

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

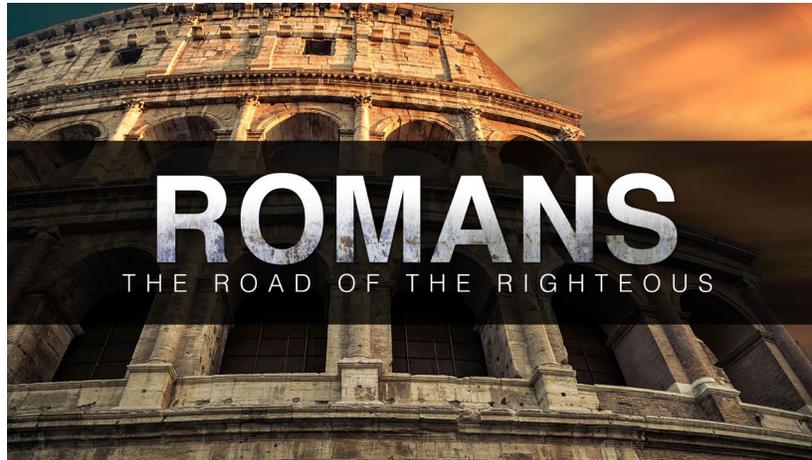
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 9:1-5

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

April 7, 2019



The Placement of the Overall Section

What should you do when you have a troublesome, complex theological question?

- Pray for God to give you illumination and understanding in His time.
- Read the Word of God and listen to God speak as you read. He will answer in the most profound fashion.
- Read systematic theologies, especially the area in question. Hence, if your question is related to salvation, or soteriology, you should read all you can on this topic. Charles Ryrie's *Basic Theology* is a helpful book in this regard. Every Christian should own and read a book like this. Henry Thiessen's standby called *Lectures in Systematic Theology* is another great read. For those of the Reformed tradition, Wayne Grudem's *Bible Doctrine* is most insightful and instructive.
- Read books on the subject in question. I've written a lengthy annotated bibliography to this end. It's located on our website under the resources tab. Need to work through how God used warfare in the Old Testament to accomplish His goals, you might like to read Copan's *Is God a Moral Monster*.
- Talk with other Christians who might know more about the subject than you do. And don't worry. All questions are good questions, so don't be embarrassed. Ask away.

Trust me on this one, I mention these concepts because I've employed them throughout my life, and I know they work.

Paul, as we know, was a master educator. He knew how to teach a class or preach the Word in welcoming and unwelcoming situations. As a communicator of the Word of God at a time of great godlessness, materialism, geo-political expansion, and various forms of thriving idol worship, he had fielded just about every kind of question one can imagine. And as a skilled writer, the wise apostle knew how to posit questions he knew his readers would ask. He has employed this powerful pedagogical technique throughout Romans chapters 1 through 8, and now as he turns to a new subject in chapters 9 through 11 he continues with this proven method.

What is the question Paul anticipated? In the first eight chapters, Paul has waxed eloquent concerning the power of the gospel to justify all sinners, be they Jew or Gentile, at the moment of their faith in the Messiah, Jesus. He portrays both as sinners in need of the Savior, and the Jew does not have a proverbial leg up on the Gentile because of his Jewish ancestry and reception of the Torah of God. Both are chosen by God to be part of His Church by means of His foreknowledge and desire to predestine them to be saved (Rom. 8:28-30). Finally, once they are justified by their faith in God's courtroom, their salvation, which is also likened to an inexorable Roman adoption (Rom. 8:12-17), is safe and secure until either God calls them home or He appears in the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

All of this wonderful theology would have caused Jews to have at least one burning, bothersome question: Since God is now working in and through the Church, which is composed of Jews and Gentiles, does this mean He is, *ipso facto*, finished with His prior plan for the Jewish people? Paul establishes this question most forcefully in chapter 11:

¹ I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*, how he pleads with God against Israel (Rom. 11).

A secondary corollary question would have naturally emerged from this first one: Since God appears to have reneged on His unconditional promises to the Jewish people with this new gospel, how do you know He will not change terms He has established with the Church? A third question follows this one: If God now desires to save individual Jews by means of faith in Jesus, what does this mean in relation to the nation of Israel? Does this mean all the Old Testament prophetic texts detailing the salvation of the nation (Zech. 12-14) are now abrogated?

