gentiles as also rejoicing at this time. Clearly those amongst the nations who persecuted the Chosen People will not be rejoicing as they are punished, but rather those who have been grafted into the family of God, through Yeshua will be rejoicing (while still remaining Gentiles for this prophecy to be valid).

Romans 15:11 *"And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."*

Psalms 117:1: *"Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!"*

Paul clearly saw in such passages that the God of Israel was also the God of the Gentiles. Perhaps before his encounter with the Risen Yeshua, he had wondered how the God of Israel could also be the God of the Gentiles. Until his revelation the Rabbis of his day, such as Hillel and Shammai, had thought that God-fearing Gentiles, while having a place in the Coming Age, needed to become Jews to be full and equal members of God's family.

Romans 15:12 *'And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."*

Isaiah 11:10:

10: *In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.*

11 *In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.*

12 *He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*

Romans 15:12 is perhaps the most informative of all these quotes from the Tanakh when we include verses 11 and 12 as well. It was quite common in Paul's day for the Jewish people to learn a great deal of Scripture off by heart and so that when a person mentioned one verse from a Book or Psalm, the hearers would recollect of the rest of the passage as well, as seek the relevance of the whole passage.

The classic example is the most quoted and alluded to verse from the Tanakh in the New Testament, Psalms 110:1. Whenever this verse was referred to it is quite clear that the whole Psalm would have come to mind and even been intended by the speaker.

It is also quite likely then, that Paul would have thought of at least these three verses 10-12 when he quoted verse 10 of Isaiah 11.

What we see here then is a prophecy (interestingly from the first section of Isaiah which speaks of the Kingly Messiah, rather than from Isaiah 40 on, where we read the prophecies principally based around the 'suffering Servant' or Messianic figure).

Note that this Jewish Messianic figure draws Gentiles to him and in some way 'rules' over them (to follow the ensign of a King was to accept his authority and government).

The next two verses relate to the return to the Land of Israel from the dispersion throughout all the nations of the world. This prophecy is being fulfilled in our lifetime!

We may well question how Yeshua is directly involved in this return as this stage, though it is clear that there was, and is, considerable support from some Gentile followers of Yeshua for this miracle of our times.

In the final phase of this end time return event, we can expect the Messiah to play a much greater role, especially as the Kingly Messiah of Isaiah 11.

In summary then, in witnessing the great move of Gentiles coming to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah and coming into the community of Israel; sharing in the community life of the synagogue, etc., Paul saw these prophecies being fulfilled before his very eyes! Thus it appears he then concluded that it was Yeshua's crucifixion and resurrection that was the turning point, the apocalyptic event that enabled this great end-times fulfillment to begin.

As I have stated elsewhere, Paul believed that God's adoption of the Gentiles was to precede the restoration of Israel (including the full return from exile and re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel).

Therefore Paul believed that God had temporarily hardened the hearts of many Israelites to the truth regarding Yeshua as the Messiah so that Paul's mission to the Gentiles could first be accomplished. It is important also to repeat that a hardening or 'stumbling' is not a 'falling' (to destruction). That is, these Israelites have not lost their place in the Kingdom, but have only lost the opportunity to share in the joy and great privilege of this climatic end-time event.

This hardening of Israel for a time is clearly laid out in the 'Olive Tree' analogy (Romans 9-11 and specifically 11:11-32), but is further exemplified in Romans 8 where he makes a reference to Psalms 44, as if to suggest that the 'stumbling' of some of Israel is not due to their unrighteousness but is rather God ordained for the very purpose of bringing the Gentiles in. Paul then applies the same language to the 'stumbling' of Israel that he used to describe Yeshua's death. See for example, Romans 8:32-33 *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?"*

What is the significance of this? Surely, just as Yeshua rose again so will Israel. Just as these individual Israelites in Rome may have 'stumbled' in not recognizing Yeshua as the Messiah, the Almighty still plans to justify them as they are His elect!

It was also vital then that these Gentiles believers in Rome continued to respect the Jewish authorities and community through which they had learned the truth of the One God and His Messiah. If they did not act in accordance with the expectations of the Jewish community they were now a part of, the 'stumbling' Jews would most likely reject this whole event as a move of God; reject Yeshua as Messiah; and reject that the 'restoration of all things' was about to take place (and as a result their 'stumbling' may result in

'falling' and destruction).

While there is some evidence that Gentile followers of Yeshua in Rome did maintain allegiance to the Jewish communities and synagogues at least up to the middle of the second century CE., the degree of allegiance to the purity laws, to the Sabbath and festivals, may not have been as great, or widespread as desired by Paul.

With the turning away from the Jewish communities in which these Gentiles has been nurtured, the second stage of Paul's end time scenario was impaired and it appears suspended.

This may even be part of the explanation as to why the return from the great dispersion has only begun in the last century, and therefore why the inauguration of the Coming Age has not yet occurred.

I like the way Richard B. Hays sums this up in his *'Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul'* (p 71):
"Clearly, he (Paul) has saved his clinchers for the end. After much allusive and labored argumentation, Paul finally draws back the curtain and reveals a collection of passages that explicitly embody his vision for... Jews and Gentiles glorifying God together.... All pointing to the eschatological consummation in which Gentiles join in the worship of Israel's God: truly the Law and the Prophets are brought forward here as witnesses." (cited by Nanos in 'The Mystery of Romans' p 435)

(For a more detailed discussion of Paul's vision here I again recommend 'The Mystery of Romans' by Mark Nanos).

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