



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"Isreality"
Romans 9:1-5

Did God hate Esau? Did God harden Pharaoh's heart so that he could not believe? Is God a Potter Who routinely rejects the majority of the human clay He created, rendering them lost and damned? These are all found in Romans chapter nine.

Your first inclination - and it's a good one - is to say, "No." But then what are we to make of incredible statements, like "Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated"?

If you read chapters nine, ten and eleven as the unit they are, you come to an important realization. Paul was writing about the plan and purposes of God for the nation of Israel in light of the fact the Jewish leaders had officially rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah. What, if any, plan did God yet have for His specially chosen people?

Some will say, "None. God has no plan for Israel other than individual Jews getting saved just the same as Gentiles." If that is your working theory, then you will interpret these examples from the Old Testament to teach that God hated Esau as a person, that He hardened Pharaoh's heart so he could not be saved, and that He routinely damns to Hell much of the human clay He created.

Ah, but it is obvious, is it not, that God **does** have a plan for the nation of Israel! It's obvious as you read God's Word and take it literally. And it's obvious as you read the news and see what's happening in the world, especially in the Middle East around Jerusalem.

The church at Rome was probably founded by Jews who had been saved while visiting Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

Some time had passed since they had begun sharing the Gospel in Rome. The Jewish believers 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 in the next three chapters. In them he discusses, in order, God's past, present, and prophetic dealings with the nation of Israel.

His general assessment is this: Israel was and remains God's specially chosen nation. Yet they have been set aside by God as He builds His church. God will take up with them once the church is complete.

This requires an explanation, a solidly biblical one, and Paul gives it in these chapters.

It's not just a prophetic issue. How can **we** be secure in God's love and salvation when it seems that Israel was once loved and saved, but now seems to be rejected? Will God also reject me one day?

No, He will not, and He has not rejected Israel either.

We begin with a look at Israel's past in chapter nine. Or it might be more accurate to say that Paul draws from Israel's past to show the Roman believers (and all believers) that God's present dealings with Israel are Scriptural.

The following are the stories Paul will utilize:

- 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.

But before he gets into his argument, Paul has something to share about his love for his fellow countrymen.

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

When Paul said he was “[telling] the truth... not lying,” 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.

“Conscience” is that mental faculty by which we judge the rightness or wrongness of our thoughts and actions. Paul thought it right that he have such a great love for his countrymen.

It wasn’t merely his own conscience that guided him in his love for the Jews. No, he was being influenced by the Holy Spirit. This was Paul’s heart because it was and is God’s heart.

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

“Continual” doesn’t necessarily mean all the time, but rather whenever he thought about the condition of Israel.

Having said that, **we need to understand he probably thought about Israel a lot!**

We think in either/or terms too much. Either I am happy or I am sad or depressed. But there's a sense I can be both with regard to different things. I can have the joy of the Lord while simultaneously having "continual grief in my heart" for someone or some thing. If I'm reading this right, I ought to have continual grief for the lost.

This helps me to understand how Jesus Christ could be described as a man of sorrows acquainted with grief and yet be the perfect, sinless, joyous Son of God.

Just how much did Paul love his countrymen?

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

Paul honestly said - his conscience influenced by God the Holy Spirit - that he would have forfeited his own salvation, if that were possible, for the salvation of his natural, national people - the Jews.

Let's just stop and say, "Wow." I would hope that I could at least say I am willing to die in order that others might hear the Gospel and be saved. Or at least die to myself to help further the kingdom. Or at least that I would live every moment for Christ so others would see His love for them.

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

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.

In a moment (in verse six) Paul is going to launch into an argument that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel." It has led some to say that Paul's real focus in this chapter is on **any** person - Jew or Gentile - who gets saved. To them it's a kind of disclaimer, as if Paul was saying, "but God isn't really dealing with Israel as a nation anymore, just individuals from every ethnicity."

Not true! In verses four and five he clearly establishes that he is talking about national, ethnic Israel. Of course it is true, as he will show in verse six, that just being a Jew didn't save you. But it does not follow God is through dealing with the Jews. **He is not!**

These chapters describe God's dealings with His chosen nation during a long period of their unbelief.

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;

Here is a list of the privileges that uniquely 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. When the building of the tabernacle had been completed, this "glory of the Lord" came and filled it. It took its stand above the mercy-seat in the holy of holies. During the wilderness journeys when it rested, the Israelites did not travel. When it was taken up, they marched. It was a cloud by day and a pillar of light by night. When Solomon finished his very impressive prayer at the dedication of the temple, this glory filled the temple. It indicated the presence of the Lord with his people.
- "The covenants" refer to the ones God made specifically with Abraham and David. The unconditional parts of them are that Abraham would be given a land, descendants as innumerable as the sand and the stars, and that the Savior Who would come from him and his people would bless the entire human race with the promise of redemption. David was unconditionally promised that the Savior would be a direct descendant of his and that His kingdom would be literally and physically established forever.
- "The giving of the Law" as their rule of life. It was given to them - not Gentiles. True, in the past if a Gentile was to approach God he must convert to Judaism. But that's not true anymore! The church council, whose official minutes are recorded in Acts fifteen, established that Gentiles have no responsibility to put themselves under the Law of Moses.
- "The service of God" refers to the Temple and its symbolic rituals.

- And (finally) there were innumerable (and we must add unconditional) “promises” about how God intended to bless Israel as an earthly people. And how He intended to bless all earthly peoples through them.

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.

Their privileges were intended to prepare them to receive their Messiah, Jesus Christ, Who was born a Jew descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the particular line of David, "according to the flesh."

“Flesh” in this context simply means according to physical descent and lineage.

By the way, the sentence structure is such that Jesus Christ is being called “the eternally blessed God.” It’s always good to be reminded that the Bible presents one God in three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are not three gods; nor do they exist one at a time, the Father becoming the Son, then the Son sending the Spirit. God is three-in-one in a mystery that cannot be fathomed.

Paul included this strong statement of nationality, of ethnicity, precisely so we would not make the error of thinking that in verse six he was dismissing God’s dealings with Israel as His chosen nation. **Far from it!**

His argument isn’t that God is through with the Jews but that He has temporarily set them aside. He will give proof from the Old Testament that what God is doing is Scriptural - that it was anticipated in their history.

He is building up to be able to say,

Romans 11:1 I say then, has God cast away His people? **Certainly not!** For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...

Does it sound at all like Paul is referring to just anyone, Jew or Gentile? Not at all. He goes to great lengths to let you know he’s talking about the

physical descendants of Abraham who are like him - except they are not saved.

Our approach to Israel is part of a larger understanding of God's relationship to human history that is called Dispensational Theology or Dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism is a framework for understanding the Bible, teaching that God has dealt with man historically in different administrations or *dispensations*. It maintains a radical distinction between Israel and the Church - that there are two peoples of God with two different destinies - and it distinguishes between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ (that one precedes the other by seven years of tribulation).

Dr. Charles Ryrie says this:

The essence of dispensationalism... is the distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist's consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.

That's the deal on a doctrinal level. On a more devotional level, on a personal level, the bottom line is what I stated earlier. If God can make certain unconditional promises to the physical descendants of Abraham that He breaks, then how can I trust in the promises He had made me?

God cannot break His unconditional promises! So Paul gives us an accounting of what God is, in fact, doing with Israel during the dispensation we are now in, the church age.

