

# ROMANS Part 81

Chapter 9:6-8

## The immutability of God's Word (Israel division).

**Now it is not such as that the word of God has lapsed, for not all those out of Israel, these are Israel; 7 neither that Abraham's seed are all children, but "In Isaac shall your seed be called." 8 That is, that the children of the flesh, not these are the children of God, but the children of the promise is He reckoning for the seed.**

In spite of all appearances, God is not finished with Israel. If God has left Israel short of the promises He made to it, then truly the Word of God will have lapsed and God will have turned out to be a liar. This is my argument against the Preterists, that the Word of God must not lapse and that God must not be a liar. The Preterists are not impressed. They stare at this argument and yawn.

Besides believing that the events of Revelation are already past (this is not a joke; if this had been an actual joke, you would have been instructed when and how to laugh), Preterists believe that the

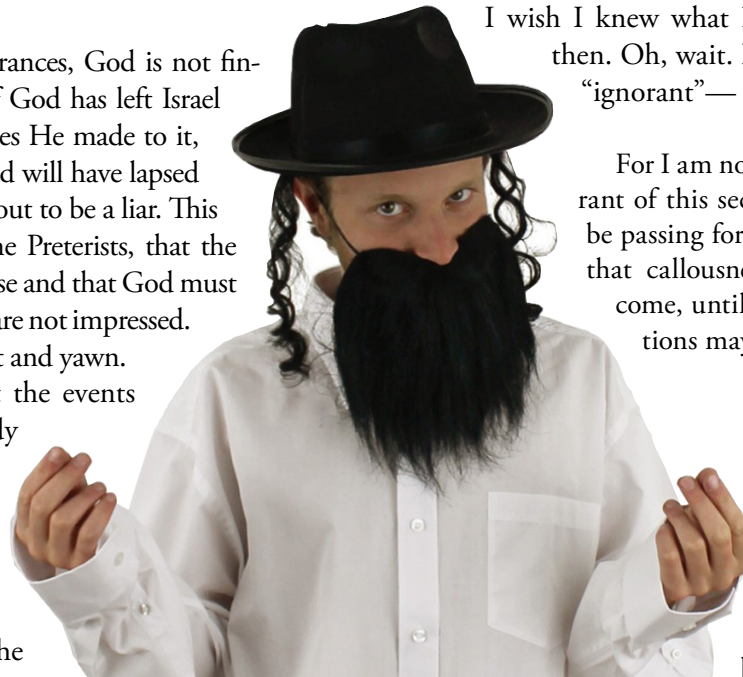
church today is "spiritual Israel." Those of this stripe consider it absurd to think that God will still bring His literal people to the literal holy land to head up a literal kingdom over the literal earth—in spite of the fact that this is precisely what God has promised to do. The Preterists make fun of *me* for taking God literally, at the same time imagining that *they* are the true Israel, and that God fulfills His promises "spiritually" (a nice way to say "not at all") through them. (And yet, unaccountably, few of them crave bagels and lox.) I have tried to think like a Preterist in order to understand this particular frame of mind, but I had to stop because I ran out of beer. The Preterists must think that converting the entire nation of Israel is too hard for God, or something. They must have a too high estimation of themselves as "spiritual Israel," or something. They must think that God gets frustrated and gives up on things, or something. They must believe that God is a lot like them. Or something.

Paul wrote this section of Romans to Preterists. I wish I knew what Paul called Preterists back then. Oh, wait. I do know. He called them "ignorant"—

For I am not willing for you to be ignorant of this secret, brethren, lest you may be passing for prudent among yourselves, that callousness, in part, on Israel has come, until the complement of the nations may be entering

—Romans 11:25

Paul was not willing for any of the Romans to be ignorant and imprudent concerning God's future plans for Israel, though they surely would have been both had they ignored



Paul's teaching. Unlike Preterists today, I am persuaded that these Romans adapted Paul's teaching. Preterists today, however, ignore the teaching of these three important chapters. Though Paul ably and (for him) clearly explained the facts of Israel's temporary stumbling (callousness, in part, on Israel has come *until...*) modern Preterists not only fail to learn anything from Paul, but they wonder why the apostle has ventured into these waters (Romans 9-11) in the first place. It should be obvious. Paul loves his brethren so much that he feels he must answer every objection of the "God-is-done-with-Israel" crowd. The viewpoint of the Preterists (held for five minutes by the Romans) would have angered Paul tremendously.



