

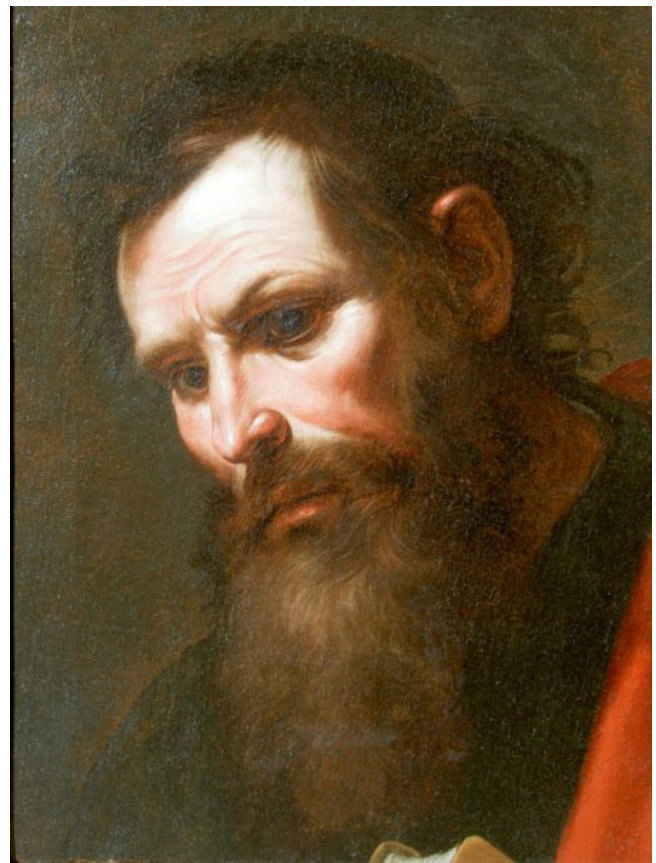
ROMANS Part 80

Chapter 9:1-5

Paul's defense of Israel.

The truth am I telling in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifying together with me in holy spirit, 2 That my sorrow is great, and unintermittent pain is in my heart—3 for I myself wished to be anathema from Christ— for my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, whose is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the legislation and the divine service and the promises; 5 whose are the fathers, and out of whom is the Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all, God be blessed for the cons. Amen!

Paul now heads off on a giant, three-chapter sidetrack which of course is not a sidetrack at all but an inspired soliloquy/dirge/prayer/wish/prophesy over his fellow Israelites that will not wrap up until the end of chapter 11. If one has consumed the marvels of Romans up to now, one gets the idea that both God and Paul (who have now teamed up) have washed their hands of Israel. After all, Paul is promoting freedom and grace in Christ Jesus. He is teaching justification, which is a really great thing for former tree worshipers but a tough matzah ball to swallow for those of the chosen race, as justification by faith comes “apart from law” (Romans 3:21, 28). We all know how dearly the Israelites love law.



Paul's colorful “apart from law” brochures turned many of his brethren against him. It was mainly Jews who wanted Paul dead. They accused him of bucking the traditions of their forefathers, which of course he was. On second thought, it's not that Paul set himself to destroy Israelite traditions. God's evangel to Israel remained intact. At the apprehension of Saul by God, the gospel of the Circumcision did not disappear from the pages of Scripture. It was still there for Peter, James, John, and the hundreds of Israelites who believed after the coming of Christ and the testimony of Peter at Pentecost. Paul became the herald of a new message that blessed any man or any woman of any nationality apart from the ceremonies (some might say the “rigmarole”) of Israelite worship.

If Israel had simply accepted that a new evangel had come to town, for a new people, with a new destiny and new marching orders, then they could have simply proceeded with their thing while the former tree worshipers proceeded with theirs. But no. Israelites, being the self-righteous types, despised the notion of anyone getting blessings ahead of them, or in an easier manner than they. *Easier manner?* Um, how about free.

COULD YOU REPEAT THAT, PAUL?

