

Romans Chapter 9 : Who Is the True Israel?

Romans 9.1-18 “Who Are Israelites?”

The Signs of the Times : July 9, 1896

The ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of Romans are devoted especially to the answer to this question: “Who are the Israelites?” so that only a portion of it can be dealt with in this article. The matter has, however, been so clearly indicated in the studies of the second, third and fourth chapters, that we may pass over this ground more rapidly than we otherwise should. This does not mean that the chapters themselves should be dismissed with slight study, for there is no part of the Bible that has more to yield to the patient student; but our work of leading the student to it may be the more quickly done, in consequence of what has already been done.

At first sight it would seem that the subject of the epistle is entirely changed. A more general view will show us that the apostle here carried out the original subject, showing who are heirs of God’s promise, and how only it is to be obtained.

Paul’s Love for His Brethren: Romans 9.1-18

“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh; who are Israelites; to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel; neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, 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. For this is the word of promise, at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac (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 calls); it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will be hardened.”

This is a long portion of Scripture for study, but if it is diligently questioned, to see exactly what it says, it will not be found so difficult as it is usually thought. We can put only a few of the many that might and should be asked.

Questions on the Text:

- What burden does the apostle say that he carried continually?
 - “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.”
- For whom did he have this sorrow?
 - “For my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”
- How great was his love and sympathy for them?
 - “I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren.”
- Who were these brethren?
 - “Israelites.”
- What privileges did they have?
 - “The adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises,” and “the fathers.”
- What other great honor was theirs?
 - “Of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.”
- If their condition was so bad, notwithstanding all the promises, how could the integrity of God’s word be shown?
 - “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”
- Who only of Abraham’s descendants are the seed?
 - “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”
- What is said of the children of the flesh?
 - “These are not the children of God.”
- Who are the seed?
 - “The children of the promise are counted for the seed.”
- What shows that the children are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”?
 - “When Rebecca also had conceived, . . . the children being not yet born. . . . it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the young.”
- How did the verdict in after years agree with this?
 - “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”
- Is there then unrighteousness with God?
 - “God forbid.” Not by any means. He “without respect of persons judges according to every man’s works.” 1 Peter 1. 17
- On what then does every man’s salvation depend?
 - “It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that showeth mercy.”

- For what purpose did God say to Pharaoh that He had raised him up?
 - “That I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth.”
- What is the conclusion?
 - “Therefore He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardens.”

Both Jews and Greeks: Although Paul was “the apostle of the Gentiles,” he did not forget his “kinsmen according to the flesh.” Wherever he went he sought out the Jews first, and preached to them. To the elders of Ephesus he said, “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 20:20, 21. Paul’s solicitude for all classes, even for those who were personally strangers to him, shows, more than anything else, his likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Israel’s Advantage: “What advantage then hath the Jew?” “Much every way; chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” Romans 3:1, 2. So here we read a wondrous list of things that pertain to Israel: the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises. A terrible thing it is indeed to prove unfaithful amid such inestimable privileges!

“Salvation is of the Jews” Thus said Jesus to the woman of Samaria at the well. John 4:22 “Of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.” The Bible was written by Jews, and a young Jewess was the mother of our Lord. As man, Christ was a Jew, of the tribe of Judah. When we read that “we are saved by His life,” we know that it is by His life as a Jew. There is no divine gift and blessing for man that was not “to the Jew first,” and for the knowledge of which we are not indebted to the Jews.

Nothing from the Gentiles: The Apostle Paul says of the “Gentiles in the flesh,” that they are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Ephesians 2:11, 12. The covenants, the promises, even Christ himself, all belong to the Jews, and not to the Gentiles. Therefore whoever is saved must be saved as a Jew. “God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.” Acts 15:14

Accursed from Christ: It makes no difference whether we use the word “accursed,” or “anathema,” or “separated.” All mean the same thing, and express the most deplorable condition. To be without Christ is to be without hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12

It was in that condition that Paul would have been willing to be placed for his brethren according to the flesh, if it would have done them any good. What does that show? Simply this, that Israel according to the flesh was, and is, in just that condition accursed from Christ, “having no hope, and without God in the world.” But since all the promises of God are in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20), those who are separate from Christ have no part in the promises; and therefore we learn anew the fact that Israel after the flesh, as a nation of earth, have not and never had any claim

upon God above other nations; that God never made any special promises to Israel after the flesh, more than to any other people.

