

# NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

## *Lesson 52*

### Romans – Part Five

#### God's Sovereignty, Israel's Future and Conclusion

#### Chapters 9 – 16

## I. BACKGROUND

Paul began his letter to the Roman church exploring the commonality of Gentile and Jewish Christians in their need for God (1:18-3:20), forgiveness in Christ (3:21-5:21), and the call to righteousness (6-8). In chapters 9 through 11, Paul began to discuss the issue of salvation in light of God's choices and the Jews that refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah. These passages are very difficult to understand. Personally, I believe that in later years, Peter, having spent considerable time with the Roman church, had familiarity with this letter. He may have even thought of these chapters when he wrote,

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. *His letters contain some things that are hard to understand*, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction. (II Peter 3:15-16)

As we look at chapters that many scholars deem Paul's most difficult to grasp, let us try to understand while avoiding ignorance and instability!

## II. THE TEXT

Paul begins Chapter 9 expressing his clear emotional concern over the Jewish unbelievers. Paul writes of his "great sorrow" and "unceasing anguish" in his heart over the Jews. Paul explains that the Jews were adopted sons; receivers of God's glory in the wilderness, tabernacle and ark of the covenant; receiving God's covenantal promise, the law, the temple, and the other promises delivered. The Jews were not only the Patriarchs, but also the earthly lineage of Christ himself. Paul would gladly be cut off from God if it would make a difference to his people (9:1-5).

It is no surprise to read these words. Paul's earthly family was entirely and purely Jewish. His growing friends, his companions, and his colleagues were all Jewish. No doubt many faces near and dear to Paul flashed before his eyes and heart as he thought of Jews rejecting Jesus as Messiah. God used Paul to bring countless Gentiles into the church, and yet, there were many brethren Jews who he seemed unable to help find the light.

Did God's promises to Abraham and the Patriarchs fail? Did the exclusion of great numbers of Jews from the kingdom (church) mean that God's promises were thwarted? Paul says certainly not!

Paul then explains that all the seed of Abraham were never considered God's "chosen people" anyway. Paul notes that God blessed Abraham and his offspring in Genesis 21:12, but only through Isaac and not through Ishmael. Paul saw in this that the children of God are the children assigned through God's promise, not simply genetics.

In a similar fashion, Paul reminds the Romans that Isaac also had two boys, Jacob and Esau. The Jewish promise never rested on all those descending through Isaac. The promise rested only on Jacob. Paul adds that this selection process by God was not only a simple matter of genetics, but it also was not based on the good or bad deeds of those selected. In fact, the selection of Jacob over Esau was made while both were in the womb, before either one had done anything good or bad (9:6-13).<sup>1</sup>

God's choices were not unjust. To the contrary, God makes choices on where and how life falls to people. Jesus recognized this fact as well when he taught that to whom much is given, much is expected. There is not equality in the world as to the blessings, gifts, and opportunities of people. Nor are God's choices simply made off of man's merit. God raised up Pharaoh with great power and wealth, not because Pharaoh deserved it. To the contrary, Pharaoh got the power and blessings so God could show to the world God's overarching power. God works throughout history and through mankind to see his glory and purposes fulfilled (9:14-18).

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<sup>1</sup> Paul quotes from Genesis 25:23 that "the older [Esau] will serve the younger [Jacob]." Paul then goes to Malachi 1:2-3 for the passage, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." We sell Paul short if we remove this quotation from its context in Malachi. God is not saying he peremptorily hated Esau. The Malachi quote reflects that God gave the promised good land to the descendants of Jacob while lesser lands and opportunities were given to Esau.

Paul knew this teaching might prompt some to ask, “Why does God blame man? Isn’t it all God’s choice?” Paul does not give a direct answer to this question. He first challenges the right to even ask the question! God is God, not merely a more powerful human. God is so beyond us that we need to step back and consider that in asking such a question we are taking on a position as God’s judge! We have no more right to judge our creator God than a pot has a right to question a potter as to why it was made in its form (9:19-21).

God could have reasons far beyond our ability to grasp. God could be making objects to help his people perceive the “riches of his glory” (9:23). God’s real chosen people were not Jews only, but those among Jews and Gentiles that respond to the call of Christ.

In that regard, Paul quotes the Hosea 2:23 passage that God would call “them ‘my people’ who are not my people.” God gave righteousness in Jesus to Jew and Gentile both. God did so even though the Gentiles were not living in service to God out of the law. In fact, Paul notes the law became a stumbling block to many Jews who thought it was a means to righteousness (9:25-33).

So, Paul’s heart and desire was for all Jews to find God’s salvation in Jesus. Paul recognized that many had great zeal in their life, but their zealotry came not from humility before God but rather from self-righteousness. These were Jews who sought to stand before God based on their own merit and effort rather than God’s mercy and sacrifice. These folks missed the purpose of the law!

Paul uses a multitude of scriptures to set apart a life based on earned righteousness to one based on the merit of Christ. It is wrong for anyone to believe that he has the ability to go into heaven and bring Christ and salvation down. Nor can anyone go into the grave and bring Christ back. The only hope for man is in the righteousness that comes from faith. Paul emphasizes that,

*If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.  
(10:9)*

From the heart (faith) expressed by the mouth (confession), we have justification and salvation. To support this, Paul references Isaiah 28:16, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” This is the bottom line, and it applies equally to Jew and Gentile. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (10:13).

To call on the name of the Lord, one needs to believe. To believe, one needs to hear. To hear, someone must preach. To preach, someone must go forth with a message. Hence, Paul proclaims a blessing on those who take the gospel out (10:14-15).