In the opening strains of chapter nine, Paul told the truth about his love for Israel. He was also not lying. This is a redundancy. Paul purposely thought up different ways of saying the same thing when finding himself on the wrong edge of popular opinion, which was frequently. Paul had much bad press to overcome, and so it behooved him to shout down the Abrahamic mob (and perhaps some of the nations as well) that no doubt now considered him a Jew-Hater. (After all, just read his letters; simply get a hold of a copy of *this* one; the man seemed to undo all things Jewish.) Paul couldn't even trick himself on this matter; his conscience weighed in and said, *Yep, you still love 'em. And they're still beloved by God. And God will still fulfill His literal promises to them.* If that weren't enough, the holy spirit making its home in Paul butted in with its two cents worth of opinion. So between telling the truth, not lying, and the dual witness of conscience and spirit, it is safe to say that Paul felt awful about what had befallen Israel in light of his new evangel, and he wanted the best for it. Israel will get the best all right; wait until chapter 11.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Unintermittent pain is in my heart—for I myself wished to be anathema from Christ—for my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, who are Israelites” (Romans 9).

Many people—expositors included—misinterpret this verse. They think Paul is saying that he would gladly have traded places with Israel and offered himself up to destruction (“anathema”) in their place if it meant saving them. Paul is not that crazy. He likes what he has been given in Christ and revels in his own future glorification. But haven't we ourselves been challenged by this verse—and failed it miserably? We were taught that, in order to be as spiritual as Paul, we would have

to be willing to trade places with someone and accept their doom as ours in order to save them. (How come this never appealed to us? Because we're not crazy! How bad would this be if eternal torment were true? Would anyone gladly walk into a burning cavern of hell in the place of a loved-one? Hm, perhaps so. But don't worry. God confronts none of us with such an idiotic decision.) But isn't this what Christ did? No. Christ was not stupid either. It is true that Christ died for our sakes, but He was not about to rob Himself in the process. He was to become the Firstborn of many brethren, not the *neverborn* of these brethren. He gave Himself up to save all, but would also



become the first One vivified from among the dead, the Guarantor of our salvation. With Christ, everyone wins. No one has to win at the eternal expense of another. No one has to give up one's inheritance so that someone else can have his.

Note the tense of Paul's statement: "I myself *wished* to be anathema from Christ." This was something that Paul *used* to feel. Note, too, that this is a parenthetical statement. Paul is saying something in addition to—not in expansion of—the testimony of the pain in his heart. This statement is not a strict explanation of his pain, and neither ought it be run together with the following clause, as if to say, "I wished to be anathema for the sake of my relatives." Paul's parenthetical statement stands alone. So what is Paul saying?

For Paul's part, it is a show of empathy. He knows how his relatives according to the flesh feel. It is true that several hundred Israelites of Paul's day embraced Jesus Christ as the long-awaited fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy, but many more refused His Messiahship. I am thinking of the parable of Luke 19:14, where Jesus compares Himself to a nobleman of whom the people said, "We do not want this man to reign over us." Most of the Jews did not want Jesus Christ as their Messiah. In fact, they wanted to distance themselves from Him as far as the east is from the west. They would create an uncrossable chasm of destruction, if they could, between Him and them. Such was their hatred. Such was Paul's hatred as well. You know the story of Saul the Pharisee. The author of Romans himself, in his former life, had wanted to be anathema from Christ. The Pharisee Saul so opposed Christ that, if any bridge might have been constructed between him and that deceiver from Nazareth, Saul would have destroyed it so as to render it irreparable. This is the heat of "anathema." It's tough. It's hatred brought to boil.

Paul is basically saying—

I feel sorry for what these people are going through, believe me. I myself had at one time wanted to have nothing to do with Jesus Christ, so the Jews' hatred of Christ is not unfamiliar to me. My former life was anything but easy. Being a Christ-denying Pharisee turned me into a self-righteous lunatic. Sad to say, this is what many of my brethren in the flesh are today. Jesus later described it as me kicking against the goads. An apt description, that. A goad is a prod. My prod was my conscience. Everything inside of me, including my conscience, resisted my murderous exploits. Kicking against goads hurts. But I did it, and my relatives are doing it now and I feel their unconscious pain.

