

## Romans 9

### A. Paul's heart for Israel.

#### Chapter 9 brings a slight shift in focus to the Book of Romans.

a. In Romans chapters one through eight, Paul thoroughly convinced us about man's need and God's glorious provision in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

b. Now, in Romans 9 through 11, Paul deals with the problem associated with the condition of Israel. What does it mean that Israel has missed its Messiah? What does this say about God? What does it say about Israel? What does it say about our present position in God?

i. The question goes something like this: How can I be secure in God's love and salvation to me when it seems that Israel was once loved and saved, but now seems to be rejected and cursed? Will God also reject and curse me one day?

ii. "These three chapters are part of the way he makes plain how God in fact saves people." (Morris)

#### **Vs. 1-2** - *Paul's sorrow.*

**I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.**

a. In Romans 8 Paul left us at the summit of glory, assuring us that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So why has Paul now become so somber in his tone?

b. **I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit:** Paul uses every possible assurance to declare his great sorrow over Israel. This is something that really bothered Paul and was on his heart.

c. **I have sorrow and continual grief:** Paul feels this because he considers a people who rejected God's Messiah – unbelieving Israel.

#### **Vs. 3-5** - *The source of Paul's sorrow.*

**For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.**

a. This is a dramatic declaration of Paul's great love and sorrow for his brethren. Paul says he himself is willing to be separated from Jesus if that could somehow accomplish the salvation of Israel.

i. This great passion for souls gave Paul perspective. Lesser things did not trouble him because he was troubled by a great thing – the souls of men.

b. **I could wish that I myself were accursed:** Paul reflects the same heart Moses had in Exodus 32 Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."

i. Of course Paul also shows the heart of Jesus, who was cursed on behalf of others that they might be saved (Galatians 3:13).

ii. We should remember that when it came to ministry, the Jews were Paul's worst enemies. They harassed and persecuted him from town to town, stirring up lies and violence against him. Yet he still loved them this passionately.

c. **The adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the services of God, and the promises:** The pain Paul feels for his lost brethren is all the more severe when he considers how God has blessed them with all the privileges of being His own special people.

i. **The glory** speaks of God's Shekinah glory, the visible "cloud of glory" showing God's presence among His people.

d. **Of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came:** Paul also considers the legacy of being God's chosen people. Israel not only gave us the great **fathers** of the Old Testament, but Jesus Himself came from Israel. This entire spiritual legacy makes Israel's unbelief all the more problematic.

e. **Christ... who is over all, the eternally blessed God, Amen:** This is one of Paul's clear statements that Jesus is God.

i. Wuest, quoting Robertson: "[This is a] clear statement of the deity of Christ following the remark about His humanity.

**B. Why Israel is in its present condition from God's perspective: Israel missed the Messiah because it was according to God's sovereign plan.**

**Vs. 6-9** - *Has God failed with His plan regarding Israel? No; God has not failed His children of promise.*

**But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."**

a. **It is not that the word of God has taken no effect:** Paul thinks of someone looking at Israel and saying, "God's word didn't come through for them. How do I know that He will come through for me?" Paul answers the question by asserting that **it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.**

b. **For they are not all Israel who are of Israel:** One meaning of the name **Israel** is "governed by God." Paul says here that not all **Israel** is really "governed by God." Did God's word fail? No; instead, **they are not all** governed by God **who are of Israel.**

*"Paul tells us that no one is truly Israel unless he is governed by God. We have a parallel situation with the word 'Christian.' Not everyone who is called a Christian is truly a follower of Christ."* (Smith)

c. **The children of the promise are counted as the seed:** God's word didn't fail, because God still reaches His **children of the promise**, which may or may not be the same as physical Israel.

i. Paul shows that merely being the descendant of Abraham saves no one. For example, Ishmael was just as much a son of Abraham as Isaac was; but Ishmael was a son according to the flesh, and Isaac was a son according to the promise (**At this time I will come and Sarah will have a son**). One was the heir of God's covenant of salvation, and one was not. Isaac stands for the **children of the promise** and Ishmael stands for the **children of the flesh.**

