

The Book of Romans Study Guide

Chapter 9

In the first eight chapters, Paul has methodically demonstrated that humanity is incapable of escaping the consequences of sin on our own, and that our only hope is through faith in Yeshua, accompanied by the transformational power of the Holy Spirit. Now, in this chapter, he addresses what might appear to be a relevant problem for believers. At one time in the past, the nation of Israel was beloved by God, and yet, at the present time, the nation seems to be rejected and cursed. By extension then, is it possible that God reject and curse individual believers one day? Over the next three chapters, he will deal with that question and many others that arise from issues related to the identity and nature of the people of God.

9:1-5

v 1-4 Paul makes it clear has so much passion for his fellow Jewish people that he is willing to give up his own salvation for them. And to be clear about the subject of his passion, spanning verses 3-4, he uses the phrase “his kinsmen according to the flesh, who are the Israelites.” For those who have a replacement theology orientation, they redefine the word Israel to mean the church. In other words, God has replaced physical Israel with a spiritual Israel of believers in Jesus.

But this verse strongly contradicts that notion. In particular, we have to consider the verb of this phrase. Koine (Biblical) Greek verbs can actually provide more information than English because of their structure in a particular verse. So, when he writes “who are the Israelites,” the verb “are” is in what is called the present active indicative form. That refers to an action or a state that is both in the present and is continuous, with no contingency. Another way of saying that is: it’s happening right now, So, at the moment Paul wrote those words, this verse is saying that Israel is his kinsmen according to the flesh, and that reality will continue indefinitely because no conditions are stated that will terminate it.

That grammatical foundation presents a real problem for proponents of replacement theology. Their way of thinking requires a transition or a turning point in which God’s promises to national Israel are transferred to the church. Some proponents say that took place when Yeshua died on the cross. Others say it was when the Sanhedrin, representing national Israel, rejected Him as the Messiah, or when the church was born in Acts 2 (which is inaccurate for other reasons). But all of these turning points took place long before Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans around 57 A.D. Yet here he is saying that His Jewish kinsmen according to the flesh are still Israel at that time, not the church.

v 4-5 Having that grammatical foundation also enables to see what the continuing privileges are for the Jewish people as Israel. Earlier, in 3:2, we saw that they were

- **Entrusted with the Oracles of God:** Having the unique responsibility and honor of being the guardians of God’s direct revelation of Scripture.

Now, in 9:4–5, he adds seven more privileges:

- **Adoption** (as God’s chosen people)

- **The Glory** (the divine presence)
- **The Covenants** (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic)
- **The Giving of the Law**
- **The Temple Service** (divinely mandated worship)
- **The Promises** (specifically regarding the Messiah)
- **The Patriarchs** (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)
- **The Messiah** (who came from their physical lineage)

This is a recognition of the great blessings that have come into this world through the Jewish people. Unfortunately, not everyone has an appreciation for these things, even when they personally benefit from them.

Notice also how he refers in verse 5 to “the Messiah according to the flesh.” That is in parallel to His “kinsmen according to the flesh.” Once again that reinforces continuity, for just as Yeshua never stopped being Jewish, Israel never stopped referring to the Jewish people. And let us also note, as his message continues to unfold, he will define Israel more precisely, and He will address how Gentiles connect to this reality.

9:6-13

v 6 This is the primary prooftext for proponents of replacement theology. They take the phrase, “they are not all Israel who are (descended) from Israel,” and conclude that there is another Israel. In this way of thinking, physical Israel is seen as having forfeited its special status due to the rejection of the Messiah, and God has replaced it with spiritual Israel that is based on faith in Jesus. Consequently, all of the national and territorial promises made to ethnic Israel in the Old Testament have been "spiritualized" and transferred to the Church.

But that is a flawed interpretation, because it ignores the context that immediately follows, as well as the context at the end of the chapter. In verses 7-13, Paul first describes the way that God has been selective in His covenant promises, steadily narrowing the scope from the broadest sense of physical descendants down to a smaller subset of people.

v 7-9 He narrows the scope from Abraham to Isaac. In verse 8, he uses the phrase “it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God.” That is a clear parallel to “they are not all Israel who are (descended) from Israel” in verse 6. In each case, there is a subset within the total physical descendants who are children of God.

v 10-13 He repeats that principle regarding Jacob and Esau. Again, there is a larger number of physical descendants, but only one of them – Jacob – was loved by God and served His purpose by leading the people of God in his day.