## “Paul must answer every objection of the ‘God-is-done-with-Israel’ crowd.”

As for me, I am not objecting to the objections of the Romans. The objections—back then—would have been sensible, normal, understandable, excusable. With God moving so mightily among the nations (evidenced by the unprecedented spiritual blessings described in the earlier chapters of Romans), and with the blessings to these nations actually dependent upon Israel's rejection of Messiah, a man or woman of the nations could easily think that, subsequent to Israel's national defection, God was now finished with His literal people. What is abnormal and senseless and inexcusable today is that we have Paul's clear explanation of *why* God

temporarily set Israel aside (Paul *says* that it's temporary), along with the promise that God will still, in the future, fulfill His literal promise to Paul's brethren (“thus all Israel shall be saved according as it is written ...” —Romans 11:26). Therefore, ignorance *today* of God's plans is not only abnormal and inexcusable, but a monument to the very naiveté Paul wished upon no one.

Here are some sparkling synonyms for “lapsed,” as in, *It is not such as that the Word of God has lapsed*: “expired,” “finished,” “terminated,” “voided,” “dead,” and “extinct.” Are these very nice terms to be applied to something that God swore by an oath to accomplish?

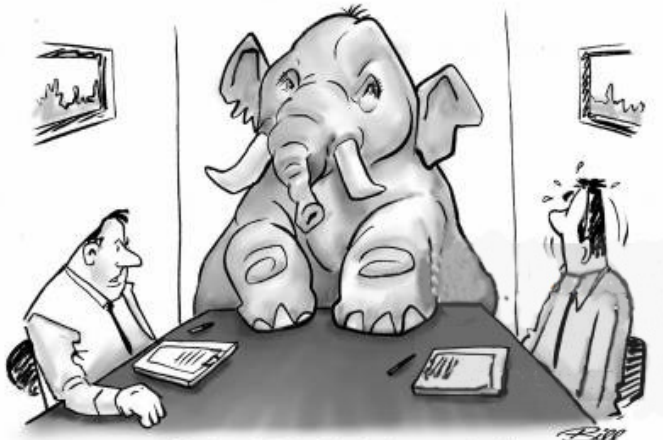
### NOT ALL ISRAEL IS ISRAEL

#### “For not all out of Israel, these are Israel” (Romans 9:6).

Preterists and other brands of Christians use this phrase to “prove” that they are now spiritual Israelites. “See?” they say. “Not all Israel is Israel.” But all these people have done is repeat the verse. They have proven nothing. They imagine that if 1) not all out of Israel are Israel, and 2) since they are not Israel, then 3) they must be Israel. This is an abortion of logic. The subject of the passage is—front to back—Israel. Not once does this passage have anything to do with anyone who is not of the stock of Jacob. People who are not Israelites do not miraculously become—in a moment—Israelites. Neither is Paul spelling out a way here for non-Israelites to become metaphoric Israelites. Rather, Paul's point is that not all who are called Israelites (that is, literal Israelites) are the Israel that God is looking for. Only the spiritual Israelites (who are still literal Israelites) are that. Anyone else is an apostate Israelites (though still a literal son); a spiritual poser.

It is like saying, “Not all Americans are Americans.” Every person of this context is a literal American; no one is questioning that. But there are Americans by mere nationality, and then there are flag-waving, bootstrap-pulling sons and daughters of revolution who proudly sing the *Star-Spangled Banner* while eating apple pie. That's the sense of Paul's statement. Another way he could have said it would have been, “Not all literal Israelites are spiritual Israelites; some of them are fleshly.” The point I wish to press is that, in this context, we are considering nothing but literal Israelites. The question of the Romans would not have been, “Are we talking about literal Israelites here?” but rather, “Are these literal Israelites touched by the spirit of God or aren't they?”

This interpretation is confirmed by Paul's next state-



"Calm down, Jenkins. It's simply a metaphor."

ment, verse seven— **"...neither that Abraham's seed are all children, but 'In Isaac shall your seed be called.'"** The subject is none other than Abraham's seed. No other people are in view besides literal descendants of Abraham. But not all of the children of Abraham are children of the promise. Rather, "In Issac shall your seed be called." In other words, even though the descendants of Abraham's other son, Ishmael, are still Abraham's seed, they don't count for the promise because they were born out of an effort of flesh.

### FIGURATIVE, NOT SPIRITUAL

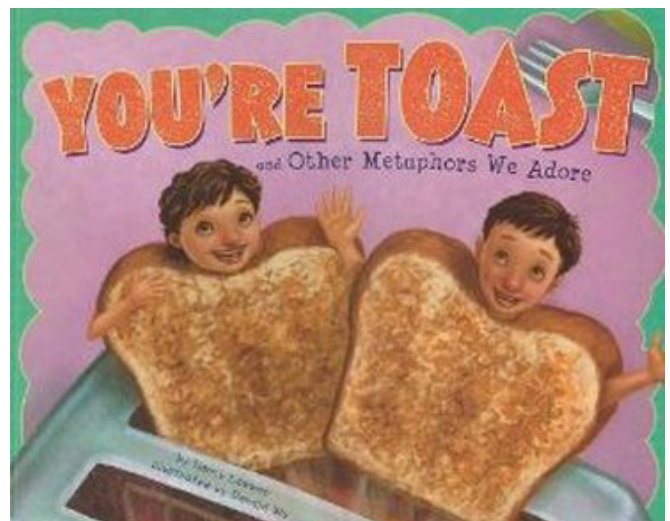
"Spiritual seed" does not mean "figurative seed," and neither are figurative Israelites literal Israelites. Here is another place where the "we-are-spiritual-Israel" crowd fall off the camel. While it is true that Paul does sometimes compare the nations to Israel, the key word of my handy little sentence here, easily under-appreciated, is the word "compare." For instance, the nations are *like* Abraham in the ways of faith. In Romans 4:16, Paul actually calls Abraham "the father of us all"—

