

Romans 9... 10... 11

Never take a Bible text out of its context!

While this is always an important rule of Bible study, it is perhaps nowhere more important than here in Romans Nine. Individual verses, studied alone without their supporting context, have led to all manner of controversies over the character of God.

What *is* the context of Romans Nine? First and foremost it is a Jewish context:

- There is the story of Abraham and his children by Hagar and Sarah, and his sons Ishmael and Isaac...
- There is the story of Isaac and Rebecca and of their two sons, Esau and Jacob...
- There is the story of Moses and Pharaoh...
- There is the story of the potter and the clay, taken from Jeremiah Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen...
- And there are quotes from the prophets Hosea and Isaiah...

The context of Romans Nine is Jewish. The context of Romans Ten and Eleven is Jewish.

These three Chapters discuss God's *past*, *present*, and *prophetic* dealings with the nation of Israel.

Israel was and remains God's specially chosen nation. Yet they have been set aside by God as He builds His church. This requires an explanation, and Paul gives it in these Chapters.

It's not just a prophetic issue. 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?

To begin with he looks at Israel's *past* in Chapter Nine. He says "they are not all Israel who are of Israel." In other words, although privileged to be born Jews, natural birth alone was not enough to make the Jew a child of God. Another birth, a supernatural birth, was required.

The Church at Rome was probably founded by Jews who had been saved while visiting Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. They were perplexed and bewildered as they saw their own nation hardened into opposition against the Gospel, while at the same time Gentiles were turning to the Lord. They were aware that the prophets predicted a great work of God among the Gentiles, but they had always been accustomed to think of this as following the full restoration and blessing of Israel and as flowing from it. Now all the prophecies on which they had based this expectation seemed to have failed. An explanation was required, and one that fully agreed with the Old Testament.

Paul takes up the explanation, first *identifying* with his fellow Jews in verses one through five, then *instructing* them in verses six through twenty-nine.

Romans 9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

Romans 9:2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

In this Chapter when he uses the word "flesh" Paul is talking about descent and heritage, not the body with its tendencies towards indulgence and sin. He is identifying with the Jews, his own people by descent and heritage.

When Paul said he was telling the truth, not lying, and that his conscience was bearing witness, it wasn't just a literary device to get their attention. His love and concern for Israel went to his very core. Though he took the Gospel to Gentiles he always started (when he

could) in the local synagogues. It was only after Jews in a city rejected the Gospel that he went outside.

How great was his love? Paul said he would have traded his own salvation, if that were possible, for the salvation of his natural, national people - the Jews.

I think Paul was serious. But he was also identifying with the most revered Old Testament character to the Jews. Moses had once made a similar plea to God, asking to be blotted out of God's book of life if God didn't save Israel.¹

There is thus a hint in this comparison that Paul, in preaching the Gospel to the Jews, was a spiritual deliverer to them. And, just like with Moses, the Jews did not always respect or recognize what God was doing.

While expressing his own heart, Paul is also expressing God's heart. Jesus did become a curse for us when He died on the Cross at Calvary (Galatians 3:13)..

Romans 9:4 who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises;
Romans 9:5 of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.

Here is a list of the privileges that belong to the nation of Israel.

- “Adoption” looks back to Exodus 4:22 where God told Moses to tell Pharaoh that He had chosen Israel as His firstborn son.
- “The glory” refers to the shekinah, the cloud that led Israel in the wilderness representing the glory of God.
- “The covenants” refer to the ones God made with Abraham and David.

¹Exodus 32

- “The giving of the Law” as their rule of life. It was given them not Gentiles.
- “The service of God” refers to the Temple and its symbolic rituals.
- And (finally) there were innumerable “promises” about how God intended to bless Israel as an earthly people.

Their privileges were intended to prepare them to receive their Messiah, Jesus Christ, Who was born a Jew "according to the flesh." Yet they did not receive Him, but rejected Him. As you read in the Gospel of John, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."² In a subtle way Paul is reminding his Jewish listeners that it was not God Who failed Israel, but Israel who refused God's Messiah.

Two things for us to focus on:

1. We ought to check ourselves occasionally to see if our compassion for the lost has diminished.
2. Paul said he had “great sorrow and continual grief in his heart.” It is possible to have joy and sorrow at the same time. In fact, it is normal and a mark of maturity. We have the joy of the Lord as our strength. It is a settled understanding that our sovereign God is at work to display His glory and work all things together for the good. But it all occurs in a context of the fallen world with its awful sufferings.

²John 1:11