

### THE BOOK OF ROMANS

#### Lesson 20, Chapter 9

I'll keep reminding you that even though we are moving today from Romans chapter 8 to chapter 9, Paul certainly was not thinking in terms of "chapters". The chapters were put there over a millennia after Paul's day as an honest attempt to merely break the Bible up into bite-sized chunks that we could digest a little easier. Chapters and verses give us a way to communicate to one another more precisely which passages in the Holy Scriptures that we are referring to. Chapters and verses are tools, and nothing more.

Thus keep in mind that when we open chapter 9 in a few moments that Paul is not completely altering his previous line of thought; the subject is not changing, the scene is not changing, and Paul is not ending one message to begin another. Chapter 9 is not only a continuation of chapter 8 in a very real and literal sense, but chapter 9 also re-exams and nuances some of his thoughts from even earlier chapters of Romans. So to open Romans chapter 9, Paul is going to continue along the lines of defending Israel's election as God's chosen people, and he is going to return to the theme of the advantages that Israel enjoys over gentiles that he spoke about back in chapter 3.

#### Romans 3:1-4 CJB

**<sup>CJB</sup> Romans 3:1 *Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God. <sup>3</sup> If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness? <sup>4</sup> Heaven forbid! God would be true even if everyone were a liar!***

Even so, since Israel's election as God's people is a critical underlying issue for the letter to the Romans, this brief statement about the problem of Israel's lack of faithfulness to God needs more explanation. Where does Israel's lack of faithfulness leave them in relation to their covenants with God and thus their status before Him, and especially as concerns the Gospel since Paul says that the Gospel is an Old Testament promise? Therefore we should take the opening of Romans chapter 3 as the background for the opening verses of Romans chapter 9. That is, according to Paul God gave and continues to give Israel a favored status above all other nations. However Israel has admittedly failed in their God-given purpose despite their advantages and the majority of Israel has become unfaithful to God....at least unfaithful as Paul measures it. Thus with all of Paul's talk about gentiles being able to partake in Israel's Messiah, the logical question that Jews especially, but also gentiles, might ask is: why, if God is faithful, would He suddenly include some outsiders (gentiles) and exclude some insiders (Jews) in His covenants with Israel? Might this mean that God has abandoned His old people Israel and replaced them with His new people: gentile Believers in Christ? Or to use modern Christianese: has the Church replaced Israel as God's chosen? Unfortunately a major portion of the institutional Church answers that question with a resounding yes! As we have read in

Acts and now Romans, Paul repeatedly answers that question with a “no”, or more literally, “Heaven forbid”.

Open your Bibles to Romans chapter 9.

### **READ ROMANS CHAPTER 9 all**

When Paul begins by saying that he is “speaking the truth” it is more of an expression than an important piece of information that he wants to add (after all his readers would have expected Paul to have already been telling the truth). It is an expression of special emphasis on what he is about to say, not unlike the expression “behold” is also a Biblical expression of special emphasis. What he is about to say is also sort of a pause in the action to interject a statement to make sure that anything he has said to this point is not misconstrued. It is very similar to Yeshua’s pause in the action during His sermon on the mount, and then His interjection of a special statement about the continuing validity of The Law of Moses, which we find in Matthew 5:17 – 19.

Paul uses kind a judicial motif to draw attention to the importance and sincerity of what he is about to express by invoking the commandment that ‘thou shalt not lie’. He frames himself as a witness in a trial and the number one duty of a witness is to tell the truth; in fact there are major penalties for not being truthful. But all trials must have the testimony of two witnesses to verify the truth so the second witness Paul personifies as his own conscience that is under Holy Spirit control. Therefore now that the bonafides of the two witnesses have been established Paul goes on to give his testimony.

I want to pause to frame Paul’s concern to make himself as clear as is possible (concerning a very challenging subject, so full of mystery) by putting it this way: if God gave the Jews a “forever” covenant, and through this “forever” covenant brought a Messiah into the world whose job was to deliver the Jewish people from the eternal death penalty that their sinning bought them; then what does God do with the Jewish people when they become unfaithful to Him? Does he throw them back into the pool of common humanity and pluck out a new people for Himself? Because that should not only be terribly concerning to the Jews, but also to the new gentile Believers in Yeshua who have been made a very similar promise. That is, Messiah’s sacrifice on the Cross is said to be sufficient to save them from eternal death.....forever. And yet, simple observation says that Israel will stumble and fall at times, and continue to sin occasionally. So does this mean that God could just as easily throw the new gentile Believers back into the pool of common humanity (just as He supposedly did to the Jews) and start all over yet again?

