

Romans

Bible Study

Israel's Past Romans 9:6—29

Always keep in mind, as you study the book of Romans, that chapters nine through eleven deal with Israel and not with the Church, the Body of Christ. However, it's important to understand that Paul is not dealing with Israel as a nation, as Peter was doing, but with individuals within the nation of Israel. Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, and Peter and the Disciples all dealt with Israel as a nation. They were getting her ready to go into the Millennial Kingdom and take her role in ruling over the world. Unfortunately, they failed in identifying Jesus as their Messiah, and instead of proclaiming Him to all of Israel, and ultimately to the rest of the world, they turned away from Him and did everything possible to rid themselves of any trace of Jesus and His followers. In spite of that, God continued to work with Israel under their prophetic dispensation until they rejected the witness of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Stephen. Once they put him to death, God temporarily turned away from working with Israel, and raised up the Apostle Paul to bring the message of Grace to the world. Instead of using Israel to reach the world, God began to work around them since they failed in their election of serving Him.

The book of Romans was written to establish the believer in the doctrine of Grace (Romans 1:11). This doctrine was revealed to the Apostle Paul as the Mystery, a doctrine hidden from mankind since the beginning of time, and finally revealed through the Apostle Paul (Romans 16:24—25). This important change in how God is now dealing with mankind meant that Israel had to come to an understanding of what God was now doing. The Little Flock of Jewish believers was especially affected since they were anticipating that Jesus Christ would come back and establish the promised earthly Kingdom. It's been 20 years, or so, since Jesus and the Disciples were preaching that the Kingdom was at hand. It should have been established by now, and these believers were concerned because all things were continuing on as always with no Kingdom in sight. There were scoffers, at that time, who were mocking the believers for thinking they would become major players in this hoped-for Kingdom (2 Peter 3:3—4; 8—10).

With all these dispensational changes happening, and with Paul focused exclusively on the Church, the Body of Christ in the past eight chapters of Romans, it was necessary for him to step back and show the Kingdom believers in Rome exactly what God was doing, and why. He does this by first showing them how Israel got in this situation (chapter 9), and then he explains how they fit into God's plan in this Age of Grace (chapter 10). Paul then assures them that God is not done with the nation of Israel. There will come a time when God puts aside the Gentiles, and once again puts Israel into a position of favor. God will use Israel to fulfill all of the Old Testament promises, and bring His ultimate plans concerning Israel to completion (chapter 11). We will now take a closer look at Chapter 9, which gives historical perspective as to why Israel has not yet been given the Kingdom.

True Israel (verses 6—13)

The last two lessons looked at who a true Jew is. Physically, it's not everyone who came out of Abraham, since he bore other children who were not in the line of Isaac and Jacob. However, God defines true Israel as those who have come to Him by faith, the children of the promise (Romans 9:8). There are many who take verses like this and try to force-fit the church into them. This is why it is important to understand that Paul is not speaking directly to the Church in these three chapters. Paul is specifically addressing believing Israelites who were waiting for the promised Kingdom.

These verses explain how God decided to select a particular person to produce a large nation. His election of Israel was done to have them serve Him. It was through Israel that God would eventually reveal Himself to the world. Election must be understood to be about service, and this passage is about nations, not individuals.

Is God unrighteous? (verses 14—18)

Is it fair that God chooses one group over another? This is the question that Paul anticipates will be asked after saying that God chose Jacob over Esau. Paul's answer to this is that God has mercy on whom He wants to show mercy. This goes back to Exodus 33:19 when God passed by Moses to reveal His glory. Before this, God became angry with Israel for forming and worshiping the golden calf, and He hid His face from them because He would have destroyed them if He had confronted them (Exodus 33:20). However, Moses had found favor with God, and therefore He showed grace and mercy toward him.

Paul is now using this verse and this incident to show how Israel had turned away from God, and God then turned away temporarily from the nation of Israel to raise up Paul and simultaneously form the Church, the Body of Christ. God is righteous (right) in all that He does because it is His character to be righteous (always doing the right thing). He acts righteously because He is righteous (Ezra 9:15; Nehemiah 9:33; Daniel 9:7). Since He is righteous, He is always just and fair.

Pharaoh is another example, given in Romans 9, of how God is able to use someone for His own purpose. He is not a cruel God who enjoys causing problems to those who don't do as He says. Instead, He gives people, nations and those he elects ample opportunity to do what they are called to do. Pharaoh had plenty of warning to do what God demanded, but he hardened his own heart against God until God finally hardened his heart, allowing him to go in the direction he insisted upon going. Pharaoh's refusing to comply with God's demands was used by God to declare His name to the world (Exodus 9:16).

When God chose Israel, she was chosen to eventually carry His plan of salvation to the world. Once Israel refused to do what she was elected to do, God changed how He was dealing with mankind by putting Israel on the back burner and using the Gentile nations to carry out His plans. God has changed how He deals with mankind throughout the centuries a number of times (dispensations). For Him to put Israel aside and go directly to the Gentiles should not be shocking since we see that pattern in the past. God does not need to act according to how man thinks He should act. God is able to use any man or nation to accomplish His purpose.

Can Israel be blamed? (verses 19—29)

Paul addresses the next obvious question that would be asked. If God were going to do whatever He decided anyway, then how can Israel be blamed for failing to do what God wanted them to do? If God wants something, it will happen.

First, Paul asked how arrogant it is to question God and what He is doing. The problem is in the attitude of the person asking the question, not in the question itself. How is it possible for the clay pot to question its maker's purpose in forming one pot to honor and one to dishonor? The Gentiles were in a place of dishonor when God was dealing with Israel (Ephesians 2:12). Gentiles were excluded from the blessings that were given to Israel, and they were without hope. Now the tables have been turned. Israel is now in a place of dishonor and the Gentiles have been raised up. The Potter can do as He pleases.

This is nothing new to the nation of Israel because God has at various times put Israel into a place of dishonor. Paul takes us back to Hosea the prophet, who was told to marry a prostitute, which was a picture of Israel and God. Israel went after other gods, and it was said that she was playing the harlot (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1, 6, 8; Ezekiel 16:15—16). God declares Israel to be "Not My people" when she turned away from God. However, there will come a time when Israel will be called "Children of the living God." This will happen at the Second Coming when Israel is ushered into the Millennial Kingdom. Paul uses this passage in Hosea 1 to show how God will at times put Israel on the back burner, just as he is now doing in this Dispensation of Grace.

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