### **Vs. 10-13**

**And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."**

a. **Our father Isaac:** God's choice between Ishmael and Isaac seems somewhat illogical to us. It's a lot harder to understand why God chose Jacob to be the heir of God's covenant of salvation instead of Esau. We might not understand it as easily, but God's choice is just as valid.

b. **Not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil:** Paul points out that God's choice was not based on the performance of Jacob or Esau. The choice was made before they were born.

c. **That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls:** So we do not think that God chose Jacob over Esau because He knew their works in advance, Paul points out that it was **not of works**. Instead, the reason for choosing was found in **Him who calls**.

d. **The older shall serve the younger:** God announced these intentions to Rebecca before the children were born, and He repeated His verdict long after Jacob and Esau had both passed from the earth (**Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated**).

i. God's preference could rightly be regarded as a display of **love** towards Jacob and **hate** towards Esau.

ii. All in all, we see that Esau was a blessed man (Genesis 33:8-16, Genesis 36). God hated Esau in regard to inheriting the covenant, not in regard to blessing in this life or the next.

*"A woman once said to Mr. Spurgeon, 'I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.' Spurgeon replied, 'That is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob.'"* (Newell)

v. Our greatest error in considering the choices of God is to think that God chooses in an "eeny-meeny-miny-moe" kind of way. We may not be able to fathom God's reasons for choosing, and they are reasons He alone knows, but God's choices are not arbitrary. He has a plan and a reason.

**Vs. 14-16** - *Does God's choice of one over another make God unrighteous?*

**What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.**

a. **Is there unrighteousness with God?** Paul answers this question strongly: **Certainly not!** God clearly explains His right to give mercy to whomever He pleases in Exodus 33:19.

b. **I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy:** Remember what **mercy** is. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve. God is never less than fair with anyone, but fully reserves the right to be more than fair as He chooses.

- i. Jesus spoke of this right of God in the parable of the landowner in Matthew 20:1-16.
  - ii. We are in a dangerous place when we regard God's mercy towards us as our right. If God is obliged to show mercy, then it is not mercy – it is obligation.
- c. **So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy:** God's mercy is not given to us because of what we wish to do (**him who wills**), or because of what we actually do (**him who runs**), but simply out of His desire to show mercy.

**Vs. 17-18** - *The example of Pharaoh.*

**For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.**

- a. God allowed Pharaoh in the days of Moses to rise to power so that God could show the strength of His judgment against Pharaoh, and thereby glorify Himself.
- b. **Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens:** Sometimes God will glorify Himself through showing mercy; sometimes God will glorify Himself through a man's hardness.
- i. We should not think that God persuaded an unwilling, kind-hearted Pharaoh to be hard towards God and Israel. In hardening the heart of Pharaoh, God simply allowed Pharaoh's heart to pursue its natural inclination.
- c. **He hardens:** We know that Pharaoh did harden his own heart, according to Exodus 7:13, 7:22, 8:15, 8:19, **8:32**, 9:7, and **9:34**.

**Vs. 19-21** - *Does God's right to choose relieve man of responsibility?*

**You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?**

- a. Paul imagines someone asking, "If it is all a matter of God's choice, then how can God find fault with me? How can anyone go against God's choice?"
- b. **Indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?** If God says He chooses, and if God also says that we are responsible before Him, who are we to question Him?
- c. **Does not the potter have power over the clay:** Does not God have the same right that any Creator has over his creation? Therefore, if God declares that we have an eternal responsibility before Him, then it is so.

**Vs. 22-24** - *Doesn't God have the right to glorify Himself as He sees fit?*

**What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?**

a. **What if God:** Again, the same principle from God's dealing with Pharaoh is repeated. If God chooses to glorify Himself through letting people go their own way and letting them righteously receive His wrath so as to **make His power known**, who can oppose Him?

b. **He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy:** As well, if God desires to be more than fair with others, showing them His mercy, who can oppose Him?

c. **But also of the Gentiles:** And if God wants to show mercy to the Gentiles as well as the Jews (of course, never being less than fair to either), who can oppose Him?