CUTTING THE COVENANT

Believers today are not "spiritual Israel." This is a lie that besmirches the character of God. Believers today have not displaced or replaced Israel. "Replacement Theology" tacitly calls God a liar. This does not seem to bother those holding it. Not only has Israel not been discarded or replaced at the coming of the new evangel of grace to the nations, but they are still beloved by both Paul and God.

Israel's existence as a nation is tied to God's promises. God is the one who chose Israel. He chose Israel, not because it was the greatest nation, but because it was the least. The first covenant God made with this people was conditional; the second was without condition. The first covenant would prove Israel's inadequacy, the second God's faithfulness. God created every circumstance that would first humble, then bless His people.

In the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, God confirmed His unconditional promises to Israel with an oath. He, Himself, swore this oath. If you want to read about the promises first, go to chapters 12 and 13 of Genesis. If you want to read about the oath, proceed to chapter 15. Abraham cut animals in half, which was the old way of making an oath. (Here is the source of the term, "cutting a covenant.") Abraham laid the pieces on two sides and then God, as a fire, passed between the pieces. By this means God covenanted with Himself, swearing by Himself, making an oath to Himself for the sake of Israel. Where was Abraham when God passed between the sacrifices? God had put Abraham to sleep. It's the same thing He did to Adam when creating Eve. When God gets down to business, he brooks no human interference. That's how unconditional this covenant was. This was and is and will be the New Covenant. To then say or even suggest that God will not fulfill the promises He made to Israel is the height of insult. Paul himself is offended by the very suggestion. He rants for three chapters concerning it. I wonder how he restrained himself from ranting through yet another chapter.





GETTING THE GOODS

“... whose is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the legislation and the divine service and the promises; 5 whose are the fathers, and out of whom is the Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all, God be blessed for the eons. Amen!” (Romans 9:4-5).

What a delicious display of somersaulting exuberance here by Paul at the end of this section. It is easy for him to list off the top of His head all of the wild gifts and advantages that God gave Israel. It’s as if someone had said to Paul, “Ok, what’s so great about Israel? Give me eight things off the top of your head of why Israel is so great and why God has not forsaken His literal promises to this literal people?” Paul’s answer here would have stopped the inquisitor in his tracks, eliciting an embarrassed “Oh, I see,” and a hastily-devised excuse to forsake the conversation—“Well, Paul. Gotta go feed the goats. Take care now!”

We would not have known of the concept of sonship in a relationship with God, without Israel. Without the example of Israel, who would have known that God could reveal His glory, in such rich and textured folds, to humanity? The only way we now appreciate the lack of covenants is by studying the first covenant God made with His chosen people. Divine service is the ceremony

and detail given to Israel by God for His proper worship. Without appreciating the difficulty originally associated with approaching the Deity, we cannot properly enjoy the ease of access we now have to this very same Deity.

Israel is the first people God promised Himself to with such lavish promises. No one can speak of the promises of God without homage to those recipients of the first divine avowals. That our promises exceed, in glory, those of Israel, cannot and will never eclipse God’s original espousal to His original people. In this letter, Paul calls upon Abraham as a champion of faith. In this chapter, he will call upon Jacob and Esau as examples of God’s control of both evil and good. These are “the fathers,” and the fathers are of Israel. Last but not least, Israel brought forth the Christ according to the flesh, “Who is over all.” Lest anyone forget, Christ, our Savior, came out of this small, dusty nation. It is true that we are to no longer know Him according to flesh (2 Corinthians 5:16), but the same Christ who is now seated above every sovereignty and authority that is named, came to us, originally, through Israel. What an honor for that nation.

What a thing for us never to forget. —MZ
(*To be continued.*)