In Romans 9 through 11, Paul stops and answers questions he knew all Jews would be asking as they studied the concept of justification of all sinners by means of faith in Jesus, the Christ. Yes, the theological crescendo of 8:31-38 could have easily been followed by all of the practical instruction in how to walk a holy life starting in chapter 12; however, Paul could not head here until he had first resolved the issue with Jews and Judaism. If the Law does not save (Rom. 2), if Jews and Gentiles are now heirs of Abraham (Rom. 4), if Gentiles are now the adopted sons of God (Rom. 8), then a Jew must logically conclude God is not staying true to His word because it appears that all the promises to the Jews are summarily terminated at the cross of Christ. I'm sure you can relate to the theological tension, because you have probably had a thorny question or two which caused you to question the actions of God. Thankfully, God gives us answers.

Had the Church replaced Israel, all Paul had to do was highlight this new theological reality. But he didn't, and for good reason. God had chosen and elected Israel to be His special people (Deut. 7:1-6). What he will show in the section before us is how the gospel merely fulfills God's plan for His original chosen people. Put differently, just because He saves Jews and Gentiles now and places them in the Church, does not mean He will not fulfill His ancient promises to Israel with the same gospel built on the person and work of the Messiah.

All of this complex theology merely informs us the Roman church had debates and discussions about all of this. On the one hand, the Gentile believers would argue, though wrongly so, that God had finished His providential plan with Israel, therefore, the Jews needed to move on. The Jews, on the other hand, would have retorted that their divinely chosen bloodline made them God's people, by default. Enter Paul the caring, loving pastor, and wise and gifted teacher. He addressed the questions at hand so unity and spiritual health could flourish in the pivotal church. As a side note, I would say if you are looking for a church, chose one which will not skirt the issues of the day. Choose one which will address the uncomfortably cultural questions so people know God's mind on the matter. Our church is such a church.

With this foundational understanding of the placement of this passage in mind, we can now turn our attention to what I call . . .

The Point of the Immediate Section (Rom. 9:1-5)

Without his typical connective word, like "therefore" (Rom. 1:24; 2:1, 21, 26; 4:22; 5:1, 12; 6:4, 12, 21; 7:4, 13; 8:1, 12:1; 13:2, 12; 14:8, 13, 16; 15:9, 17, 28; 16:19), or a key transitional question (Rom. 3:1, 3, 5, 9, 27; 4:1; 6:1, 15; 7:7; 8:31), Paul jumps right into the thick of his next theological discussion. This tells me the content weighed heavy on his heart. Someone who is emotionally charged isn't necessarily thinking about crossing every rhetorical "t" and dotting every grammatical "i." The love for his people and their lost status moved the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13) to waste no time addressing the gospel's relation to the nation of Israel. Read the text and you can just sense Paul's passion for his people.

¹ I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 9).

From this text emerges one practical theological motif:

Those Who Reject The Gospel Should Be The Object Of Our Bold Witness (Rom. 9:1-5)

Paul courageously preached in many synagogues in his day. Dr. Luke verifies this truth in his historical work called the book of Acts (13:14, 15, 43; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 7, 8, 17, 19, 26; 19:8). Some Jews converted to Christianity when the former Rabbi showed them the stone cold facts about how Jesus met the prophetic criteria for the coming Messiah. The majority, however, opposed

him, choosing to cling to their nationality, possession of the Torah, and obedience to the Torah as their means of being God's true people. Having held that position, Paul knew it well. Having the risen Messiah and Lord encounter him on the road to Damascus to kill more Jewish converts (Acts 9), radically changed his view, however, regarding who is a child of God and who is not. In the blinding flash of that theophany, Paul instantly dropped his concept of salvation by works, and replaced it with salvation by faith in the perfect salvific work of Jesus, the Savior who died our sins as prophesied (Isa. 53).

Moving through his opening words here in this powerful section, we catch a glimpse of his heart for his people. He, like them, had been blinded by his Jewish pedigree, his love of salvation based on perpetual obedience to the Law, his love of Jewish traditions, and his arduous training as a Pharisee. He gave this all up in a moment to embrace Jesus, the true and only Savior. Now, Paul's consuming desire was for his people, who continued to arrogantly reject Jesus as their Messiah, to move away from false salvation and discover true salvation like he possessed from God's good hand. In five short verses, he validates how we, too, need to reach out to Christ rejecters, by addressing two supportive concepts:

Share Your Passion (Rom. 9:1-3)

Paul's words pulsate with love.