In the wish that Paul expressed, he showed how completely he was given up to the Lord, and how much he shared in his Spirit. Christ gave himself for men, consenting even to be separated from God, in order that he might reach and save the lost. There is none other name under heaven whereby men can be saved, and consequently Paul's being accursed would not have saved his brethren, as he very well knew. But he simply showed how desperate was the case of the Jews, and how great was his solicitude. While no human sacrifice can avail, men are privileged to share Christ's sufferings for others. Paul says of himself, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church." Colossians 1:24

Circumcision Made Uncircumcision: We have before read the words, "If thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." Romans 2:25. This language was addressed to the Jews, who in the same connection were charged with breaking the law. Romans 2:17-24. In the thirty-first verse of this present chapter we also are told that Israel did not attain to the law of righteousness. And the reason is that they did not accept Christ, through whom alone the righteousness of the law can be obtained. So again we find that Israel, Paul's "kinsmen after the flesh," were not Israelites at all, but Gentiles, separate from Christ, "having no hope, and without God in the world."

No Failure in the Promise: This is a sad state of things. All the promises belong to Israel, and there is nothing from God for any other nation, and yet the very people known as Israel are accursed from Christ. Nevertheless the word of God has not failed, "for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." The unbelief of some cannot make the faith of God without effect. Romans 3:3. If every literal descendant of Jacob were lost, that would not weaken in the least God's promises to Israel, since the true Israelites are only those who believe the promises.

The Seed of Abraham: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Isaac was the child of promise; therefore those who believe the promises of God are the seed of Abraham. To the Jews who were self-satisfied because of their descent, John the Baptist said, "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Matthew 3:9. He could do that as easily as he could make man in the beginning from the dust of the earth.

The Flesh and the Promise: "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." This text alone should forever set at rest the speculations about the return of the Jews to old Jerusalem, in order that God's promises may be fulfilled. Still more should it put an end to the absurd notion that any nation, as England or America, constitutes Israel, and is heir to those promises of God.

God's Foreknowledge: When the children were not yet born, and had done neither good nor evil, it was said of them, "The elder shall serve the younger." God knows the end from the beginning, and could tell what each one would do. The choice was in accordance with what is said of God, "who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." 2 Timothy 1:9

“Esau Have I Hated” This was not written until many years after the death of both Jacob and Esau. “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the Lord; yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.” Malachi 1:2, 3. Of his descendants it is said that they shall be called, “The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever.” Verse 3. And why? “Thus saith the Lord, For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever.” Amos 1:11. Jacob, on the other hand, while no better by nature than Esau, believed the promises of God, and was by them made partaker of the divine nature and thus an heir of God and a joint heir of Jesus Christ.

No Unrighteousness with God: Mark well verses 14-17 for evidence that there is no arbitrariness in God’s choice. It is all of mercy. “He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” So it is all of “God that shows mercy.” The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord (Psalm 119:64), and “His mercy endures forever.”

God’s Purpose for Pharaoh: The case of Pharaoh is cited by the apostle as an illustration of the statement that “it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.” “For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth.”

It is immaterial whether this refers to the bringing of Pharaoh to the throne, or to the preserving of him up to that time. One thing is certain: it does not teach us, as is commonly supposed, that God brought Pharaoh to the throne for the purpose of wreaking his vengeance upon him. It is astonishing that any professed Christian could ever have dishonored God by such a charge against him.

