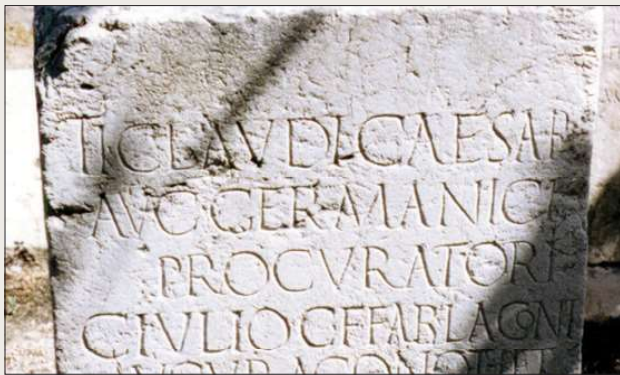


Chapter Nine

Chapter nine shifts the focus away from the problem of sin in general to the problem of Israel's rejection of Jesus. This, in fact, is the resumption of the question asked near the beginning of the book, regarding Israel, "What if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" (Rom. 3:3). Paul devotes the next three chapters to this issue.

Paul's Concern For Israel (9:1-5)

Paul's constant concern for others serves as a marvelous example to believers. Not only is he interested in the needs and struggles of believers, but he demonstrates a genuine concern for those who are lost. This is especially seen in his concern for his own brethren according to the flesh—the Jews. He says, **I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart** (9:2) for his Is-



Latin inscription from Corinth referring to Claudius Caesar, the emperor who expelled the Jews from Rome.
Photo: Kyle Pope.

raelite brethren. He felt this to such an extent that he declared, **I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh** (9:3). Jesus defined this type of attitude as the greatest form of love—the willingness to lay down one's life for another (John 15:13).

Although Paul had been given the special task of teaching the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9; Acts 26:17),

much of what he does, he claims is an effort that, "by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them" (Rom. 11:14).

The Israelites were God's chosen people under the Mosaic covenant. To them, Paul declares, **pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises** (9:4). There are no pillars of faith outside of Israel. Rather, it

is Israel, **of whom are the fathers** (9:5a) and from Israel, **according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God** (9:5b). Yet, how is it that not all of the Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah? While the first Christians were Jews, many rejected Jesus, and vainly continued in the vestiges of

Paul's constant concern for others serves as a marvelous example to believers.

the Old Covenant which Jesus had set aside by His coming. To understand God's faithfulness in the face of Israel's repeated rejection of His mercy demanded a clearer definition of what it truly meant to be the people of God.

The Children of the Promise (9:6-13)

The Old Covenant had been a covenant made with the physical descendents of Jacob who were alive during the Exodus (Deut. 5:3). Yet, it had never been the case that birth alone defined one's participation in this covenant. So Paul declares, **for they are not all Israel who are of Israel** (9:6b). This is an important premise which Paul will argue throughout the next chapters. Paul has already articulated this in chapter two, declaring, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Rom. 2:28-29).

In this sense *Christians* are *Jews*, in that they are members of the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

Paul expands this idea in the next few verses. First, he returns again to Abraham and points out, not all of Abraham’s descendants were children of the promise, but God had declared **in Isaac your seed shall be called** (9:7b). He explains that there is a difference between **children of the flesh** (who are not all **children of God**) and **children of the promise** (who are **counted as the seed**) (9:8). Even after Abraham, of the children of Isaac, God made a choice through whom He would raise up “children of the promise.” God had declared to Rebecca, **the older shall serve the younger** (9:12; Gen. 25:23). This promise had occurred before the children were even born, nor had **done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls** (9:11).

Some have mistakenly understood these words to indicate personal predestination unto salvation or condemnation. This is not what Paul is teaching. He is not addressing the personal salvation

Paul does not address the personal salvation of Esau and Jacob but the role of Israel and Edom as nations in the Messianic plan.

or condemnation of Jacob and Esau but how God chose the “children of the promise” (i.e., the people through whom he would establish His covenant and ultimately raise up



Jews were not well accepted in the Roman world. This inscription on a seat in the theater of Miletus, reads “the place of the Jews and the God-fearers.” Photo: Kyle Pope.

the Messiah). The very quote Paul offers from Malachi 1:3, **Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated** (Rom. 9:13) is not addressing Jacob or Esau personally but using their names to stand for the nations of Israel and Edom as a whole. God hated the idolatry of Edom and God loved the faithfulness of the “children of the Promise”—Israel.