¹ I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, . . .

The first word in the Greek text is *truth* (Αλήθειαν), and its placement is grammatically emphatic. Paul uses everything within his rhetorical repertoire to underscore his concern and compassion for his people, the Jewish people. He has not forgotten them even though he focuses much of his time on Gentiles. By tying his truth-telling to the prepositional phrase *in Christ* (ἐν Χριστῷ), he buttresses its worth. Couched differently, Paul is saying his words are spoken of in the sphere of the living, reigning Messiah, and this is a sphere he would never dream of putting forth deceptive language. Wedded to this is the fact his deep conscience, *syneidescos* (συνείδησις), that God-given faculty all of us possess which internally tells us the difference between right and wrong,¹ bears powerful witness from the Holy Spirit that his words are the essence of truth, not falsity.

¹Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 967-968; **συνείδησις, εως, ἢ** (συνεῖδον) ① **awareness of information about someth., consciousness** (Democr., Fgm. 297 σ. τῆς κακοπραγμοσύνης; Chrysipp. in Diog. L. 7, 85 τὴν ταύτης συνείδησιν; Eccl 10:20; Sir 42:18 v.l.; Jos., Ant. 16, 212; Just.; Theoph. Ant. 2, 4 [p. 102, 8]) w. obj. gen. συνείδησις ἀμαρτιῶν *consciousness of sin* **Hb 10:2** (Diod S 4, 65, 7 διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν τοῦ μύσου; Philo, Det. Pot. Ins. 146 οἱ συνειδήσει τῶν οικειῶν ἀδικημάτων ἐλεγχόμενοι, Virt. 124 σ. ἀμαρτημάτων). συνείδησις θεοῦ *consciousness, awareness of God* **1 Pt 2:19** (s. ESelwyn, 1 Pt '46, 176-78). Opp. σ. τοῦ εἰδώλου *in awareness that this is an idol* **1 Cor 8:7a** v.l. (for συνηθεία).

② **the inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong, moral consciousness, conscience** (Menand., Monost. 597 ἅπασιν ἡμῖν ἢ συνείδησις θεός comes close to this mng.;; cp. 654; Dionys. Hal., De Thuc. 8 μιαινεῖν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ συνείδησιν; Heraclit. Sto., 37 p. 54, 8 σ. ἀμαρτόντος ἀνθρώπου; Ps.-Lucian, Amor. 49 οὐδεμιᾶς ἀπρεποῦς συνειδήσεως παροικουσύνης; Hierocles 14, 451; Stob., Flor. 3, 24 [I 601ff H.] quotes sayings of Bias and Periander on ὀρθὴ οἱ ἀγαθὴ συνείδησις; P Ryl 116, 9 [II A.D.] θλιβομένη τῇ συνειδήσει περὶ ὧν ἐνοσφίσατο; Mitt-Wilck. II/2, 88 I, 35 [II A.D.]; BGU 1024 III, 7; PFlor 338, 17 [III A.D.] συνειδήσει='conscientiously', also s. 3, below; Wsd 17:10; Jos., Ant. 16, 103 κατὰ συνείδησιν ἀποπτέραν; TestReub 4:3; TestJud 20:2 v.l.; συνείδησιν

What does he need to truthfully articulate? He communicates he has a constant, never-ending (adjective describing something which is never interrupted: ἀδιάλειπτος) sorrow and deep anguish for the fact His people, by and large, reject the Messiah. The second word, *anguish*, *odyne* (ὀδύνη), is used in John 16:21 of the pain of childbirth. Note how Paul doesn't even finish the thought of the clause out to say why his soul is constantly troubled. That concept has to be supplied from the import of the entire section of Romans 9 through 11.

His concern for the salvation of fellow Jews is so great he makes a jaw-dropping statement:

³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, . . .

He says if it were possible for him to be accursed, or *anathema* (ἀνάθεμα) before God, which is something no man would wish upon himself, he would do it if Jewish brothers and sisters could come to know Jesus as the Messiah. He even goes so far as to say, he would be willing to be separated from Christ or lose his place in heaven, which couldn't happen based on what he taught in Romans 8:31-39. What passion. What concern. What love for his Jewish kinsmen.