Therefore it is of faith that it may accord with grace, for the promise to be confirmed to the entire seed, not to those of the law only, but to those also of the faith of Abraham, who is father of us all.

This verse electrifies the Preterists, who start growing long spiritual beards and shouting, "See? We are spiritual Israelites!" But they're not spiritual Israelites. Spiritual Israelites are Israelites who are spiritual—differentiating them from Israelites who are fleshly. What the

Preterists ought to be saying is, "See? We are *figurative* Israelites." This can be done without growing a beard or shouting strange, inappropriate things. Abraham is not their literal father; he is their figurative father. It's *like* he's their father in that he was so full of faith toward God, and so are they (supposedly; theoretically). If only Paul had said, "Abraham is *like* the father of us all," then we probably wouldn't be entertaining this eccentric gaggle of Israel-deniers. But no. Paul used a metaphor. That right. The figure of speech employed in the sentence, "Abraham is *like* the father of us all" is a simile. Similes are easy to grasp, while metaphors strain the untrained brain, especially that gray matter belonging to the "we-are-spiritual-Israel" crowd. Many, many people trip over metaphors.

The metaphor, rather than saying that something is like another thing, says that a thing *is* that other thing—when in fact it is *not* that other thing (not even close), but only similar to that other thing in one strong but specific aspect. For instance, Jesus said, "I am the door." Now, a man is as different as can be from a door. No one would mistake a man for a door, or vice-versa. But Jesus is like a door in the single aspect of being an entryway. In His case, He is the entryway to God and to life. In no other way is Jesus Christ a door, or like a door. A metaphor is bold, which is why strong writers like Paul employ it. Instead of saying, for instance, that ex-Chicago Bear linebacker Dick Butkus "is like an animal," the metaphor boldly states, "Butkus is an animal!" In fact, Butkus is a human being. But the point is made. Isn't it? Please tell me that the point is made.





## METAPHORIC SEED

Preterist/spiritual-Israel types trip over another famous Abraham metaphor in Galatians 3:29—

Now if you are Christ's, consequently you are of Abraham's seed...

Again, if only Paul had said, "it is like you are of Abraham's seed." But that kind of weak writing sucks the life from bold points. Being a strong writer, Paul employs the metaphor again ("You are of Abraham's seed!"), trusting that his audience gets the figure. (How *couldn't* they get it? None of the non-Israelites in Paul's audience were actual Israelites. Not even natural Israelites could be literal seeds of Abraham—see accompanying illustration—because no human being is a literal

seed; it's another metaphor.) No one who is not one of Abraham's literal descendants can become, in an instant, one of Abraham's literal descendants. And neither can anyone become a spiritual Israelite who is not an Israelite to begin with. But a metaphoric Israelite? Hell, we are all metaphoric Israelites, for we are all of the faith of Abraham.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED HERE?

Apply this now to "Not all Israel, these are Israel." It's the spiritual members of *the literal nation* that Paul seeks, not Christian wannabes with no knowledge of figures of speech vainly imagining that non-Israelites could possibly fulfill God's promises to literal descendants of Abraham.

## "THE CHILDREN OF THE FLESH"

In case some of the Romans *still* didn't get that God would surely one day resume His program of promise with His literal people (once the complement of the nations has entered into *their* calling—Romans 11:25), Paul finishes off this section in verse eight with—

**"The children of the flesh, not these are the children of God, but the children of the promise is He reckoning for the seed.**

The vital word of this context is "children." Again, we are considering none other than the offspring (children) of Abraham. The question is not whether these are a literal or figurative seed (they're all literal), but rather, are they out of Ishmael (flesh) or Isaac (spirit)? God promised that the Christ would come from Isaac, not his older brother. Abraham was the father of both, but only one seed "counted."

Is your appetite whetted for more? Romans chapter nine has just begun. Next, Paul will not only press God's responsibility to His Abraham-generated, spiritual people, but he will disclose the method by which God will accomplish the amazing feat—He is the Sovereign of the universe! —MZ (*To be continued.*)