

# Israel's Rejection of Christ

*Romans*

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**Bible Text:** Romans 9:1-29  
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We turn to the word of God again as we find it in Romans chapter 9. The book of Romans chapter 9. We're reading verses 1 to 29 of the chapter.

1 I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." 10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls-- 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." 14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For

who can resist his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" 26 "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" 27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." 29 And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."

Amen. The last sermon I preached was the final sermon of a series of 20 on the first eight chapters of Paul's book of Romans, and I did spend several weeks then praying and thinking about what I might preach on next but eventually I took a fairly sensible and obvious, though perhaps not easy, decision, I decided that I would continue with Romans. We have done the first eight chapters and we're going to move on from there. Let me say at first that our first few sermons will be larger passages than I have preached previously from the book. Chapters 9 to 11, I want to take a sermon on each passage. So they're long, there will be no way in which I'll be able to cover everything, but I hope I can give you the main ideas and the main thoughts to help you to get to terms with these sermons.

Chapter 9, this is where the third main section of the epistle begins. The theme of the book is given to us in chapter 1 verses 16 and 17, the gospel, the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, the righteous shall live by faith. Paul says that is our subject. His first topic from chapter 1 verse 18 to chapter 3 verse 20, man's lack of righteousness. Man's lack of righteousness. And then from 3:21 to 8:39, God's provision of righteousness. And now we've come to the third subject, chapters 9 to 11, Israel's refusal of righteousness. Israel's refusal of righteousness. Now why does this come in here? How does Paul not move on to the practical teaching of chapter 12 following? Well, we go back to 1:16. He's preaching about salvation and he says to the Jew first. To the Jew first and that seems to be contradicted by Israel's unbelief and apostasy. God has provided his Son as the Savior, but it's a fact that Israel on the whole has rejected him. They don't want to believe in him or have anything to do with him. And so in these three chapters, Paul is setting himself to answer this painful, difficult question: why have the Jews not believed? It was for them first. He's going to help, he trusts, both the Jewish unbeliever and the Gentile believer and he's going to give three answers, or if you like, they're not exactly answers, but three

answers, one each in chapters 9, 10, and 11. And it's rich teaching, it's often neglected by Christians and I'm sorry that I've got to give you a very brief look.

So this morning we're going to look briefly at chapter 9. What he's saying in chapter 9 is Israel's rejection of Christ is not total. They haven't all done it. It is mixed with God's mercy. I want to work through the passage with you in four sections. First, in verses 1 to 5, the tragedy of Israel. The tragedy of Israel. There is at this point in Romans a huge change in Paul's tone and Paul's attitude. Chapter 8 had ended on a tone of triumphant joy. Look at verses 38 and 39, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." What a high point. What a point to bring great delight and worship to the people. Wonderful, wonderful. But then in verse 2 of chapter 9, he writes, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." So he's changed dramatically and why has this happened? Because Israel, his people have lost their own salvation, their beautiful salvation. That's why Paul is sad. Look how he describes it in verse 3 and following, "my brothers, my kinship, my kinsmen according to the flesh, the Israelites, to them belong adoption, glory, covenants, the giving of love, worship, promise, to them belong patriarchs, and from their place according to flesh, and from their race according to flesh, is Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever." They should love him. They should trust him. They should know him. He is one of them and all of this was set before them, and he was offered to them, and they were called to receive him. But they don't have him. They don't have him. One commentator says, God was now pouring out all his greatest blessings, and yet the very nation whom he had prepared to receive them was not interested.

There are no lies here about Paul's message. Three times in verse 1 he makes the point, "I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit." And this man is affected by great sorrow at what has happened to the Jews. He is heartbroken. He says in verse 2, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." The tragedy of Israel has broken him, has brought him down. He's filled with despair. and sorrow. What he says in verse 3 is impossible, of course. It's unreal. But there's a sense in which he would love to do it, to offer himself for their salvation. He says in verse 3, "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinship according to the flesh. I'm so upset about it, I'm so despairing about it, that there's almost a sense in which I would go to hell if they would go to heaven." He knows that's not going to happen but he's saying it to draw to us the tremendous sorrow and passion he feels for his lost people.

My friends, that's a question for each of us who are Christians. What anguish do you and I feel for those we know who are lost, who are not converted? How much do we know of this sorrow, especially in those who are closest to us, members of our families, our parents, our brothers or sisters, children or friends? It's a sad thing. That's why Paul is so sorrowful here and he now, in the rest of the chapter, answers three questions. We're going to look at each of them in turn. The first of the three is the longest. So when we reach the end of the first question, don't despair.

