**Paul's Letter to the Romans:**

**"OUR DILEMMA: GOD'S SOLUTION"**

**Chapter 11:1-24**

***“Blinded By The Light”***

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chooled as a logician and lawyer, and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this letter to Christ’s followers in 1st century Rome, Paul produces God’s tutorial to explain how life works.

Romans zooms in on the nexus between God and man, revealing what God wants us to know about sin and salvation.

About 200 B.C. Yin and Yang appeared, representing not good or evil, but opposites (e.g., Richard Clarke and Condoleezza Rice).

Unable to exist without each other, Yin and Yang seek a perfect balance between nature’s great forces. But God hates sin, is the Author of salvation, and sees good and evil as engaged in spiritual warfare, certainly not co-existing in any “perfect balance.”

***Romans Recycled***

**Ch. 1’s** “bad news” is that every human is born estranged from God because of Adam’s first sin, leaving all of us accountable to Him, “without excuse” (Romans 1:20). **Ch. 2** says even if you’re “religious” and try to appease God by keeping His 10 Commandments, that’s not enough.

In **ch. 3** we see that nobody even *seeks* God, and that we’ve all flunked His “entrance exam” (Romans 3:10, 23). Paul reminds his Jewish readers in **ch. 4** that even Abraham was accepted by God on the basis of his faith, just as we are today (Romans 4:3, 20-25).

**Ch. 5** unveils two watersheds: (1) ***Adam’s sin doomed us all***, but ***Christ’s death ransomed us all*** from sin’s eternal torture in a literal, blazing lake the Bible calls “hell;” and (2) those who accept this by faith will instantly be square with God (Romans 5:1, 18, 19).

Since the believer’s sins (past, present and future) have been forgiven at the cross, Paul asks rhetorically in **ch. 6**, “Why don’t we put God’s grace to the test and just party?” “No way!” he snorts, exhorting us to take the higher road in this life-changing adventure with Christ (Romans 6:1-5).

In **ch. 7** Paul “outs” the inner battle every believer has with wanting to do right, yet veering from the path (Romans 7:21-24). But Paul says Christ knows our struggle, that one day He’ll free us from it, and ‘til then He won’t hold our sins against us (Romans 7:25, 8:1)!

In **ch. 8** we learn that God takes the good and the bad that enters the believer’s life and uses it to form Christlike character in us (Romans 8:28-29). Absolutely nothing can ever drive a wedge between Christ and His kids (Romans 8:38-39, John 10:28, 11:26).

In chs. 9-11 Paul deals with Israel, history’s odd man out, and its temporary tumble from being God’s “Teacher’s Pet.” We see its current and future role in God’s master plan, and discover that the Gentiles were moved up to the head of the line alongside the Jews to receive God’s *direct* blessing, a spot once held exclusively by Israel.

Why for 40+ centuries has there been such bitter hatred for the Jews? It stems from sibling rivalry between Abraham’s sons, Ishmael and Isaac. “Ish,” born to Sarah’s servant Hagar, became founder of the Arab race. “Ike,” supernaturally born to Sarah who was barren ‘til age 90, headed up the newly-formed Jewish race into which the Son of God was born forty generations later.

Today Ishmael’s and Isaac’s descendants are still warring over territory which God pledged to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and -- with its very borders defined -- to Moses (Genesis 15:1-7, Numbers 34:1-15).

Turning from addressing our *individual* sin and salvation, Paul now highlights God’s strategem for the *nations*. **Ch. 9** states that the Jews took a pass on Christ as their Messiah, so God let them become calloused toward Him. They chose *self-righteousness by works* instead of receiving *God’s righteousness by faith* (Romans 9:30-33).

In **ch. 10** Paul says when it comes to pleasing God, zeal alone doesn’t cut it (Romans 10:2, 3, 9, 10, 13). With God having temporarily set aside Israel as a nation, where does this leave this enigmatic people? **Let’s read Romans 11:1-24 (page 843).**

***Grace and Law: Making Sense or Slaw?***

Ch. 11 asks: (1) is personal salvation off the table now for a Jew? And (2) has God permanently ditched Israel as His favored nation?”

To answer with contextual, biblical integrity, we best sidestep the notion that God abruptly changed gears with man between the Old and New Testaments. If not, we’re stuck with a tossed salad of His separate programs of Law and Grace (2 Corinthians 3:7-11).

God’s Law program, centered on Israel, offered to set up His kingdom on earth. The Jews nixed it, but it’ll happen when Christ returns to win the last great war (Armageddon) at the close of the “Tribulation” (Jeremiah 30, Daniel 9:20-27, Matthew 25:31-46).

The Grace program (the “mystery” or “secret”) was intro’d not in the O.T., but by Christ to Paul (Romans 16:25-26). Here’s the mystery: when Christ was crucified, God set aside the Jewish approach that all men could only come to God via temple worship, Moses’ Law and religious rituals. God no longer makes His home in a building, but in believers’ hearts (Acts 7:48, Colossians 1:27).

Jesus defined His earth mission: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). But after Christ’s resurrection Paul told the Jews in Turkey, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46-48).

Since that time, under Grace ALL people enter God’s “forever family” based solely on their faith that Jesus’ death totally paid the penalty for our sins. Those “born again” during this Grace age will accompany Christ directly to heaven when He returns prior to “The Great Tribulation,” your humble servant believes (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Referred to as “The Rapture,” this was not predicted in the O.T., but revealed by Christ only to Paul.