Paul recognized and spoke of the obvious in relation to this message. Namely, many Jews failed to embrace the gospel message of Jesus as a crucified Messiah. These Jews certainly did hear the word, but the message was not understood or accepted. Through obstinance and disobedience, many Jews steadfastly refused Jesus and his salvation. This fact Paul contrasted to the many Gentiles who never sought God but came to faith as the word of God came to them (10:16-21).

So, does this mean that God rejected Israel? Certainly not! (μη γενοιτο - *me genoito!*) Look at Paul! Paul was a Jew. God did not reject Paul! And, not just Paul was saved among the Jews. Reminding the Romans of Elijah’s thinking that all the Jews but him were living in idolatry, while in fact 7,000 had not bowed the knee to Baal, Paul emphasizes that among the Jews are a number of Christian believers (11:1-6).

Those God foreknew were not rejected but elected! They accepted Jesus while others were hardened in their hearts. God has put those of faith into his kingdom, while those of disbelief cannot even see or hear the good news for what it is (11:7-10).

Are no more Jews to find the kingdom? Have they fallen beyond recovery? Paul says, “no!” In fact, the Jews rejection of Jesus in a real sense has brought salvation to the Gentiles. Paul believes and hopes that the conversion process among the Gentiles will stir up more Jews to faith. Accordingly, Paul warns the Gentiles not to get too uppity about their faith and inclusion in the kingdom. Like a wild branch grafted onto a tree, the Gentiles need to bear fruit and not start judging in arrogance that the branches have been cut off (11:13-21).

History shows Paul, the Romans, and us God's kindness and sternness. God kindness extends to believers in Christ, just as his sternness extends to those rejecting the faith. We Gentiles need to respect the kindness of the Lord and live in it instead of joining those who reject him (11:22-24).

Paul then expounds on the future of Jews in a way that causes many confusion. Paul writes that Israel experienced a hardening of heart in part to get the full number of Gentiles into the kingdom. God loves the Jews on behalf of the Patriarchs, and a day is coming when they will receive God's mercy just as the Gentiles are as Paul writes (11:25-32).

The way Paul writes this raises a number of interpretive questions: Is Paul saying all Jews will eventually be saved? Is Paul using "all" in the sense of all that are foreknown or all that are called? Is Paul saying that a day will come when a good number of Jews will come to faith? Those answers are not clear from just the text we have in front of us. We need the larger context and teaching of scripture to help sort out answers to those questions. This is where Peter's quote might easily come into play!

Paul is sure of one thing though. God's wisdom and knowledge are so deep that like his judgments, we are incapable of following them out fully. We can never plumb the depths of God's mind, nor give him advice on how to accomplish his mighty works. God is the source and the conduit for everything good. Accordingly, we give him all our praise! (11:33-36)

### **III. POINTS FOR HOME**

Rather than give our usual listing of points for home, we will borrow a bit from brother Paul and Romans. We can do so because after Paul writes these incredibly difficult chapters, Paul gives his own "points for home." Chapter 12 begins with the word "Therefore." By beginning that way, Paul offers a proper reaction to the teachings he previously laid out, Paul urges the Romans "to offer [their] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (12:1-2). Paul wants them not to be conformed to the patterns and ways of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.

They should not (nor should we) think of themselves more highly than right and proper. Instead, they should use sober judgment and see each other as a body part of the whole body of Christ. Again, as we have seen throughout this letter, these words take on greater significance as we see Paul addressing a church divided and then reuniting.

The Jews and Gentiles have no need to fuss over which of the two groups is in charge and who maintains which roles. They all need to see themselves as part of the same singular body. The roles are determined by gifts, not genetics. Those who can preach should preach. Those who can serve should serve. Teachers should teach and encouragers should encourage. Those who have should give to those in need. Leaders should lead carefully and mercy should abound (12:3-8).

Folks should love genuinely, hating only that which is evil. Folks should “cling” to good. Their relationships should be ones of devotion and brotherly love. Each should honor another above him. They are to keep energy and zeal in service to God. Hope should give them joy, affliction foster patience, and prayer should continue faithfully.

Hospitality and sharing should be the normative. They should bless those who persecute, and be there in the rejoicing or mourning with those in need of either. They should never divide among themselves based on merit or class. Those in high and low positions should associate as equals in Christ. Vengeance has no role in their lives, but they are to seek living peacefully with all. Instead of being overcome with evil, they are to overcome evil with good (12:9-21).

Paul continues setting out life choices in chapter 13 with a discussion about authorities. Paul explains we are to live under submission, where in line with God’s law and authorities. We pay taxes, respect, and honor those in authority over us, recognizing that God has placed them in authority (13:1-7).

We are to pay off our debts, owing only the obligation to love each other. We are to live loving our neighbors as ourselves, hence fulfilling the commandments of the law. Recognizing that our day of salvation is nearer than ever before, we are to put aside our sinful practices and daily clothe ourselves in Jesus (13:8-14).

Paul uses chapter 14 and a good bit of 15 to discuss how we relate to each other. Those who are weak are not to be trampled by those who are strong. Some may still have issues on what food to eat or what day to celebrate. In this regard, rather than pass judgment on another, we are to seek peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Live for peace and mutual edification. Let the strong bear with the failings of the weak. Paul sees this naturally in his own life as he ministered to the Gentiles; we should be no different.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Paul then concludes his letter in chapters 15 and 16 with personal notes and a hope of visiting the church soon. He seeks the prayers of the Romans for success in his travels to Jerusalem and eventual trip to Rome. Acts will show us how well those prayers were answered!

#### **V. POINTS FOR HOME**

- High and Low the Same
- Not Overcome by Evil ... Overcome Evil With Good
- Submission to Authorities
- Pay off Debts Except Love
- Honor Weaker Faith
- Live For Peace and Edification