

### What About God's Program for the Nation of Israel?

#### Romans 9:1-5

Romans 9:1-5 - *"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; <sup>5</sup> of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."*

#### Background Notes

In the epistle to the Romans, the great doctrine of justification by faith is presented in a systematic way. In Romans, the basic question of how a righteous God can save unrighteous people is answered. In Romans 1-3, the whole world is shown to be guilty before a holy God. In Romans 4, God's way of salvation is clearly presented: by grace through faith. That has always been God's method – in Old Testament times and in New Testament times. Man is not saved through his good works, or through his religious connections, but by God's grace alone! Romans 5-8 is a great section on the benefits and blessings of our "package of salvation." Certain questions about the Christian life are answered in these chapters as well.

However, one question that's not fully answered in the first 8 chapters of Romans is, "What about God's plans for the nation of Israel?" In fact, in view of what's been presented in Romans 1-8, the question really would have come to the forefront in the minds of the readers of this epistle. After all, the Old Testament clearly indicates that the Jewish people are God's chosen people. But it appeared that Israel had been set aside. It looks like God had changed His mind, and was bringing the Gentiles into His family. In fact, it appears that Paul himself, even though he was a Jew, had so fallen in love with God's plan for the Gentiles that he didn't care about the Jewish people anymore! Most likely some of Paul's Jewish antagonists were accusing him of this very thing, and that's probably why he emphasized in verse 1 that he was not lying: *"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit..."*

So that's the first point that Paul answered in Romans 9. He bared his soul and said that he loved his own people so much that if it were possible he would take God's judgment upon himself as a substitute! Look at verse 3: *"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh..."* That would be impossible, of course, but it shows Paul's great concern for the Jewish people.

It reminds us of what Moses asked of the Lord in Exodus 32:32, on the occasion of the great sin of the Israelites, the sin of creating and worshipping the golden calf. God was going to judge the people, but Moses prayed an intercessory prayer for them: *"Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."*

Moses was willing to be judged in place of the Israelites. That was the same attitude that Paul had concerning the Jewish people.

In verse 4 Paul began his answer about the question of God's dealings with the nation of Israel, and he began by showing that the Jewish people are still to be considered a privileged people.

## Doctrinal Point

### The Jewish people were given "MFN" (Most Favored Nation) status.

"MFN" status is a term we hear frequently in reference to trade agreements between the USA and other nations. Some nations are more highly favored than others by the United States in the certain diplomatic areas. Well, Israel was certainly granted this status – and it was granted by God Himself! God called Abraham out of the idolatry of the ancient world, and with him God began a new people, the Jewish people. This chosen people became a nation that was greatly favored by God.

In verses 4-5 Paul mentions **eight great blessings** that emphasize how Israel was given MFN status by God Himself.

#### a. The "adoption"

In verse 4, "adoption" is another way of saying the Jewish people are God's chosen people. God adopted them – He **chose** them among all other peoples. In Exodus 4:22, God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, *"Thus says the LORD: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn.'"* What a blessing -- the "adoption"!

#### b. The glory

Blessing #2 is the glory Israel had, the special favor of having the manifestation of the very presence of God in their midst. Remember the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire to protect the people and to guide the people as they went through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land? Remember how the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle, and later the Temple? What a blessing -- the glory!

#### c. The covenants

Think of the unconditional covenants that God made with Israel! The Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, with promises of blessings, including the coming of the Messiah, and promises of possessions, including the Land – the Land of Israel. The Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, with promises of an everlasting kingdom. The New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, with promises of a new heart, and the ability to please God. All of these **unconditional** covenants were made with Israel -- **and they are still valid today**. What a blessing -- the covenants!

## d. The giving of the Law

God chose Israel as the nation to whom He would reveal His righteous standards. This was not the code of Hammurabi, or some ancient Hittite treaty -- this was the Law of the one true God. Think of the blessing of receiving the Law, the giving of the Law!

## e. The service of God

This refers to the priesthood, the offerings, and the service connected with the Tabernacle and the Temple. What a privilege to be involved in the service and worship of the living God. What a contrast to the surrounding pagan nations who served themselves or demonic forces. What a contrast -- service to the living God!

## f. The promises

Think of all the great promises in the Old Testament! Let's take a few examples: Proverbs 3:6 - *"In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."* Jeremiah 29:11 - *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."* Psalm 37:4: *"Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart."* On and on we could go with these great promises!

Now you might say, "Wait a minute, I thought those promises were for **all believers**?" Yes, we can **apply** all these promises to ourselves, and rightly so, but remember -- **in context**, they were all **given to the Jewish people**. In fact, the Old Testament Scripture itself was given to Israel. Romans 3:2 - *"to them were committed the oracles of God."* What a blessing -- the promises!

## g. The fathers (the patriarchs of Israel)

The patriarchs of the faith were all Jewish (Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, etc.) In fact, read the list of people in great "Hall of fame of Faith" chapter, Hebrews 11. They're **all** from Israel, they're **all** Jewish! What a national blessing -- the fathers!

## h. The Messiah

This is the climax, and the greatest blessing. Notice the contrast with the fathers in verse 5: *"of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."* In other words, the Messiah came from Israel, but He is not the special property of Israel -- He's the Savior for **all mankind!**

Notice that the deity of Christ is brought out in the last part of verse 5: *"... Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."* Notice how His deity is emphasized in the phrase, *"who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."* Or, as another translation puts it, *"who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."*

Only two verses, but eight great blessings of the Jewish people! The Jewish people were given MFN status.

## Practical Application

### How great is my passion for souls?

Look again at what Paul said in verses 2-3, *“that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh...”* Paul was willing, if it were possible, to swap places with the unbelieving Jews, if it meant that they could be saved. He would have been willing to give up His salvation and take their punishment! That’s a real passion for souls, isn’t it? Would you go that far for an unsaved neighbor, or an unsaved family member? It’s a tough question, isn’t it?

This week I’ll be meeting with a man who is interested in knowing more about the Lord, but he’s not yet a Christian. I have never met him before, so we’re going to meet together over a cup of coffee, and I’ll try to answer his questions about the Christian faith and whatever else may come up. Maybe there will be an open door to present the gospel -- perhaps the Holy Spirit is drawing this man to Himself.

I sincerely hope that this man becomes a believer -- but I have to confess to you and to myself, before the Lord, that I don’t really have a “passion” for his soul. I’m praying for him, but not passionately. I’m excusing myself because I don’t yet know the man. But wait a minute -- Paul didn’t know all his fellow Jews, yet he prayed passionately for them. And some of his fellow Jews hated him, and Paul knew it (Act 21-25) -- and yet he was praying for them! Paul had a passion for their souls.

I’m afraid we often fall short of the biblical standard in our passion for souls. Would you agree? Let’s think about this question. How great is my passion for souls?