The purpose of God in raising Pharaoh up, or causing him to stand, was that he might show to him and in him his power, and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth. This purpose was accomplished in the destruction of Pharaoh because of his stubborn resistance. But it would have been accomplished just as well, and much better for Pharaoh if he had listened to the word of God. Pharaoh saw God’s power, but would not believe. If he had believed, he would have been saved, because the power of God is salvation to every one that believeth.

Pharaoh had an imperious will. His one great characteristic was steadfastness, pertinacity degenerating into stubbornness. But who can estimate the power for good that Pharaoh would have been if his will had been yielded to the Lord? To yield to the Lord would have meant a great sacrifice, as men count sacrifices, but no greater than that which Moses had made. Moses had given up the same throne, to cast in his lot with God’s people. A wonderful and honorable position was offered to Pharaoh, but he knew not the day of his visitation. It involved humiliation, and he rejected it. As a consequence he lost everything; while Moses, who chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, and to share the reproach of Christ, has a name and a place that will endure throughout eternity. The mercies of God rejected turn into curses. “For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein.” Hosea 14:9

Romans 9:19-33 “Accepted in the Beloved”

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In our last study, embracing the first part of the ninth chapter of Romans, we learned something further in regard to God’s purpose and election. We learned that the Jews by nature were never any more the people of God than any other people, and that apart from Christ they were as much accursed as were heathen that ever lived.

We learned also that although God did make choice of certain ones, specially named, who afterwards attained great eminence as children of God, the choice was not arbitrary. Jacob was chosen before he was born, but no more than all other men are. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, “according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” Ephesians 1:3-7

“So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God, that showeth mercy.” As proof of this, the apostle cited the case of Pharaoh, who was chosen in Christ just as much as Jacob was, and just as much as we are. He was chosen to the praise of the glory of the grace of God, that he might show forth the excellencies of the Lord; but he obstinately refused to submit. But God will be praised even by the wrath of men, if they are not willing to praise Him voluntarily, and so God’s name and power were made known through Pharaoh’s stubbornness. It would have been better if the proud king had yielded himself to the design of God, instead of having that design worked out in spite of him. But the lesson that we are to learn is that every man in every nation under heaven has been chosen in Christ, and that none have been chosen in any other way, and that this choice is that they should be adopted as sons. In this choice the Jews have no advantage over others, but are on equality with them, as is further shown by the remainder of the chapter:

Romans 9:19-33

“Thou wilt then say unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not My people, and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. Isaiah also cries concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved; for He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness; because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Isaiah said before, Except the Lord of Sabbath had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto

Gomorrhah. What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

We will omit the usual questions on the text, leaving the reader to press that matter as closely as possible, and will proceed at once to note a few of the lessons set forth in the text.

Replying Against God: This is a very common thing, and its commonness has caused most people to lose sight of its wickedness. The man who begins indignantly to ask, “Why does God do so and so?” or to say, “I can’t see the justice in such a course,” as though he were especially and personally affronted, makes it impossible for himself to understand even that which a mortal may comprehend of God. It is very foolish and wicked to blame Him because we are not equal to Him in wisdom. The only way to come to the knowledge of the little that may be understood of God is to settle it once for all that He is just and merciful, and that everything He does is for the good of His creatures. Reverence, and not clamorous questioning, becomes a creature in the presence of the infinite God. “Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

The Potter and His Vessels: The one who thinks himself competent to criticize the Lord thinks that he has a sure case against him in verses 21-24 of this chapter. “Surely,” says he, “this text teaches us that God has made some men to be saved, and others to be destroyed.” Most certainly we find nothing of the kind! There is a vast difference between what the text actually says, and what men imagine that it says. The potter has power over the clay, and so the Creator has power over his creatures, of natural and unquestionable right. Consider the figure. The potter has power over the clay to make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor. Very true; but who in the world ever heard of a potter who busied himself making vessels for the sole purpose of destroying them? He makes vessels of different kinds for various purposes, but they are all intended for use, and not for destruction. So God never made anyone for the purpose of destroying him.

