



“It is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:33).

The Gospel Rejected by Israel

Central Truth: Those who reject Christ are condemned.

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God chose a people who did not choose Him. How strange! He set His love on national Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7, 8). His purpose was to bless all the world through her by giving her a revelation of himself which would be passed on to all the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3; Romans 15:8-12). But Israel did not set her love upon God. She did not become His willing agent of blessing.

Was God's plan thwarted because of the rebellion of men? Not at all! His purposes will be performed and He will do all His will with or without our cooperation. *“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful”* (II Timothy 2,13).

All through her ancient history, Israel was plagued with idolatry. Her spiritual history could be charted like the waves of the sea. Her spiritual life was up and down, repeatedly, century after century. Those who were faithful to God were always a small minority of the whole nation. The Bible calls them a *“remnant,”* meaning a fragment or small part of the whole. That remnant has always been the true Israel of God. That is the burden of Romans 9.

I. CONCERN FOR ISRAEL

Paul's deep concern for the spiritual destitution of Israel is reflected in Romans 9:1-3. He testified to the heavy and continuing burden he bore for

the people of his nation. That burden indicates that he was not a traitor to his countrymen. He was a man of concern.

A. It was a sincere concern (verse 1). In Paul's sorrow over Israel one can see a reflection of Jesus. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem because of her unbelief and rebellion (Luke 19:41). Christians have that same concern today over those who are the enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18, 19). Such a concern prompts intercessory prayer, faithful witness, and a willingness to pay whatever price is necessary to bring those unbelievers to faith and commitment to Christ.

B. It was a deep concern (verse 2). Blessed is the person who shares Paul's great weight of sorrow, who is never free from the distress brought by men and women in rebellion against God. *"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"* (Jeremiah 9:1). That is the spirit of a true intercessor. That was the spirit that motivated Paul in his whole ministry (Acts 20:18-21). No wonder he was such an effective evangelist. It is the spirit that must mark Christians today.

C. It was a sacrificial concern (verse 3). One could go no further than to be willing to give up his own hope in Christ if that would only bring other people to faith in Him. That, too, reflects the spirit of Jesus who made such intercession for transgressors (Isaiah 53:12) and gave His own life to bring men and women to God (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Oh for Christians who surrender all personal rights and privileges (I Corinthians 9:19-23) in order to bring sinners to the Savior! God is looking for such concern in us today.

II. PRIVILEGES OF ISRAEL

Israel was a uniquely privileged nation. God said, *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth"* (Amos 3:2). That privilege did not excuse her sin, however. God continued, *"Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"* (Amos 3:2). What were Israel's privileges?

A. She was privileged to be called out as God's people. She took her name after the spiritual name of Jacob: *"Israel,"* meaning "man of God." To say they were "Israelites" meant that they were people whom God had chosen as His own. That is further reflected in Paul's statement, *"to whom pertaineth the adoption"* (Romans 9:4). God had adopted them and given to them the rights of sonship. What a privilege it was to be a part of *"the Israel of God"* (Galatians 6:16)! What a privilege it was to be *"an holy people unto the LORD, . . . a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations"*

that are upon the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:2). What a privilege, indeed!

B. She was privileged to experience holiness pervading her worship. Paul pointed out that the Israelites were the ones *“to whom pertaineth . . . the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises”* (Romans 9:4). Look carefully at that list! The *“glory”* refers to the visible, glorious presence of God. Remember how His Shechinah glory filled the tabernacle, and afterwards the temple, so that the people could not approach Him? It was Israel's privilege to live in His presence.

The *“covenants”* were divine agreements, God's promised commitment, of what He would do to and through the nation. The covenants were made between Israel and God.

The *“giving of the law”* looks back to Sinai and its awesome manifestations. *“The service of God”* looks at the rituals of worship in God's temple with all the pageantry and spiritual symbolism.

C. She was privileged to have hope for the future. All the promises, the patriarchs, and the praise of God were included in her history (Romans 9:4, 5). Never has there been a nation with whom God has dealt so evidently and so continually as national Israel. Never has a nation had such reason for hope as she. Look at the Old Testament promises yet to be fulfilled.

D. She was privileged to give the Savior to the world. From Israel *“as concerning the flesh Christ came”* (Romans 9:5). Jesus was of *“the seed of Abraham”* (Hebrews 2:16). Israel was the earthly agent by which God came into the world. What an unspeakable privilege! What an act of grace that God would choose her to send His only begotten Son.