Verses 6 to 13, the question is this, and I quote it from the passage, "it is not as though the word of God has failed." It's not as though the word of God has failed. If God's people haven't believed, maybe God's word is no good. Maybe it wasn't clear. Maybe it wasn't true. Maybe it didn't convince them. Maybe it's the fault of God's word. This awful state, you see, about Israel raises a problem. God made promises to them. You can read them in the Old Testament. And now it seems that these promises hadn't been fulfilled. And they wouldn't be fulfilled. And you could say, "Can God not be trusted? Can God not be depended on? His promises have failed." And you could go on and you could say, "Well, if his promises to the Jews have failed, what about the promises that he has made to the Gentiles?" Paul has just been teaching the eternal security of the believers. In chapter 8, we read at verse 39, "In all creation, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's a great promise. Nothing will be able to separate us from God. "But," some of his opponents would say, "if the previous promises to the Jews had proved meaningless, will not these promises prove equally pointless?" Morris says in his commentary, if God cannot bring his ancient people into salvation, how do Christians know that he can save them?

All this is set before them. It's offered to them, but they don't have salvation. They don't have trust in Christ. One commentator says if his previous promises to the Jews have proved meaningless, what about his promises to the Gentiles? Verse 6. Look at what he says, "it is not as though the word of God has failed." It is not as though the word of God has failed and his opponents will say, "Well, why do you say that because he made a promise to the Jews in the Old Testament and it failed." Of course it's not. It wasn't. It wasn't. It was kept. It was obeyed. It was fulfilled because when you go back to the beginning, the promises were never made to all of Israel, to all of natural Israel, to all of national Israel. Look at verses 6 and 7, "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring." Inside the physical Israelites are the spiritual Israelites and the two bodies aren't the same. Inside the offspring of Israel are the children of Israel and the two bodies are not the same.

Paul then proves this by reminding his readers that Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, but the promise was made only to one of them, verse 7, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." A son was descended from him by a purely natural physical tie. He was his son but he was not included in the promise. The promise wasn't meant for him. The promise wasn't made for him. He wasn't promised salvation and joy. He was Abraham's son but the promise wasn't given to him. Only the son who was born spiritually, through the miracle, received the spiritual blessing. Verse 8, "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."

The old Puritan John Flavel writes, "If Abraham's faith be not in your hearts, it will be no advantage that Abraham's blood runs in your veins." If his faith isn't in your hearts, his blood by itself in your veins is no help, no benefit. And every Jew, when you think about it, would have to agree with that historic fact, even though they said they didn't agree. They would say, "I'm going to heaven because I'm a son of God," but Paul would say to

them, "But not every son of God will go to heaven." They'd say, "Oh no, I disagree, I disagree. All sons of God will go to heaven. All sons of Abraham will go to heaven." Paul will say, "Well, that means that Ishmael will be in heaven and all the evil, wicked, killing nations that came from his body who attacked you, who slaughtered you, who harmed you, who were covered with wrongness." He had to say no they weren't in heaven. They couldn't be.

But there might have been another argument. I think there was. I think some of these objectors would have said, "Well, wait a minute, Paul, you're being a bit cute here, a bit quick. After all, Ishmael was born illegally. He was born of a slave. He wasn't really your legal son in any sense. So it's not right to use him for your argument." What does Paul do? He shows that in the next generation the same thing happens. Two sons are born, one's accepted, one's not not, but this time they are born of one couple, Esau and Jacob. They had the same father and they had also the same mother, Isaac and Rebekah, and yet one of them is chosen and the other one is passed over. There is nothing obvious to distinguish them. They were twins. He says the decision was made before they were born, verse 11. They were not yet born. They had done nothing, either good or bad yet one is chosen and the other one isn't. People could have argued that if there was any priority at all, Esau was the older one. He should have been chosen and yet the promise was made only to one, the younger. He tells us why in verse 11, "in order that God's purpose of election may continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls."

So you see what Paul's saying to us, he's saying God's purpose to Israel hasn't failed. God's purpose to Israel didn't fail when we understand the Israel to whom it was given, the real Israel, the spiritual Israel, the chosen Israel, the Israel designed for heaven. There has always been division in this nation. The big physical Israel, they won't all be saved. And inside of the spiritual Israel, the chosen Israel, they will be saved. There has always been separation. There has always been rejection in this nation and that still is the case between not only in Israel, but among the people of God. You go to a big church and there are 500 people there. They're not all going to go to heaven because they all go to the same church and belong to the same church and pay to the same church because there will be those who believe in Christ and those who reject him.

This is Paul's first argument. Let me look more briefly at the second and third. Verses 14 to 18. Is there injustice on God's part? Is there injustice on God's part? Verse 14, "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?" On what basis does God choose one person but not another. Is that fair? Is that fair for God to do? Is it fair for God to say, "This person I've chosen to be mine, he will go to heaven. This person I have not chosen to be mine, he will go to hell." On what basis does God choose one person and not another? Does he choose the better ones? No, we can't say that. If he is just, would he not receive everybody? If God is just and honest and decent, would he not receive everybody into heaven? Or is he unjust? How does God choose some but not others? Is that fair? Is that right? Paul's answer is this, "You're asking the wrong question." What we're talking about here is not God's justice, it's God showing mercy. God showing mercy and here in this passage he uses the word mercy for the first time in Romans. First time he said it. And it's a key word in chapters 9 and 11. To have mercy occurs seven times in these two

chapters. It occurs once in the rest of Romans. This is about his mercy. His mercy. Mercy means God doing something which he is under no obligation to do, God doing something which he is not required to do, God acting towards certain people in a marvelous outflow of love and grace.