God used Paul to intro this current Grace era, inviting all -- regardless of race, rank or gender -- to come to Him direct through Christ, not via intermediaries (Galatians 3:1-29, 1 Timothy 2:5).

As O.T. prophets foretold, Israel reappears at center stage when Christ returns to deport Satan forever, ushering in global peace. It’s crucial to differentiate between God’s two programs (2 Timothy 2:15). If not, the Bible may seem full of contradictions. But as Augustine said in the 4th century, “Distinguish the dispensations (programs), and all is easy.” (Hebrews 13:8, John 14:6)!

***Is Israel Down For The Count?***

***Romans 11:1-6***

Israel as a nation is “thumbs down” on Jesus, but there’s hope for individual Jews. Despite once hating, stalking and terrorizing Christ’s folks, Paul’s spiritual blindness ceased when God changed his heart, giving him new life in Christ -- proof that some Jews, if but a few, will embrace Jesus as their promised Messiah.

About 860 B.C. after boldly proving that Jehovah, not the pagan god Baal, is the one true God, the prophet Elijah panicked, thinking he was the only God-fearing Hebrew left. But out of some two million-plus Jews, 7,000 had remained loyal to Jehovah (1 Kings 19:14-18).

Today out of 14 million Jews worldwide, only an estimated 30,000 to 125,000 are Jesus followers. Their ancient traditions teach them to view Jesus as an impostor, even a bastard. But against huge odds, God, in His love and grace, has sought and saved a handful!

***So Near, Yet So Far***

***Romans 11:7-10***

Despite striving for God’s okay, most Jews mistakenly rely on their own efforts to “be good.” They heard Truth from John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, John, James, from Paul, and later from the whole Bible itself. Yet they’ve turned down God’s offer for so long, it’s virtually impossible for them to “get it.” The Bible says this sad state seems to accompany repeated expressions of unbelief.

One rabbi wrote, “Paul claimed that obedience to the Torah (the Law) could not guarantee salvation; rather, salvation was obtainable only through acceptance of and faith in Christ Jesus. … We Jews have rejected this Gentile Christian view. Man by himself possesses the power to atone for his own misdeeds ….”

Truth is always to be acted on. Serial rejection causes “blindness.” The outwardly religious and well-off are very susceptible to this “snare and trap” (Matthew 19:24, Psalm 69:22-23).

***The Olive Tree And The Pits***

***Romans 11:11-24***

One day Israel will become a 100% godly nation as His beacon of righteousness to the world. Paul gives five reasons why:

1. God set Israel aside in order to offer salvation directly to Gentiles. In so doing, God intends to make Jews envious to seek Christ for themselves. This is what He’s doing now!
2. Israel will ultimately return to God as His conduit for worldwide blessing. Check it out: wherever the Gospel is freely told, without intimidation, you’ll find a free nation.
3. A few thousand Jews (“firstfruits”) out of all Israel (“the lump”) accepted Christ right after His resurrection, just as Abraham (“the root”) had believed God by faith. Thus this route to God has been trailblazed for all Jews.
4. The olive tree (those related to God by faith) has some Jews “broken off” from God because they rejected Christ, allowing Gentiles (“wild olive shoots”) to be grafted into God’s family. If Gentiles thrive as grafts, imagine how Israel (“natural branches”) will bloom when grafted back into God’s program!
5. Paul says if you come to God as a sinner, desperate without Him, you’ll be welcomed by His “kindness.” But spurn His generous offer, and you’ll run afoul of His “sternness.”

God spoke through O.T. prophet Zechariah, saying that in the Tribulation two-thirds of all Jews will be killed, but **ALL** of the remaining remnant will put their faith in Christ, realizing He’d been crucified for them (Zechariah 13:19, Matthew 24-21-22).

Then God will place this prodigal nation back at the center of His program to bring peace and righteousness to the whole earth. James, one of Jesus’ earthly siblings, reminds us, “God sets Himself against the proud, but He shows favor to the humble. So humble yourselves before God” (James 4:6-7).

God’s warning to non-Jewish nations (not to individuals!) is this: He will end this current Grace program without any “last chance” warnings. This will happen, Paul says, when Christ returns (the Rapture) to take His followers to heaven to be with Him always. Next stop for those left behind….the Tribulation. As we discovered when we studied Revelation, that’s not a sunny, 7-year forecast.

***Reasons To Believe***

Bruce Springsteen wrote “Blinded By The Light,” real musical mouthwash, with apologies to Don McLean. He also wrote “Reason To Believe.” 2,000 years ago were the Jewish elite and Roman occupiers blinded by the One who said, “I am the Light?” Hadn’t He given them this reason to believe: “Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” to die "for our sins" (1 Timothy 1:15, 1 Corinthians 15:3).

That means you and I can have peace with God now, and beyond death (Hebrews 4:16, 10:19-22). God tells us what we need to know about sin and salvation. He actually wants to live in you! If that smacks of Truth to you, please act on it. Just tell Him now:

“God, You’ve put a lot more thought into my life than I have. You even had Your own Son die for my sins. I now believe this, God, so here’s my life. Please take over as my Lord and Savior, and I’ll thank You by surrendering my pride, and receiving You now. Amen.”

His Deal

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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