God’s Longsuffering: The fact that God does not plan the destruction of any one is shown in that He hesitates long before allowing any to suffer the destruction which their own evil deeds have justly earned. He “endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” They fitted themselves for destruction after their hardness, by treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath. Romans 2:5. Note that God endured with much long-suffering these “vessels of wrath.” Now we are to “account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation.” 2 Peter 3:15. He “is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Verse 9. The fact, therefore, that God endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, even after they were fitted to destruction, shows that he longed for their salvation, and would give them every possible chance for it.

“Whom He Hath Called” God’s long-suffering is also for the purpose of making known the riches of His glory “on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory.” And who are these? “Even us, whom He hath called.” And who are they who are called? Are they of some particular nation? “Not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” The entire chapter is a

vindication of God's choice of men even before their birth, as illustrated in the case of Jacob; and this verse shows that the choosing of Jacob did not mean that God had special privileges for the Jewish nation, but that He bestows His favors impartially on Jews and Gentiles alike, if they will accept them.

God's People: This is still further shown by verses 25, 26: "As He saith also in Osee [Hosea 1.9,10], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people; there shall they be called the children of the living God." God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. The apostle Peter described this visit in these words: "God, which knows the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." And further, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Acts 15:7-11. And so "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." Romans 10:12

The Remnant: "Isaiah also cries concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved." Therefore "at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Romans 11:5. No matter how many there may be who can trace their genealogy to Jacob according to the flesh; it is only they who are willing subjects of the grace of God who will be saved. There is positively no chance for boasting save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gentiles Ahead: The Jews professed to keep the law, but did not; the Gentiles were not associated with the law, yet they met its requirements. Now, if the reader will recall Romans 2:25-29, he will see that real circumcision consists (and always did consist) in keeping the law. Therefore since the Gentiles by their faith kept the law, and the Jews through their lack of faith did not keep it, it appears that they had changed places; the Gentiles were really "Jews," and the Jews by nature were the same as the heathen.

Missing the Mark: The Jews followed after the law of righteousness, but did not attain to it. Why not? "Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." How forcibly this sets forth that of which the entire epistle is a demonstration, namely, that faith does not clear one from its transgression, but that by faith alone can the law be kept! The Jews are not blamed for following after the law of righteousness, but for not following after it in the right way. It is not by works, but by faith, that the works, which the law requires, can be attained. That is to say that bad works cannot produce good works; good cannot come of evil. There is no discount upon good works. They are the most necessary things in the world. They are the result of the keeping of the law by faith. But there can not by any possibility be good works without faith; for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Romans 14:23

The Stumbling-Stone: Do not fail to connect the last part of this chapter with the first part. Remember that the beginning presents Israel according to the flesh as accursed from Christ. To them pertained, among other things, the giving of the law, but they came miserably short of it. Why? "For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone." What stumbling-stone? Christ. They were in the very same condition that so many people are today, they would not believe that the promises of God to Israel were wholly and solely in Christ. They thought, as many professed Christians now do, that God honored them for their own sake, without any regard to Christ. Christ is the

stumbling-stone over which all stumble who regard the promises to Israel as made to a certain earthly nation, to the exclusion of all others.

A Sure Foundation: Strange to say, that very stumbling-stone is a stepping-stone, and a sure foundation. That over which some fall, is the means of lifting up and building up others. “The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein.” Hosea 14:9. Christ is a rock of offence to those who disbelieve, but a sure foundation to those who have faith. He is “the Holy One of Israel,” “the King of Israel,” “the Shepherd of Israel,” and at the same time the fold, and the door into the fold. Without him there could be no such thing as a nation of Israel. Those who think to claim an inheritance in Israel because of their birth and without respect to Christ will be ashamed at the last because whosoever comes not in at the door, the same will be proved to be “a thief and a robber.” But “whosoever believeth on him shall not be put to shame,” because his faith will show him to be Abraham’s seed, and thus an heir of God according to the promise.