

## **An Apostolic Burden**

Romans 9:1-9

Today we make a big shift in our study of the book of Romans. The first 8 chapters are an exposition of one main theme, namely the gospel itself. The focus is upon God's work of justification, by which we are forgiven our sin. And the living out of that great work of God in our own lives as believers. With the hope and confidence of ultimate success and glory. Thus chapter 8 ends so triumphantly,

Rom. 8:31 "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

And, Rom. 8:37 "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So drink deeply from all the riches and encouragement of that whole chapter. Take a deep breath and enjoy it all. Then let's move on to chapter 9, a chapter more personally grounded in Paul's relationship to his fellow Israelites. He expresses a great burden, with astounding words. Having presented the gospel so fully and so faithfully thus far, he now acknowledges that the nation of Israel, as a nation, is no longer the people of God. And his burden is the realization that so many among his fellow-Israelites are now actually separated from God, subject to God's curse and condemnation for their unbelief in their rejection of Jesus. So his apostolic and deeply personal burden is,

## **I. A BURDEN FOR THOSE WITHOUT CHRIST.**

v.1-3

It is, of course, those countrymen according to the flesh who are accursed. Such is the distinct change as the revelation of God transitioned from the Old Covenant to the New. True saving faith, even in the Old Testament, wasn't merely a matter of external ethnic identity, but that external identity was the badge of identification for the covenant people of God. The Israel of God were the people of God, in the shadows of Old Testament revelation. That's how the people of God were identified then—by citizenship in the nation of Israel. But now, in the New Testament, what has always been true is made plain and evident.

### **A. Human ancestry will not secure salvation.**

Notice again how Paul identifies the Jews—"my countrymen according to the flesh." Relatives, based on ethnic identity and heritage. They shared a common earthly and human origin. They were of Israel, an identity demonstrated outwardly by the rite of circumcision. Israelites according to verse 4.

We know who they are by ethnic origin, tracing their lineage to Abraham. Then to his son Isaac. Then Jacob. And the fullness of the twelve sons of Jacob comprise the fullness of Israel. That name was given to Jacob after he wrestled with God, in,

Gen. 32:24 "Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. 25 Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. 26 And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" 27 So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." 28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." 29 Then

Jacob asked, saying, “Tell me Your name, I pray.” And He said, “Why is it that you ask about My name?” And He blessed him there. 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

So the life of fallen men was preserved, by the blessing of God. But what is so stunning in this passage in Romans 9, the point Paul is making in this great transition, is that that blessing of God is not dependent upon ethnic identity. With the coming of Jesus in the New Covenant, no longer would that nation of Paul’s countrymen according to the flesh even be considered to be the people of God. Paul understands. They are accursed from Christ because of their unbelief. They are separated from God because of their unbelief. Thus they cannot claim any privilege based solely upon their identity as Jews. And the broader point needs to be stressed, that human ancestry will not secure salvation.

That principle is, of course, to be emphasized today as well. Our human ancestry, your human ancestry, is not the basis upon which you will go to heaven. Being born in a Christian home or family will not save you. Membership in a Christian church will not save, nor any form of baptism. Having Christian parents will not save you. There has to be a personal relationship established with God through faith in Jesus. He, and he alone, is the way the truth and the life.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

1 Tim. 2:5 “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

Thus Peter preached to the people of Israel these great words,

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,

“Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Human ancestry will not secure salvation. And so many among Paul’s countrymen according to the flesh missed that. They would, instead, rely upon their flesh, their human ancestry. And they remained lost, dead in sin, and separated from God. Thus Paul’s burden, expressed as,

### **B. Sorrow and grief for those who are separated from Christ.**

Paul doesn’t hold back his words, nor the expression of his heart and emotions.

v.2-3a

Chapter 10 begins with that same burden,

Rom. 10:1 “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

Incredible words. Incomprehensible love. Paul goes out of his way to prove his sincerity-- “I speak the truth, in Christ.” He affirms the truthfulness and sincerity of what he writes, and

testifies that he has a clear conscience. As an Israelite, he grieves for the nation of Israel. There is great pain. There is heaviness of heart. There is sorrow, grief, beyond measure. Unceasing anguish. So much so, that Paul writes that he would wish himself condemned and accursed for the sake of his fellow Israelites. He could wish himself cut off from Christ for their sake.