You see, Believers, this is the problem with the terrible and arrogant doctrine that the Jews are stiff necked and a disobedient people who were at one time God’s “forever” chosen people, but the Lord grew tired of their sinning and thus cancelled His covenants and revoked His promises to them. And, to our good fortune, He turned instead to the millions of gentiles who came to believe in Yeshua as Savior. But if God would do that to the Jewish people, by what rationale would He not do the same to gentile Christians? Just how assured of our position of eternal security before Him ought we to be if He is a God who promises and then reneges at

will? Can we truly rely on God's promise that His actions on our behalf through Jesus Christ are forever when He made a similar promise to Israel but took it back because they continued to sin? So my mindset as a gentile Believer must be that I hope and pray to the high Heavens that God did NOT revoke His promise to Israel; because if He did that, then you and I are at the mercy of an unethical God who makes promises and takes them away at His option. The good news is that God did not cancel His covenants and revoke His promises to Israel; He is always faithful to His Word. It is merely some anti-Jewish gentile Church leaders who have told the big lie loud enough and often enough that it has been believed. But it is also billions of naïve and disinterested Christians over the past 2000 years who have never thought to ask themselves the simple questions about God's character that I have just set before you. Paul is, of course, unafraid to confront these questions head-on.

Not as much by Christian scholars, but certainly more so by Christian Pastors and educators, the Book of Romans is regularly characterized as Paul's criticism against His Jewish brethren and his justification for welcoming potential gentile Believers. But such a notion is destroyed time and again by merely believing Paul and taking him at his word rather than applying heaping helpings of allegory to his statements. What Paul says beginning in verse 2 and continuing through verse 5 is such a powerful testimony against Christian anti-Semitism and Replacement Theology that it is hard to overstate it. Here Paul once again identifies Jews as his dear flesh and blood brethren; not as his **former** brethren or even as his opponents. Appealing to the Messiah as the guarantor of truth, Paul says in all sincerity that if somehow giving up his own personal salvation, and instead being cursed by God and cut off from His identity in and relationship with, Christ would bring his Jewish brothers (who reject Yeshua) into a state of righteousness before God, he would gladly do it. Does this sound like a man who has turned his back on his Hebraic heritage and Jewish people and instead virtually become identified as a gentile?

Paul's statement of grief, devotion and identification towards his fellow Jews echoes back to another Hebrew who, after witnessing a great apostasy by his people, offered the same personal sacrifice on their behalf.

### **Exodus 32:31-33 CJB**

**<sup>31</sup> Moshe went back to ADONAI and said, "Please! These people have committed a terrible sin: they have made themselves a god out of gold. <sup>32</sup> Now, if you will just forgive their sin! But if you won't, then, I beg you, blot me out of your book which you have written!"**

**<sup>33</sup> ADONAI answered Moshe, "Those who have sinned against me are the ones I will blot out of my book."**

Nevertheless Paul, of course, couldn't take his people's sin as his responsibility and suffer the consequences for it anymore than could Moses. But he above most others recognized the eternal danger his people were in while they, themselves, were oblivious to it. So Paul was willing to suffer whatever slings and arrows from his own people that he might have to endure for their sake. But once more notice: although he was Christ's designated Apostle to the

Gentiles, that hardly meant that the gentiles were the only people Paul evangelized or cared about; he regularly dealt directly with the Jewish people. However because he was assigned to go forth into the gentile world to evangelize then the Jews he encountered were the Diaspora Jews, who were quite different in attitude and customs than the Holy Land Jews that James, Peter, and others of the Apostles mostly dealt with. It was a mixed audience that he dealt with so he had to speak to them in that context.

Starting in verse 4 is a list of advantages and favor that God showed to Israel. First, the people of Israel were made God's children. This once again opens up the issue of election so Paul begins his list by declaring Israel's election as God's own people (His children). Remember; a child of God, sometimes being synonymous with a son of God, means that this child's father is Yehoveh, God of Israel. And if one is a child, one can expect an inheritance from their father. Notice that they were "made" as God's children; this means that they were not God's natural born children but rather were adopted. Adopted means they were chosen out of a bigger group (so in the negative, all the other people were NOT chosen). So Paul once again confirms (using Jewish cultural terminology) the concept election; Israel was specially chosen by God from all other people on earth. A great honor indeed.