*"The Jews were inclined to think that God could not make them anything other than vessels of honor. Paul rejects this view and points out that God does what he wills."* (Morris)

d. **Vessels of wrath prepared for destruction:** Paul does not say that God has prepared them for destruction. Those vessels do an adequate job on their own.

**Vs. 25-26** - *The prophet Hosea (in Hosea 2:23 and 1:10) declares God's right to choose, calling those who previously were not called, His people.*

**As He says also in Hosea:**

**"I will call them My people, who were not My people,  
And her beloved, who was not beloved."  
And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,  
'You are not My people,'  
There they shall be called sons of the living God."**

a. These passages from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 show the mercy of God. God told the prophet Hosea to name one of his children Lo-Ammi, meaning "Not My People." Yet God also promised that this judgment would not last forever. One day Israel will be restored and once again be called **sons of the living God**.

**Vs. 27-29** - *Isaiah (in Isaiah 10:22-23 and 1:9) declares God's right to choose a remnant among Israel for salvation.*

**Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel:**

**"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea,  
The remnant will be saved."**

**For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,  
Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.”**

**And as Isaiah said before:**

**“Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed,  
We would have become like Sodom,  
And we would have been made like Gomorrah.”**

a. **The remnant will be saved:** The passage quoted from Isaiah 10:22-23 speaks first to God’s work in saving a remnant from the coming Assyrian destruction. The suffering of God’s people at the hands of the Assyrians and others would make them feel as if they would certainly be destroyed. God assures them that this is not the case. He will always preserve His **remnant**.

i. God has always dealt with a **remnant**. *“It was foolish to think that, since the whole nation had not entered the blessing, the promise of God had failed. The promise had not been made to the whole nation and had never been intended to apply to the whole nation.”* (Morris)

b. **We would have become like Sodom:** Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed in judgment. This quotation from Isaiah 1:9 shows that as bad as Judah’s state was because of their sin, it could have been worse. It was only by the mercy of God that they survived at all. **Sodom** and **Gomorrah** were both totally destroyed, with not even a **very small remnant** to carry on. Even in the midst of judgment, God showed His mercy to Judah.

i. The merciful promise is clear: “But if only a remnant will survive, at least a remnant will survive, and constitute the hope of restoration.” (Bruce)

**C. Why Israel is in its present condition from man’s perspective: Israel missed the Messiah because they refuse to come by faith.**

**Vs. 30-31** - *Analyzing the present situation of Israel and the Gentiles according to a human perspective.*

**What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.**

a. **Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness:** By all appearances the Gentiles found righteousness even though it did not seem that they really looked for it.

b. **But Israel... has not attained to the law of righteousness:** By all appearances Israel seemed to work for the righteousness of God with everything it had, but did not find it.



c. **Attained to righteousness... not attained:** What was the difference? Why did the unlikely Gentiles find righteousness, when the likely Jews did not? Because the Gentiles pursued **the righteousness of faith**, and the Jews pursued **the law of righteousness**. The Gentiles who were saved came to God through faith, receiving His righteousness. The Jews who seem to be cast off from God tried to justify themselves before God by performing works according to **the law of righteousness**.

**Vs. 32-33** - *Paul emphasizes the reason why Israel seems cast off from God's goodness and righteousness: Because they did not seek it by faith.*

**Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written:**

**“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,  
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”**

a. **Because they did not seek it by faith:** We might expect Paul to answer the question **“Why?”** again from God's perspective, and simply throw the matter back on God's sovereign choice. Instead, he places the responsibility on Israel: **Because they did not seek it by faith... they stumbled at that stumbling stone.**

i. Paul has already shown in Romans that the only possible way to be saved is through faith, not the works of the law; and that this salvation comes only through the work of a crucified Savior – which was a stumbling block to Israel (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).

b. **For they stumbled at that stumbling stone:** Paul shows that Israel is responsible for their present condition. Question: Has he contradicted everything he has previously said, which emphasized God's sovereign plan? Of course not, he simply presents the problem from the other side of the coin – the side of human responsibility, instead of the side of God's sovereign choice.