Now, of course, he can't be. He can't possibly atone for his own sins, let alone for the sins of others. But just because this is a hypothetical situation, we need not doubt the depth of his motives. Paul is sincere. It is a sincere wish, a genuine desire, knowing, in fact, that the nation of Israel is cursed and cut off from Christ! He would wish upon himself the very condemnation that he knows is falling upon the nation of Israel. Cursed and cut off from Christ. The Greek word is anathema. That curse, anathema, corresponds to the Hebrew word for putting something under the ban, something that cannot be redeemed, but must be destroyed or put to death. So Israel, as a nation, because of their rejection of Jesus Christ the Messiah, was put under the ban, devoted to destruction. Paul knew that, and not many years after he wrote this great epistle, the historical fulfillment of that curse came to pass. The capital city of Israel, Jerusalem, was literally devoted to destruction. The whole city, and therefore the whole nation, was put to death. That was the reason for his grief.

I should note that such sorrow and grief should be ours for all those whom we know are also cut off from Christ because of their own rebellion of unbelief. We should as well feel that sense of grief for unbelievers, who, if they die in their unbelief, will face an eternal judgment at the hands of Almighty God. Thus the motivation for the work of evangelism, the eagerness to proclaim the gospel to this dying world in which we live.

That was Paul's burden. But he goes on, to describe,

## **II. A BURDEN FOR THOSE WHO SQUANDER THE ADVANTAGES OF OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL.**

It is quite a fascinating description, because he defines for us what those advantages were, the advantages of God's people Israel in the Old Testament. Their ethnic heritage was sufficient to save them, but they certainly enjoyed great and significant privileges.

### **A. There is great spiritual benefit in God's relationship with his Old Testament people.**

Beginning with what Paul calls "the adoption" in verse 4. In other words, Israel, the whole nation, was identified as God's son, an adopted child.

Ex. 4:21 "And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. 23 So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.'"

Such a great privilege that was! Such a treasured position, the one whom God would call "my firstborn." That is a privilege we Christians have today, in the language of the New Covenant, but for Israel of old, that was their identity.

And then, going on in verse 4, "the glory." I believe that refers to the glory of God's presence which was with the nation of Israel, a glory that appeared on Mt. Sinai and which also filled the tabernacle. It was a glory that appeared above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies and also filled the temple. "This glory was the sign of God's presence with Israel and certified to Israel that God dwelt among them and met with them." The glory was nothing less than the privilege of God's actual presence among his people. That he would dwell with them.

Israel also had the covenants, the series of contracts which God initiated with the nation. Specifically, he inaugurated covenants with Abraham, Moses and David. It was the covenant of grace, by which God defined his relationship with his people, and to which God himself remained faithful. Perfectly faithful. Always faithful. That covenant relationship is best defined by the sovereign declaration of God, “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

They also had the receiving of the law, given directly by God to Moses, such a privilege it was. God had spoken to them directly, personally. He had given them his word. And even had the ten words of the law written upon stone.

They also had the temple worship, or the service of God, as we read in verse 4. We read about that in,

Heb. 9:1 “Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary.”

Then also Paul mentions the promises, a reference no doubt to the central promise of the gospel itself, the promise of life, the promise of the restoration of a relationship with God. The promise of reconciliation, of atonement, of the forgiveness of sins. All of that. The old covenant nation of Israel had all those promises. And they were real and true, and they all were focused on the one great, over-arching promise of the Old Covenant, the promise of the Messiah, the savior of the world. Here is Romans 9, Paul, of course, directs our focus to that great promise above all others.