The next advantage for Israel is that God's **Sh'khinah** (glory) has been with them. We must grasp that in the context of defining the substance of God that the **Sh'khinah** is one of God's attributes. In rather standard Trinity Doctrine terminology the **Sh'khinah** is one of the "persons" of God. Although there is no single, universally agreed to Trinity Doctrine, they all say that there are 3 persons of God and only 3. I won't take the time to go deeply into it but I don't find the Bible supporting that notion. I certainly subscribe to the concept of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit of God as legitimate attributes or persons or elements or components (whatever inadequate term we might choose) that together make up the Godhead. However the Bible is all too clear that the **Sh'khinah** speaks as God and bears God's authority, as does another and different manifestation of God called the Angel of the Lord. It is the custom in Christianity, however, to simply roll the attributes of the **Sh'khinah** and the Angel of the Lord into the person of The Son. There is absolutely no Biblical hint of such a thing; however if one is going to unflinchingly uphold the manmade Doctrine of the Trinity in its most rigid definition (that allows only 3 persons or 3 attributes of God to exist), then what choice does a theologian have but to roll other named manifestations of God in the Bible into one or the other of the Father, The Son, or the Holy Spirit? If not, then of course we wind up with more than 3.

To remind you: the **Sh'khinah** took on the form of the fire-cloud that led Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. It is also said that God's **Sh'khinah** is what filled the Temple when it was completed by Solomon and ordained into service. There is no biblical record of the **Sh'khinah** having been with any other people than Israel and it was a sign of Israel's election as God's children. It served to lead Israel and to confirm God's ongoing presence with them.

The next advantage the Jews enjoy and Paul lists is that the covenants are theirs. This is the one that ought to grab our attention the most. Folks, God ONLY made covenants with the Hebrews; no one else. The covenants are theirs. And the covenants, while meaning all the covenants, mostly points towards Abraham's and Moses' covenants from Paul's

perspective. Even the so-called New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 that is commonly said to have established the Church did no such thing; it, too, was a purely Hebrew covenant because a gentile covenant with the God of Israel does not, and has never, existed. I realize that may sound like heresy to much of Christianity so I'll prove my point.

### Jeremiah 31:30-32 CJB

<sup>30</sup> ***"Here, the days are coming," says ADONAI, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. <sup>31</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says ADONAI. <sup>32</sup> "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says ADONAI: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people.***

First: who did God say He would make the "new" covenant with? The House of Israel and the House of Judah. Anyone else? Any gentiles mentioned here? No.

Second: After Israel has broken the earlier covenant God had with Israel, made when He brought them out of the land of Egypt, who did God say He was going to make this "new" covenant with that Jeremiah speaks about? The house of Israel. Anyone else mentioned? No.

And third: upon whom will the effect of this "new" covenant be? It will be that the "new" covenant will be written on **their** hearts and **they** will be God's people. Who are "they"? Israel. Anyone else? Some other nations listed? No.

Paul has waxed eloquently in the Book of Romans that it is the Covenant of Abraham (a Hebrew covenant) that established the promises for future "seed of Abraham". And that it is the seed of Abraham who will be the inheritors of God's Kingdom. So, Believing gentiles, if you trust Christ then you are seed of Abraham and you are an inheritor of God's Kingdom; that's the promise. But what specific group of people held that promise in the form of a covenant given to them by God? The Hebrews. So how did gentiles get into a position to be seed of Abraham? We were grafted into the Hebrew's covenants by our trust in Messiah Yeshua (Paul will discuss that at length in Romans 11). That is, if we trust in the perfect faithfulness of Jesus Christ then we will be included in the promises and terms of the Covenants of Abraham and Moses even though we are not physical Hebrews.

The next advantage is the Jews' possession of the Law of Moses, which Paul calls the giving of the Torah; another covenant with the Hebrews. It is the Torah and nothing else that defines sin according to the Apostle John in 1John3:4. The Law of Moses was given to Israel at Mt. Sinai to God's elect AFTER God had redeemed Israel from Egypt by means of the 10 plagues. According to Yeshua in Matthew 5, all who follow Him are to obey the Law of Moses; and this is because the Law of Moses is ONLY for the already redeemed (the Law is not a means of redemption). Are you a gentile following Yeshua? Then obey His command to obey the Law of Moses; Yeshua says it is your duty and that your status in the Kingdom of God will be determined by how well or poorly you obeyed The Law.



Gentile Believers: we indeed have a covenant relationship with God. But the covenants are not ours; they were given to, and they belong to, Israel. This is why we are called “grafted-in”. We can only be grafted into something that already exists, and it must be into something alive and well. It does no good to be grafted into a dead stump because a graft gets its nourishment from the roots of the tree it has been grafted into. And since the stump is strictly Israel’s stump, it is another advantage for Israel.