Proponents of replacement theology claim that national/physical Israel has been rejected by God and replaced with the Church, which they call “spiritual Israel,” even though you will never find that term anywhere in Scripture. But the text of Romans 9 shows that when Paul states that “they are not all Israel who are (descended) from Israel,” he is just saying that there is a faithful subset of people within national Israel. Later in this chapter, Paul will define more precisely the identity of that subset of people.

9:14-26

v 14-16 In light of God's act of His will to love Jacob and to hate Esau (because he disdained the birthright of the Abrahamic Covenant), and in light of this broader concept of the narrowing of the concept of Israel to those of the physical nation who remained faithful to Adonai, Paul addresses the linked attributes of God's justice and mercy. Remember, God's justice demands punishment for sin, but, in His mercy, He offers a pardon for those who believe that Yeshua died in their place. In verse 15 he quotes from Exodus 33:19, showing that, according to the sovereign will of God, He decides who will receive mercy and compassion.

v 17-18 Paul shows that the opposite is also true. Adonai, as the Sovereign Lord of the universe, also exercises His will by hardening the hearts of people

v 19-21 Paul continues with this same argument by asking another rhetorical question: "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" To put it another way, "If it's only a matter of God's choice, then how can He hold us accountable?" He responds with two metaphors.

- The thing molded or formed has no right to question why it was formed a particular way.
- And the potter has the right to make from the same lump of clay a vessel for honorable or valuable use, and another for common use.

So, if God declares that we are responsible for our actions, regardless of His involvement in the circumstances of our lives, so be it. That is what true sovereignty is about. And that circles back to what Paul was saying about the Law in chapter 7, So that, when the Law establishes a principle, human nature has an innate tendency to rebel against authority. And that, in turn, confirms the condemnation that all unbelievers are under and the true sovereignty of God.

v 22-26 He asks another rhetorical question that can be summarized as – "What if God showed patience to those who deserve wrath, and demonstrated His glory by showing mercy on people He prepared for that purpose, & included both Jews and Gentiles in the people of God? (Hosea 2:23; 1:10) He does not need to answer the question, because he has already established that God is sovereign and has the right to do as He pleases.

9:27-33

Paul now shows the relevance to this argument by returning to his commentary on the faithful subset of physical Israel.

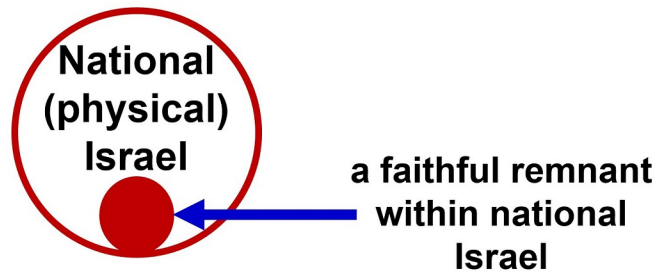
v 27-28 He identifies that subset as the remnant, which has the sense of a remaining portion of something. He then illustrates this concept with two episodes from biblical history. The first is from Isaiah 10:22-23 where the prophet cites the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore, but only a remnant would be spared from the invasion of Judah by Assyria in 701 B.C.

v 29 The second metaphor is a quotation from Isaiah 1:9, in which the prophet compares that same event to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Without a remnant being left, the

entire kingdom would have been completely destroyed, just like Sodom and Gomorrah.

This understanding enables us to more thoroughly understand Paul's earlier statement in verse 6 that "they are not all Israel who are (descended) from Israel." Within the physical nation of Israel, there is a subset called the remnant. Contextually, the remnant describes those among the ethnic Jewish people whom God has granted His mercy, and by implication, it refers to those who have remained faithful to God.

**"they are not all Israel who are
(descended) from Israel"
according to Romans 9**



Later, in chapter 11, Paul will return to this theme by illustrating it again with the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and he will show that the remnant now specifically refers to Jewish believers in Yeshua.

One last thought about the concept of the remnant. According to the Hebraic principle of inclusive reckoning, the remnant can represent the whole of Israel in terms of the Abrahamic Covenant plus all of the privileges and promises of God described in verses 4-5 of this chapter.

- v 30-32 Paul shifts his focus from the remnant to the majority who failed because they pursued the Law without faith. And then he contrasts that with Gentiles who weren't even looking for righteousness, but obtained it anyway because they received it as a gift through faith
- v 33 Then he closes with Isaiah 8:14, which shows that anyone who puts their trust in the "stone" of stumbling, meaning Yeshua, will never be put to shame, regardless of their background.