Verse 15, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" I will choose. I will decide. I will pick them out and I will give mercy to those whom I have chosen and I will show compassion to those whom I have chosen. He's quoting from Exodus 33:19. God could have punished in Exodus all of Israel for their idolatry. As one commentator says, he retreated into his sovereignty to find a way to pardon. He reversed, no, he reserved absolute liberty in exercise of mercy.

You see, friends, it's so often a tendency among us to think that we have the right of salvation, that we have a claim for forgiveness, that God is unjust if he does not forgive us and save us. But here's what justice by itself is, justice by itself could condemn to hell every human being on the planet and that would be completely just and fair and right because every human being has sinned. Every human being has broken God's law. Every human being has thrown away forgiveness. Every human being except the Son of God has or will sin. He doesn't need to be merciful to anybody. He doesn't have to be merciful to anybody. We can't blame him or criticize him for not being merciful to anybody. We can't accuse him of being unjust by not forgiving everyone. If everyone went to hell, God would be recognized as completely just and yet God is loving as well as just, and that is why he is pleased to save some from what their sins so richly deserve. But he doesn't need to save others. He doesn't have to deliver them. He doesn't owe it.

This is a wonderful, staggering truth and it needs explanation that we may understand it. The great question is this, it's not why does God punish some people? That's not the question. We know the answer to that. The question is, why does God forgive some people? Why does God have mercy on some people? We all have good reasons why we should be punished and condemned. We've no reasons in ourselves why we should be forgiven, saved, delivered. That's the question, why does God show mercy to many? That's what people should be thinking about and we have to remember that if he is sovereign in mercy, he is also sovereign in withholding.

Paul makes a reference to Pharaoh in verse 18. God has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills, and that brings us to the third and last question, verses 17 to 29. Why does he still find fault? Verse 19, "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?'" If God has supreme control, people would say, "Then we can't do anything for ourselves. We can't be held responsible. He's responsible for what happens to us." Paul doesn't defend God at this point. God hasn't to answer anyone. He rebukes this tone, this attitude, this main set of the questioner. Verse 20, "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" My friends, we have no right, we have no ability to question any actions or purposes of God. We have no right, we have no ability to question any actions or purposes of God. He is so infinitely beyond us in his

power and his wisdom, and whether we understand it or not, it is powerful and it is wise and it is good and it is holy.

Paul briefly shows in three ways who God is. He shows in verse 21 that God has the power of a potter over clay, "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another vessel for dishonorable use?" Yes. And that's God. We are the clay in the potter's hands but as he says in verse 20, what is molded cannot say to his molder, "Why have you made me like this?" We don't understand it. We have no power. We have no right to criticize him, to find fault with him. He's the Creator. He does as he decides, and he does as he wishes, and it is always just. It is always just.

Then in verses 22 and 23, God reveals himself as he is, desiring, " Paul writes, to show his wrath and to make known his power. He has endured with much patience, violence as vessels of wrath. He has prepared them for destruction in order to make known riches of his glory, for vessels of glory which he has prepared beforehand for glory. There is glory those who suffer his wrath and those who suffer his glory and Paul says here that those who suffer his grace will shine more brightly against the somber ground of his wrath.

Then in verses 24 to 25 he demonstrates with a series of quotations from the Old Testament, Hosea and Isaiah. Look them up on the margins. He shows that always it is God's purpose to call Gentiles to himself, to become his covenant people. "I will say to not my people, you are my people." He shows God's grace in salvation and the privilege and blessing to which he raises these strangers. Verse 24, "even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?" He faces Israel's wickedness and he says only a remnant will be saved but that is always part of God's plan.

Now we'll be looking at this again next week, God willing, in chapter 10, where Paul wants to develop some of these ideas, but he's telling us this morning that his word hasn't failed, that the promise works, that there is mercy for Gentiles, that Israel's apostasy is a proof of God's holiness and power, not a problem of his wickedness. So this chapter is saying to us this morning, don't take for granted the value of your physical birth. Don't take for granted the value of your physical birth. Don't say, "I'm all right because my daddy and mummy are Christians, because I go to church, because we read the Bible in my house." You have to be a Christian. You have to trust Christ for yourself. Praise God for his mercy. Seek God's mercy and don't challenge God. Don't argue with God but bow before God in joyful worship. And I don't suggest for a second that we can begin to understand here on earth God's goodness and holiness and rightness in sending people to hell, but we're told that it's true. We're told that it's there. So the thing for us is to turn to those we know who have not yet trusted Christ and do and pray all we can to change it for them. Amen.

Let us bow as we come before God in prayer.

*We thank you, Lord, for the depth and the wisdom of your truth. We acknowledge again that there is much that we do not yet understand at all or fully understand. You are the*

*perfect God. You are the God who is good and just and right and people are sent to hell and in some ways there is glory to you. Father, we thank you that we are still in the earth and we have the gospel and help us to use it with all those we know and meet, that by your Spirit they may be delivered and brought into the destiny of heaven. We pray in Jesus' name.*