μολύνειν Hippol., Ref. 9, 23, 4) w. subj. gen. **Ro 2:15; 9:1; 1 Cor 10:29a; 2 Cor 1:12; 4:2; 5:11; Hb 9:14** al.; ἡ ἰδία σ. **1 Ti 4:2**. Opp. ἄλλη σ. *another's scruples* **1 Cor 10:29b**; διὰ τὴν σ. *for conscience's sake* (cp. OGI 484, 37 διὰ τὸ συνειδός; Ps.-Dio Chrys. 20 [37], 35) **Ro 13:5; 1 Cor 10:25, 27f**; τὸ μαρτύριον τῆς σ. **2 Cor 1:12**, cp. σ. as the subj. of μαρτυρεῖν **Ro 9:1**; cp. **2:15**, or of ἐλέγχειν **J 8:9** v.l. (s. ἐλέγχω 2). W. attributes: σ. ἀγαθὴ *a good conscience* (cp. Herodian 6, 3, 4; PRein s.v. καλός 2b) **Ac 23:1; 1 Ti 1:5; 1 Pt 3:21** (on the topic cp. FSokolowski, Lois sacrées des cités grecques, Supplément '62 no. 108, 4–7 'one who enters the temple ... must be pure, not through bathing but in mind'); ἔχειν ἀγαθὴν σ. (cp. ἐλευθέραν ἔχ. τὴν σ. Did., Gen. 89, 11) **1 Ti 1:19; 1 Pt 3:16**. Also ἐν ἀγαθῇ σ. ὑπάρχειν 1 Cl 41:1. ἐν ἀμώμῳ καὶ ἀγνῇ συνειδήσει περιπατεῖν Pol 5:3 (μετὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς τελευτᾶν Hippol., Ref. 9, 26, 4); cp. 1 Cl 1:3. σ. ἀσθενής *a weak conscience*, indecisive because of being bound to old ways **1 Cor 8:7**; cp. vss. **10, 12**. σ. ἀπρόσκοπος **Ac 24:16**; καθαρὰ σ. **1 Ti 3:9; 2 Ti 1:3**; 1 Cl 45:7; καθαρὸς τῇ σ. ITr 7:2; καλὴ σ. **Hb 13:18**; 2 Cl 16:4. σ. πονηρὰ *a bad conscience or a consciousness of guilt* (s. καρδία 1bδ) **Hb 10:22**; D 4:14; B 19:12; Hm 3:4. ἡ σ. μολύνεται **1 Cor 8:7**. μιαινεται **Tit 1:15** (s. Dionys. Hal. above). καθαριεῖ τ. συνειδήσιν ἡμῶν ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων **Hb 9:14**. κατὰ συνείδησιν (s. on this Vett. Val. 210, 1) τελειῶσαι τινα vs. **9**.