Paul next lists the Temple services. What is so important about the Temple services for Israel? It represents the true worship of the only true God. The Temple services included the altar sacrifices that atoned for Israel’s sins. The Temple services included the daily burnt offering that honored the God of Israel. The Temple sacrificial services were what the sacrifice of Yeshua was patterned after. The Temple was the only place on earth where God put His holy name. The Temple services were given ONLY to the Hebrews, through the Hebrew tribe of Levi that would be God’s authorized priests. The Temple services were to be where the people gathered to observe several of God’s especially holy appointed times; and the Temple services were where the Law was to be taught to the people of Israel.

Next on Paul’s list are The Patriarchs of Israel who belong to Israel. Abraham is the first person to be called a Hebrew in the Bible. **Genesis 14:13 CJB** <sup>13</sup> ***Someone who had escaped came and told Avram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Emori, brother of Eshkol and brother of 'Aner; all of them allies of Avram.*** Hebrews are defined as those people who are part of the line of covenant promises made by God to Abraham.

Isaac was the next person to be called Hebrew, and after him his son Jacob. These 3 are the Biblical Patriarchs and they are all Hebrews...as apart from gentiles. But even more important Paul finalizes his list of advantages for the Jews by stating that it is from the lineage of the Hebrew Patriarchs that Yeshua the Messiah came. Yeshua was not a generic human being; He was not the universal man; He was specifically a Jew just as the ancient prophecies said the Messiah must be. Jesus Christ was not a gentile.

Paul has set the record straight. He said that this is the truth, and has made it clear that while a way has been made for gentiles to join into the covenants that the Hebrews have enjoyed with God, all the advantages and privileges as God’ elect belong to the Hebrews (the Jews). Case closed.

Now that Paul has balanced the ledger so that no one thinks he has thrown the Jews under the bus when it comes to holding their place in redemption history, and he has emphatically shown that Israel continues in their special position as God’s elect, he throws out one of the most difficult statements that Christianity has ever had to deal with. He says this: <sup>6</sup> ***But the present condition of Isra'el does not mean that the Word of God has failed. For not everyone from Isra'el is truly part of Isra'el.***

By the present condition of Israel he is referring to the fact that the bulk of Jews have refused to accept Yeshua as their Messiah. But, says Paul, by no means does that indicate that what God has ordained for Israel has failed. Let’s stop here for a second. If you asked almost any Christian if God’s Word can ever fail I think I can safely say that all Christians, with but the

rarest exceptions, would say “Of course not!” And yet, when asked if The Law of Moses is still relevant, and if not why not, they would first say that it is no longer relevant, and second is that it had to be replaced because it was a covenant that failed and thus had to be replaced with the New Covenant. The Covenant of Moses was, and is, the Word of God. So we can’t have it both ways; either God’s Word never fails or it does sometimes fail. If it never fails then the Covenant of Moses did not fail either; it remains alive and well. Paul says that it did not fail and then explains why it might appear to some, on the surface, of having failed.

Paul is referring again back to what he had to say in Romans 3:3, 4: <sup>3</sup> ***If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness?*** <sup>4</sup> ***Heaven forbid! God would be true even if everyone were a liar!*** As we talked about earlier, Paul is well aware that some Jews and gentiles could question Paul’s doctrines about gentile inclusion into the faith because for them it seems like in order for Paul’s theology to work God would have to be unethical in His actions by not fulfilling his promises to His covenant people. But Paul insists that it is not a conflict to say that on the one hand Israel has failed God, but on the other that even so God has remained steadfast in His faithfulness to Israel. It would seem that this violates the foundational principle of a covenant; that is, if one party violates the covenant then the covenant can be terminated. But even more, if not every Israelite has been redeemed by the Gospel of Christ that Paul preaches, then how can that not be construed as a failure of the Gospel? How is that not a failure of the Word of God that promises to redeem Israel?

Part of the reason that this is even coming up is this: Judaism in Paul’s day (and to this day for the most part) saw redemption quite differently than Christianity sees it. Judaism saw redemption (salvation) as a national matter. Christianity sees redemption as an individual matter. Judaism believed that God dealt with the Jews as a collective of people (a group) when it came to redemption. Christianity believes that God deals with people on a one by one, case by case, basis and what nation we belong to has no bearing on the process. And in a sense, both are right and both are wrong because God deals with humanity on two levels: one regarding the issue of personal sin and thus personal salvation and the second level on the basis of His wrath being poured out upon nations for their collective rebellion against God. All members of a nation can suffer calamity for the actions of a nation’s governmental leaders since the leaders represent the nation.