Well might Israel say, *“What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?”* (Deuteronomy 4:7). Those privileges made her apostasy the more tragic and inexcusable.

III. IDENTIFICATION OF ISRAEL

Romans 9:6-8 has a surprising word to say about who constitutes the true Israel of God. It can be summarized in two sentences.

A. Israel is not identified racially or nationally (verses 6, 7). Some who are true physical descendants of Abraham are not members of Israel. *“They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are seed of Abraham, are they all children”* (verses 6, 7). That means that a person who is a citizen of one of the twelve tribes of Israel is not thereby automatically a citizen in the Israel of God. The promises God made to

Israel do not apply to such a person.

B. Israel is identified spiritually. *“They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed”* (verse 8). That is amazing, isn't it? The blessings God promised Abraham come by faith, not by physical relations (Galatians 3:13-18). The covenant that God made to Abraham and his seed was not made to the physical descendants of Abraham. *“He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ”* (Galatians 3:16). The Abrahamic covenant applies not to those born of Abraham's blood but to those exercising Abraham's faith. No wonder he concludes, *“If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Galatians 3:29). If you trust God as Abraham trusted Him, you are his spiritual seed and an heir to all that God promised him. Glory! God will deal yet with national Israel, but the true Israel of God is the spiritual remnant who trust Jesus. That includes Christians, whether Jew or Gentile (Galatians 3:28).

IV. CHOICE OF ISRAEL

God by sovereign choice selected Abraham and his descendants as the agents by which He would give a revelation of himself and through whom He would send the Savior. Why did He choose Israel?

A. Israel was not chosen because of race (verse 6). In the great purpose of God there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free (Galatians 3:28, 29). Traditions and prejudices made such a distinction, but Jesus broke down that separating wall that Jew and Gentile might be one in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:14-22). God did not select Abraham and his descendants just because He loves Jews more than He does any other people of the world.

B. Israel was not chosen because of birthright (verses 7-9). Ishmael had the privilege of birthright, but God chose Isaac. Esau had the privilege of birthright, but God chose Jacob. (Read those accounts in Genesis 17:20, 21; 25:23; 48:12-20.) Humans emphasize physical descent because the physical is so real to them. God looks on the heart because the spiritual is as real to Him as the physical. One must be born of the water (flesh) and of the Spirit (Holy Spirit) in order to be a true child of God (John 3:3-5).

C. Israel was not chosen because of works (Romans 9:10-13). The choice between Esau and Jacob was not based on works of merit. *“(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him*

that calleth;) it was said unto her, *The elder shall serve the younger*” (Romans 9:11, 12). Since “*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23), who has any merit?

D. Israel was chosen by divine purpose (Romans 9:14-27). God chose that people because He wanted to. There was no compulsion or cause outside of His will. “*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*” (Romans 9:16). God acted like the Sovereign that He is.

V. WAY FOR ISRAEL

How can Israel have peace with God? Romans 9:30-33 answers in three statements.

A. Peace with God is not by a “works” way (verses 31, 32). An attempt to accumulate enough self-righteousness to be accepted of God alienates a person from God (Galatians 4:10, 11; Romans 10:3).

B. Peace with God is by a “faith” way (verse 30). Gentiles who trusted God without trying to obey legal rules were justified by faith. Jews who tried to obey rules without personal faith in God's Messiah remained condemned in sin. It is true for every person in the world (Romans 11:5, 6).

C. Peace with God is by the “Jesus” way (verse 33). He is a stumbling block for some but a stepping stone to God for others. He is the only way by which any person, Jew or Gentile, can come to God (John 14:6).

God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile in Jesus Christ. Each comes to Him by faith or he does not come at all. That is why our missionary outreach must include Jews and Gentiles. We will never pray for or witness to the wrong person. Those who reject Christ are condemned; those who receive Him are saved. “*We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world*” (John 4:42).

Questions

1. Why was Paul so concerned for Israel?
2. How did Jesus show a like concern (Luke 19:41)?
3. What should be our concern about sinners today?
4. What special privileges did Israel have?
5. Why did God reveal himself to Israel rather than to other peoples?
6. How is the true Israel of God identified?
7. Why is faith more important than physical descent?

8. Why did God choose Israel as His agent to produce the Messiah?
9. Why does God demand faith rather than works in order for sinners to be saved?
10. How does Galatians 3:26-29 relate to Romans 9:8?