“Is There Unrighteousness With God” (9:14-18)

Man often looks to the behavior of Deity and by human reasoning concludes **there is unrighteousness with God** (9:14a). Paul, after asking if this is the case, declares forcefully **Certainly not!** (9:14b). What God does is always right. We may not understand it. We may not like it. It may be that our reasoning has been colored so much by sin and rebellion that we “call evil good, and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). Yet, even so, what God does is always right.

While God always does right, He has made choices about how to utilize those of His creation to accomplish His will. When God revealed His glory to Moses He declared, **I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion** (Rom. 9:16; Exod. 33:19). The father has the choice with his own children which to treat

with a “stern hand” and which to handle with gentle compassion. The master can choose which servants to assign to difficult tasks and which to assign to lighter work. With human parents and masters there is always the danger that these choices may stem from partiality and favoritism.

With God we can always have the assurance that “there is no partiality with God” (Rom. 2:11). His choices are fair and just.

Is it up to man to determine the choice that God makes? Did Abraham choose that God would raise up the Messiah through him? Did Jacob decide that his descendants would be set apart from the nations? God made these choices. In the same way, in the context of discussing Israel’s rejection of Christ and their standing before God, Paul declares, **it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy** (Rom. 9:16). What an abuse of Scripture the world has made of this verse to tell people that it doesn’t matter what man does—God alone is the One that makes man do good. Paul is addressing Israel’s role in God’s scheme leading to the Messiah, not personal accountability to God.

This is clear from Paul’s reference to Pharaoh, for **this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth** (9:17; Exod. 9:16). God knew ahead of time what Pharaoh’s reaction would be (Exod. 3:19). God hardened him through the instructions that were given to him through Moses. The references to God hardening Pharaoh are used synonymously with references to

Pharaoh hardening his own heart (Exod. 4:21; 9:34). Pharaoh exalted himself (Exod. 9:17). Pharaoh sinned (Exod. 9:27). He refused to fear God (Exod. 9:30) and like his servants “did not regard the word of the Lord” (Exod. 9:21). And yet, God used him to teach Israel and all men immeasurable lessons about God’s power and deliverance. Although God used Pharaoh’s freewill choices in this demonstration of His glory, Pharaoh had not chosen this role. It was God’s choice. Paul points out in this context, that **God has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens** (9:18). Once again, personal salvation is not the context that is being addressed, but God’s choice to utilize different people and nations in His establishment of the nation through whom the Messiah would one day come.

The Potter and the Clay (9:19-26)

Scripture on a number of occasions uses the figure of God as the potter and man as the clay. The Lord declares through Isaiah the foolishness of failing to recognize our Creator, saying, “Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, ‘He did not make me’? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding’?” (Isa. 29:16). To Jeremiah, the Lord uses the example of the potter, reshaping marred pottery into something different. This stands as a figure of God’s judgment on Judah at the hands of Babylon, asking “can I not do with you as this potter?” (Jer. 18:6). Finally, Isaiah declares, “O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand” (Isa. 64:8). How many problems would be avoided if we kept this truth before our mind at all times.

This does not suggest that we are not responsible for our own choices. We might ask, **why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?** (9:19). God does not find fault with man regarding those matters beyond our choice. The Gentiles were not sinners before God because they were born



Jewish Synagogue in Roman Sardis.
Photo: Kyle Pope.

Gentiles. They were sinners when they chose not to “retain God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28). In this context Paul asks, **who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?** (9:20, 21). The fact that God would create nations of peoples (like the Canaanite nations) of whom it could be said, “although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful” (Rom. 1:21a), and yet He bore with them, for a greater long term purpose. How many Christians alive today, of Gentile ancestry, owe their own hope of salvation to God’s patience in bearing with the rebellion of our pagan forefathers?

Paul explores this patience asking, **what if God, wanting to show**

His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory (Rom. 9:22-23).

The sense in which Paul speaks of those “prepared for destruction” or for glory refers to God’s foreknowledge. Every act of idolatry the Gentile forefathers committed was an act of rebellion that tested the longsuffering of God. Why did He endure this? So that those who would turn to Him in obedience, from the Jews or the Gentiles might experience the “riches of His glory.”