③ **attentiveness to obligation, conscientiousness** (for ins s. New Docs 3, 85; pap.) μετὰ συνειδήσεως *conscientiously* 1 Cl 2:4; ἐν ὁμοιοῖα συναχθέντες τῇ σ. *assembled in concord, with full consciousness of our duty* 1 Cl 34:7.—MKähler, Das Gewissen I 1, 1878, RE VI 1899, 646ff; RSteinmetz, Das Gewissen bei Pls 1911; MPohlenz, GGA 1913, 642ff, Die Stoa '48; '49 (index), ZNW 42, '49, 77–79; HBöhlig, Das Gewissen bei Seneka u. Pls: StKr 87, 1914, 1–24; FTillmam, Zur Geschichte des Begriffs 'Gewissen' bis zu den paulin. Briefen: SMerkle Festschr. 1922, 336–47; FZucker, Syneidesis-Conscientia 1928; TSchneider, D. paulin. Begriff d. Gewissens (Syneidesis): Bonner Zeitschr. f. Theol. u. Seelsorge 6, 1929, 193–211, D. Quellen d. paul. Gewissensbegr.: ibid. 7, 1930, 97–112; BSnell, Gnomon 6, 1930, 21ff; MDibelius Hdb.² '31 exc. on **1 Ti 1:5**; HOsborne, Σύνεσις and σ.: CIR 45, '31, 8–10, Συνειδήσις: JTS 32, '31, 167–79; GRudberg, JAEklund Festschr. '33, 165ff; GJung, Συνειδήσις, Conscientia, Bewusstsein: Archiv f. d. gesamte Psychologie 89, '34, 525–40; WAalders, Het Geweten, '35; CSPicq, La conscience dans le NT: RB 47, '38, 50–80; BReicke, The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism '46, 174–82; JDupont, Studia Hellenistica 5, '48, 119–53; HClavier, Συν., une pierre de touche de l'Hellénisme paulinien, announced in Studia Paulina [JdeZwaan Festschr.] '53, p. 80 n. 1; CPierce, Conscience in the NT, '55; BReicke, TZ 12, '56, 157–61, esp. 159; DMariella Jr., The NT Concept of Conscience, diss. Vanderbilt '59; PDelhaye, Studia Montis Regii (Montreal) 4, '61, 229–51; JStelzenberger, Syneidesis im NT, '61; MThrall, NTS 14, '67/68, 118–25; BHarris, Westminster Theol. Journal 24, '62, 173–86; RJewett, Paul's Anthropological Terms, '71, 402–46; HEckstein, Der Begriff Syneidesis bei Paulus '83; GSelby, The Meaning and Function of σ. in **Hb 9** and **10**: Restoration Qtrly 28, '86, 145–54 (internal awareness of sin); PGooch, Conscience in **1 Cor 8** and **10**: NTS 33, '87, 244–54; PTomson, Paul and the Jewish Law (CRINT III/1) '90, 208–20 ('consciousness'); EBorgh, La notion de conscience dans le NT: Filologia Neotestamentaria 10, 1997, 85–98.—RAC X 1025–1107; BHHW I 564f.—New Docs 3 no. 69. DELG s.v. οἶδα C. M-M. EDNT. TW. Spicq. Sv.¹

All of this leads me to pose some personal questions which need asking. One, who are you burdened for right now? Whose lost status is on your mind? Do you have a Jewish friend who doesn't realize the Messiah has come? Are you even concerned about the lost around you? Do you pray for them by name? How often do you pray for them? Do you pray for opportunity to share your faith with them? When's the last time you led someone to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? Have you ever? Has anyone ever been baptized because you told them about their need of a faith relationship with Jesus?

We are teaching church, a Bible church, there is no doubt about that. But let us not forget we are also to be about the Great Commission of Christ, His last command to us (Matt. 28:19-20). We are, to employ the use of our church vision statement, committed to Gathering and Growing, but just how ardent is our personal commitment to Going, of taking the gospel to people we are specifically praying about?

Here are some prayers we all need to commit to:

- God, place in my heart a burning passion for the lost, a passion something akin to that of Paul.
- God, place on my mind the name of a non-Christian person or persons I need to start specifically praying for.
- God, give me opportunity to tell them about the gospel of your son.

Paul's passion for the lost, especially among his own people, is instructive. Go and do likewise. How do you do that? The next two verses might give you an idea. You must . . .

Sense The Problem (Rom. 9:4-5)

Paul knew the sovereign spiritual blessings God had bestowed upon his people, Israel. He categorizes those six timeless concepts in rapid fire order in these verses:

⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 9).

Before we take a look at these unique privileges, let's mention that Paul does not call them Jews anymore, but Israelites. Why? He's stressing their role as a covenantal nation before God, which means they were/are a people with divine promises attached to their relationship. Let's drill down on these privileges.

One, Israel was God's adopted son. No, the OT never classifies them this way by employing this precise terminology, but it is clear they were, and are, God's chosen sons.

²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn (Exodus 4).

¹ When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son (Hosea 11).

I guess you could say God adopted them when He miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt. That was a major privilege, no doubt. Their adoption, based on God's unmitigated and

unconditional love for them as the least of all peoples (Deut. 7:1-7), immediately branded them as God's covenantal people. Their goal, of course, was to live in light of that covenant.

Two, they had "the glory," which means they, of all people, had multiple opportunities to witness the spectacular, knee-knocking, eye-popping shekinah glory of God Almighty. Whether it was His presence over the Tabernacle in the wilderness in the form of a pillar of fire (Ex. 16; 40:34-38), or His brilliance when He materialized in the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 8), they had seen the awe-inspiring nature of God's person. No other nation has witness this, but they did.

