

Romans

Bible Study

Perspective on Israel's Past

Romans 9:1—13

The book of Romans can be divided up into sections. The first section, chapters 1 through the middle of Chapter 3, deals with mankind's sinful and hopeless condition. Man is born into a state of **condemnation** and is completely helpless when it comes to removing sin and making him acceptable before God. The solution is found in chapters 3—5, which deals with **justification**, the imputation of righteousness to all who come to God by faith. We are sinners, yet God is willing to declare anyone to be righteous if they believe in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The next section of Romans is found in chapters 6—8 and deals with our **sanctification**. After we are saved, we now need to understand what is expected of us and how we should act. Sanctification is about separating ourselves from the world and unto God's service. This section of Romans gives us the information we need to live a life pleasing to God. Paul then does an aside, in chapters 9—11, by speaking directly to Israel about the new **dispensation** of Grace and how it has affected the nation of Israel. Paul ends Romans with a section on practical **application**. He takes everything we have learned in the previous sections and gives us some very practical ways to apply this knowledge.

All the things that Paul teaches in Romans 1—8 concern the Church, the Body of Christ. Here Paul shows that believers are no longer under the Mosaic Law, but instead can come to God through faith alone without works (Romans 3:28; Titus 3:5). This is a major departure since Israel was required to do works to show their faith (James 2:18—20; Acts 10:35). Paul steps away temporarily to address Israelites about how God is working in this new program of Grace because there were many Jews who would be reading the letter to the churches at Rome, and they needed to understand how it was going to affect the nation of Israel. These next three chapters show Israel's past state (Chapter 9), her present state (chapter 10) and her future restoration in spite of a temporarily paused program (chapter 11).

Israel's past (verses 1—5)

Instead of continuing his train thought, Paul breaks for the next three chapters to talk about Israel and the dispensational changes that are happening that directly affect the nation of Israel. These chapters are a parenthesis to what Paul was teaching concerning the Church, the Body of Christ. As he focuses on the nation of Israel, he explains why God put a halt to their Kingdom plans as part of his explanation about the formation of the Body of Christ and the revelation of the Mystery.

He begins by agonizing over Israel's condition because of their rejection of Jesus Christ. He has great heaviness and sorrow over his fellow Israelites. They had every blessing and opportunity given to them by God, yet they refused to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Messiah. They had the adoption, which gave them the opportunity to be full sons of God and the giving of their full inheritance on earth (Hosea 1:10—11). They were given the glory of God which was revealed through them and to no other nation (Exodus 40:34). They were also glorified above all other nations because God dwelt with them. They had the covenants (Abrahamic: Genesis 17:2—7; Mosaic: Deuteronomy 11; Palestinian: Deuteronomy 30:1—10; Davidic: 2 Samuel 7:8—16; New: Jeremiah 31:31—34), the giving of the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 4:13—49), the temple service detailing how they were to worship and serve God (Deuteronomy 10:12; Ezekiel 20:40; Isaiah 44:21) and promises of the future kingdom, inheritance and blessings when they faithfully obeyed God (Leviticus 26:3—13). On top of that, God used Israel to bring Jesus Christ into the world. In spite of all of these advantages, Israel turned away from God following their own desires.

This is why Paul had so agonized over Israel, perhaps even to the point of wishing himself accursed. I believe verse 3 can be understood in a couple of different ways. The first and most common understanding is that Paul would willingly trade his own eternal life for the lives of his brethren, much like when Moses had asked the Lord to blot his name out of the book of life if God were to blot out the nation of Israel. However, Paul would be trading his spiritual eternity for the eternal life of his brethren whereas Moses was asking God to blot his name out if God were to destroy Israel. Paul was trading his life for theirs while Moses was identifying his eternal destination with Israel.

I think it actually makes more sense to see that Paul is speaking of a time when he was not saved and was concerned that many Jews were following Jesus. The tense of the Greek word indicates that he was *wishing* (in the past) himself to be accursed from Christ for the sake of his brethren. It seems he was desirous of saving the Jews from the dangerous doctrine preached by Jesus, whom he viewed as someone who was turning people away from Judaism. He was accursed from Christ, doing everything he could to cut off Christ, in order to save his people from what he perceived to be heretical teaching. Whether he is speaking of a time before or after his conversion, we know that it is now his longing that all Israelites come to understand who Jesus Christ is, and that He is the only means of salvation.

Although Israel was the favored nation through whom God was revealing Himself to the whole world, they rejected that position. Israel was to be the conduit through whom the world would hear the salvation message. When they refused to do that, God advanced His plans and went directly to the Gentiles through the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 2:11—18). In the past, Gentiles were not able to come to God individually but needed to go through the nation of Israel.

Did God fail? (verses 6—13)

Since God had given Israel the covenants and the promises and now Paul is seemingly teaching that they lost these things, has God failed to live up to His word? This is the question that Paul anticipates as people see God moving away from Israel and favoring the Gentiles in His dealing with the world. Obviously, it wasn't God who has failed to live up to His end of the bargain, it was Israel's failure in not grabbing a hold of what God had offered her. Israel rejected God by trying to reach Him through their own works of righteousness (Romans 9:32). Paul is demonstrating that God did everything possible to bring Israel to Himself, but that Israel, time after time, had turned aside to go her own way.

First, Paul makes it clear that just because you have been born Jewish does not automatically make you a true Israelite. True Israel is composed of believing Jews, sometimes called the Little Flock (Luke 12:32), or the remnant (Isaiah 10:20—21; Romans 9:27). Just as all of the offspring of Abraham are not considered Israel, those who are not born from above are not of true Israel. Only the children of promise are counted as being from the seed of Israel.

Election (verses 11—13)

As Paul defines true Israel, he shows how God had chosen the line of Isaac for His service, over and above descendants from the line of Esau. Many take this passage as a proof-text for being elect unto salvation. God loves Isaac and chose him while hating Esau and therefore does not choose him. A little digging into the Old Testament makes it clear that this passage does not deal with individuals, but with nations (Genesis 25:23). Malachi 1:1—4 gives us more insight into why God hates Esau. The Edomites, descendants of Esau, were evil and therefore hated by God. God promises that the nation coming out of Esau would be beaten down because of their wickedness. God elected the nation coming from Isaac to serve Him while electing the nation coming out of Esau to serve Israel. Attempting to make this passage about election by God unto salvation force-fits Scripture into preconceived doctrine. Doctrine must be built on the foundation of Scripture, rightly divided.

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