Speaking clearly about Israel, we read in,

v.5 “... of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”

Jesus came into the world as a man, as an Israelite. The son of God was incarnate, the word of God became flesh, in the person of man among Israel. As was God’s plan and purpose. And that was, and is, the purpose of Israel and all the external regulations regarding Israel, that Jesus would come. It was he to whom everything else pointed. And that is the greatest possible advantage given to the nation of Israel. The gospel came, in the flesh, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.

### **B. There is great spiritual benefit in the coming of the Messiah.**

He was the fulfillment of all that Israel stood for, all that the nation represented. So everything about Israel as a nation, everything about the Old Covenant, is designed by God to point us to Jesus, that in him we might have eternal life.

Clearly, perhaps as clear as in any other single verse of Scripture, we have Jesus presented to us here as God, truly God, having the fullness of the deity in himself, in the flesh. Just read those words with all the simply clarity they express,

v.5. “...from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”

Jesus is the eternal God. As John would introduce him in,

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.”

So this was Paul’s apostolic burden, that some, many, among the Jews refused to believe in Jesus. And many still refuse to believe today. They had all the privileges and benefits of their heritage as the nation of God’s people, and they squandered it through their unbelief.

That idea begins a rather extended section in Romans, chapters 9, 10 and 11, in which Paul teaches us about the ongoing significance of Israel as a nation and how Israel is not any longer identified as the covenant people of God. That identification goes to the church, whom Paul would later call “the Israel of God.”

Gal. 6:16 “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

So we come to that seemingly contradictory statement in, v.6. “But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.”

The simply idea is this. Israel now comes to mean the true Israel, the Israel of God, the true people of God. In other words, those who believe in Jesus. But not everyone from the earthly nation of Israel would be among those believers. “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.” They are not all of true Israel, true believers, who are Israelites by ethnic heritage. And the problem is not that God’s word sometimes failed, but rather that some of the people wouldn’t believe in Jesus. And thus they remained outset the covenant relationship between God and his people. Paul’s burden then is,

### **III. A BURDEN FOR THOSE WHO WILL NOT INHERIT THE PROMISES OF GOD.**

Unbelieving Israel. And the sad reality that Paul confronted was that,

#### **A. Some among the nation of Israel remain children of the flesh.**

And the children of the flesh and distinguished from the children of the promise. In other words, those who are of Israel only by ethnic and national identity are children of the flesh. Unbelievers. And there are others who believe in the promise of

Jesus and are then called the children of the promise. But only some, not all.

v.6-8

The real point of all this, and the emphasis of the New Testament apostle here in Romans 9 is a matter of salvation.

#### **B. Salvation belongs to those who are children of the promise.**

And, I might add, ONLY to those who are children of the promise. Salvation is ONLY for those who believe, ONLY for those who accept and believe the promise that is offered to them in the gospel. And Paul’s words are pretty blunt. Just being a descendant of Abraham is not enough. We’ve already emphasized that. Verse 8, “those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God.”

Salvation isn’t a matter of the flesh. It isn’t a matter of external religion or religious ritual. Salvation is a matter of faith, a matter of believing the promises. Verse 8 again, “the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”

Do you remember how God used the image of Sarah’s children with Abraham. Abraham had a child of the flesh, a child he begot through Hagar his bondservant. It was his own attempt, in his own flesh, to bring about the fulfillment of the promise of God. He, we read, was too old to beget children and Sarah his wife past the years of childbearing. But God had promised!

v.9

That is a quote from Genesis 18, and a key reference in Old Testament history. Salvation belongs to those who believe that promise. Thus we read in,

Heb. 11:11 “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to

conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”

This declaration regarding the children of promise is emphasized as well in,

Gal. 4:22 “For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written: “Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.” 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.”

That’s the true believer, those who believe the promise of God unto salvation. We who believe are the heirs of that great old testament promise to Abraham that he have many descendants, and we who believe in Jesus are they. Children of promise. And salvation belongs to them!

Salvation belongs to you who believe as well, and only to you who believe. Salvation belongs to you who believe in Jesus, and only to you.

Acts 4:12. “...for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”