Three, they had the covenants (Rom. 9:4). God gave them five in all: (1) The Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1-2), (2) The Palestinian (Deut. 29-30), (3) The Mosaic (Ex. 19-31), (4) The Davidic (2 Sam. 7), and (5) The New Covenant. What other nation on earth received many unconditional covenants with God which promised things like a land to dwell in, that they would be a blessing to the world, that God would give them a permanent ownership of the land (Deut. 30:3-5), that God would give them an eternal David king (2 Sam. 7), that God would give the nation of new mind to love Him (Jer. 31:33), and so on and so forth. Talk about privileges, and the majority of them are unconditional and wedded to the nature of God.

Four, they had the Law, which told them exactly how they needed to live in order to please God. Put differently, the Law told them where to approach God, viz., the tabernacle (Exodus), how to approach Him by means of blood sacrifice, Leviticus 1 through 7, and how to live a holy life (Deut.). Again, no other nation on earth has ever had clear communication and direction from God like this.

Five, they had divinely ordained worship. To read through the Torah is to understand what God wanted them to do as they worshipped Him. Pick, therefore, a special day like the Day of Atonement. Each line of each verse of Leviticus chapter 16 told the Israelites what this time of worship should look like in order to please the living God. Once more, that was some kind of unique privilege.

Six, they had what Paul calls the promises. This probably refers to all the amazing promises unconditionally built into the promises to their forefathers, viz., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The patriarchs were blessed of God, they did have great names, they did become a channel of blessings to others, their enemies were divinely judged for opposing them or blessed for supporting them, and they did have progenitors to carry forth the nation in to the future. Think about it pragmatically for a moment. When God makes a promise, He will in no way ever fail to keep that promise, no matter how ancient it is.

Seven, they had the Messiah, the Anointed One, come to them as prophesied. Isaiah 7:14 said he would be God, as did Micah 5:2. Isaiah 53 said He would die for the sins of mankind. Psalm 2 said He would be the great Davidic king, and Matthew 1 and Luke 3 trace his Davidic genealogy back to David.

All of this serves to underscore the providential actions toward Israel from their conception as a people called by God. Paul's point is well-taken: The same God who, out of love for Israel, gave them all of these unconditional blessings, will fulfill them because His character is wedded to them. Translated, just because God was, and is, working through the Church by bringing Jews and Gentiles into it by means of faith in the Savior, Jesus, doesn't mean this new relationship has abrogated the privileges God promised to His first adopted sons and daughters, Israel. This is truth in bold relief.

What is reality? The raw reality is the nation, from the beginning, rebelled and turned against God. Jeremiah's warning to Israel prior to their judgment by the Babylonians sums up how they responded to the unique privileges God sent their way:

²⁵ Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending *them*. ²⁶ Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did evil more than their fathers. ²⁷ And you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you.

²⁸ And you shall say to them, 'This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God or accept correction; truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth (Jer. 7).

God showered privileges on Israel, which no other nation has experienced, but they, by and large, chose to enjoy sin for a season, as Isaiah describes in chapter 5 of his prophecy. And, then, when the Messiah came and performed miracles as Isaiah said He would to identify Himself (Isa. 35:5-6), the nation vehemently rejected Him. Speaking of their rejection, it was Jesus who said these sad, emotional words:

³⁷ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ Behold, your house is being left to you desolate (Matt. 23)!

This messianic rejection, this refusal to embrace and accept God's privileges, is why Paul was moved to pray for the salvation of his people, Israel. Their unbelief, on the contrary, didn't mean God was finished with them. No. He still has a plan for their redemption; however, in the meantime, Paul demonstrates in his opening words how the rejection of the gospel by people we love should move us to passionately pursue them for Christ.

I'm sure right now you have the name of someone in your life who, like ancient Israel, was raised with wonderful divine privileges. They heard Bible stories. They listened to powerful sermons. They walked next to truly godly people. They were part of a vibrant and godly youth group. Yet, for whatever reasons, they have chosen to walk away from that truth which can save their souls.

Have you given up on them? Have you written them off? Paul wouldn't, and didn't. Neither should you, even though they may have burned you more than a few times. What does God want? He wants you, like Paul, to have a true, burning passion for their souls. God, ignite this holy fire in our hearts right now.