At this stage of Paul’s discourse he moves again to “provoke to jealousy” his own brethren. Speaking to these Christians in Rome who came from a Jewish background, he addresses their own attitude toward their ancestry according to the flesh as well as how they must view their own non-Christian Jewish brethren. God’s children—the children of the promise are those **whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles** (9:24). Scripture itself confirmed this promise. Paul quotes God’s words to Hosea, **I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved** (9:25; Hos. 2:23). And further, **it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God** (9:26; Hos. 1:10). What a clear declaration this was during the time of the Mosaic cov-

enant itself that Gentiles one day would be “sons of the living God.”

The Gentiles and the Remnant of Israel (9:27-33)

The fact that God had promised to accept the Gentiles does not fully address the matter of Israel’s rejection of Jesus. It could well have been that all Israel, together with the Gentile converts accepted the Messiah of the New Covenant. Yet, this was not what happened. This leads back to the whole issue of how God defines those who are truly His people. To address this, Paul appeals to Scripture again, and to Isaiah specifically. He paraphrases Isaiah’s cry, **though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved** (9:27; Isa. 10:22). This calls upon the reader to recognize a distinction between “the children of Israel” and the “remnant.” He paraphrases Isaiah again, **unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah** (9:29; Isa. 1:9). The true Israel is not the fleshly seed of Jacob, but the remnant of those faithful.

This creates an odd reality. In Christ there become those in fellowship with God of a fleshly heritage that **did not pursue righteousness** and yet who **have attained to right-**

eousness, even the righteousness of faith (9:30). Yet, at the same time, under the Law of Christ there are those of Israel according to the flesh who, **pursuing the law of righteousness** are in a condition in which they have **not attained to the law of righteousness** (9:31). This must have been difficult for the Jew to accept. How could their own brethren, who esteemed the Law of God, stand separated from God? The problem did not lay at the feet of God, but in the hearts of men. Those who rejected “the righteousness of faith” in Jesus Christ, in fact rejected the way that God had offered to righteousness. In fact, **they did not seek it by faith, but**

There is a distinction between Israel according to the flesh and the “remnant” of the Israel of God.

as it were, by the works of the law (9:32a). They failed to see “it is God who justifies” (Rom. 8:33; Exod. 23:7). They sought to justify themselves (Luke 16:15). In so doing they had **stumbled at that stumbling stone** (9:32b).

While God does not individually predestine the behavior of others, He does set the terms under which He will accept those who come to

Him. Some of these terms demand a humble acceptance of God’s ways over our own preconceptions. Naaman faced such terms. He thought that Elisha would act a certain way and nearly missed the blessing of God because of his preconceived notion (2 Kings 5). Jesus came as such a “term” laid before mankind. He was not a conquering warlord. He was not wealthy, powerful, and influential. Yet, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Both Jews and Gentiles had preconceived notions of Deity that Jesus challenged. Paul explained to the Corinthians, “Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after

wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1

Cor. 1:22-23). Paul paraphrases Isaiah, one final time, **behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame** (9:33; Isa. 28:16). The challenge for the Romans, as for us today is to believe wholeheartedly in Jesus, the “stumbling stone” and “rock of offense” that God has laid in Zion.

Questions

1. What question, from earlier in the epistle does Paul essentially return to in chapters 9-11 (3:3)? _____
2. What did Paul wish might happen to him that his Israelite brethren could be saved (9:3)? _____

3. Explain the phrase, “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (9:6b). _____

4. What is the difference between “children of the flesh” and “children of the promise” (9:7-8)? _____

5. Does 9:11 or 9:13 address the personal salvation or condemnation of Jacob and Esau? _____
 Why or why not? _____

6. List what each of the following passages indicate about Pharaoh’s involvement in what Scripture describes as God “hardening” Pharaoh: _____ (Exod. 4:21; 9:34);
 _____ (Exod. 9:17); _____ (Exod. 9:27).
 What did his servants refuse to do (Exod. 9:21)? _____
7. Fill in the blanks from Isaiah 64:8: “But now, _____, You are our _____; We are the _____,
 and You our _____; And all we are the _____ of Your _____” (NKJV).
8. What will those be called who were once called “not my people” (9:26)? _____

 What does this quote from Hosea 1:10 foreshadow? _____
9. What is the distinction between “the children of Israel” and the “remnant” (9:27)? _____

10. Why did Paul say that Israel had “not attained to the law of righteousness” (9:31-32)? _____

11. To what is Jesus likened, over which Israel had “stumbled” (9:33)? _____