So as an answer to this problem regarding Israel’s failures Paul says: ***“For not every one from Israel is truly part of Israel”***. Some translations will say: ***“For not all who are descended from Israel are of Israel”***. Christians have stumbled over this passage since Romans was first included as part of our Bibles. Here is what Paul is doing: he’s making a play on words. Recall that Jacob, the founder of the tribes of Israel, was given a personal name change by God: Jacob became known as Israel. But a very long time later Israel also became the formal name of the nation of Hebrews. So in this verse the first use of the word Israel is referring to Jacob the person; the founder of the 12 tribes. The second use of the word Israel is referring to Israel nationally; it is the name of the nation of Israel (but even then only in a certain sense). So a better translation that begins to help us sort out this verse is: ***“For not every one from Jacob is truly part of Israel”***. Trust me: Paul has not really helped the situation very much. This must have caused great confusion among most who read this letter.

But what he has actually done is to describe Israel as consisting of two levels. He is saying that essentially there is an Israel within Israel. There is a true Israel within a nation of descendants of Jacob. Paul now goes on to explain who this true Israel is.

In order to explain his confounding statement Paul reconnects his argument to Abraham and his seed as he discussed by in chapter 4. He uses Abraham as a historical illustration of what he is getting at when he says that not all from Israel are truly part of Israel, by saying that not all descendants of Abraham are seed of Abraham; rather, those who can be called “seed” must come through Isaac. Let’s review this. Abraham’s first child, a son, was Ishmael. Ishmael was the child of Abraham’s wife’s servant girl, Hagar. But God rebuked Abraham for thinking that Ishmael would be the heir to the covenant that God had made with Abraham because God had told him that it was Sarah, his wife, who would provide Abraham with an heir. Abraham didn’t believe God because Sarah was far past child bearing age. But in time Sarah did get pregnant and have a child: Isaac. Sarah quickly grew jealous of Hagar and her son and ordered her to leave the clan and take Ishmael with her. Abraham was devastated as he thought of Ishmael as his beloved firstborn. But the Lord told Abraham that it would be Isaac who was to be considered as Abraham’s firstborn and heir to the covenant, so it was right for Ishmael to be banished.

Ishmael went on to found the Arab tribes.

The gist of the matter is that it was God’s will that Isaac was considered to be Hebrew, while Ishmael was NOT to be considered Hebrew even though they had the same biological father. Thus as Paul points out, while Ishmael and Isaac can both claim legitimate blood relationship to Abraham and both can call him father, only one can be considered seed of Abraham: Isaac. Thus, says Paul, as it concerns the promises contained in the Abrahamic Covenant, it is not that simply being a physical descendant (flesh and blood descendant) of Abraham that makes one a seed of Abraham. It is only those flesh and blood descendants of Abraham who also come down through his son Isaac who can be considered as seed.

So after drawing this illustration of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael to help explain how only some of Israel can be considered as true Israel, Paul takes it one step further and uses the illustration of Isaac and his wife Rivka (Rebecca). In this illustration Isaac fathered a set of twin boys with Rivka. So here we not only have a case of the same father and mother, but both boys are the product of the same pregnancy. The two boys shared every possible common biological ancestry. Yet, God was going to divide, elect, and separate them. One would be elected to the line of promise of Abraham’s Covenant and thus be called Hebrew. The other twin would not and he would be considered an outsider: a gentile. So how did God choose? Even more, when did God choose? Paul points out that the “how” couldn’t have been by merit, or that one was sinful and the other not, because the decision as to who would be elected to the line of promise (which one of the twins would be a Hebrew?) was made in the womb before either were born and had an opportunity to be either good or bad.

God had elected the second twin to come out of the birth canal (Jacob) as the inheritor of the covenant’s promises; but even more, the first to be born, Esau, would serve his younger twin.



Perhaps the most important point being made by Paul (but there are others that we'll get to) is that God is completely sovereign in the most absolute sense possible. That is, His decisions are completely independent from what human beings think or do. God does not make His choices according to human social conventions, or human philosophies of fairness, or human governmental standards of right and wrong. By human social convention Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son and had every right to inheritance. By human social convention Esau was the firstborn of Isaac and had every right to inheritance. By the human philosophy of fairness, how could God possibly judge Jacob as the righteous one and Esau as the "hated" one, when they were still in the womb?

So while Paul tells us through his historical reminders of the story of the Patriarchs' births that God can do anything He wants to in His sovereign will that still leaves us with no firm answer, yet, to the riddle of why God would judge only some of Israel as truly Israel and the remainder as not. And we'll address that subject next time.