

Paul's reason for writing Romans

- Justification fully explained

- How the nation of Israel fits with God's plan

- Romans in outline

Three reasons for Romans 9-11

(i) How does Israel fit into God's plan

(ii) The apparent failure of Israel

(iii) Has the church replaced the nation of Israel?

1. We are meant to have a special concern for the salvation of Israel

- Israel's condition is tragic and distressing

2. Great privileges do not guarantee salvation

People were often puzzled about the apostle Paul. He was a very Jewish person and yet spent his life preaching to gentiles. People almost wondered whether he had come to hate his own people. But actually Paul longed for the salvation of his own people. In this letter to the Christians at Rome he gives a full statement of his message of 'justification' and goes on to tell how the nation of Israel fits in with the plan of God to bring salvation to the world. After Jerusalem, Rome was the most important city in the world, the capital of the empire. Paul wanted the church there to be strong and clear in its faith. Paul wanted to travel further to the west of Rome, preaching the gospel. He hoped even to get as far as Spain. He wrote Romans to prepare the way.

Romans 1:1–16 is an introduction to the letter.

Romans 1:18–3:20 shows why the gospel is needed.

Romans 3:21–4:25 is his basic statement of his preaching of 'justification' by faith in Jesus.

Romans 5–8 speaks of the results of being right with God.

Romans 9–11 explains how the nation of Israel fits in to God's plan of reaching the world.

Romans 12:1–15:13 calls the Christians to live out the gospel in a practical manner in their daily living.

Then Romans 15:14–16:27 are his concluding remarks and greetings.

There are at least three reasons why Paul felt he had to write Romans chapters 9 to 11. (i) He has to explain how the nation of Israel fits into God's programme of spreading the gospel to all of the world. It was predicted in the Old Testament that salvation would come to the world through Israel and Israel's Saviour and yet the nation of Israel generally rejected Jesus. Has the Word of God failed? (ii) The apparent failure of God's purpose is specially perplexing since Paul has just said that the purpose of God cannot fail! Those whom God loved and chose, he 'justified' them and glorified them¹. But did not God choose Israel? Have they fallen out of God's purpose? (iii) It also seems that some gentile Christians were becoming somewhat critical in their attitudes towards Israel. Has the Christian church replaced the nation of Israel in such a way that Israel has been removed for ever from their status as the people of God? Paul gives four answers to the problems he raises. They come in (i) Romans 9, (ii) Romans 10, (iii) Romans 11:1–10 and (iv) Romans 11:11–36. But he first states the problem. Romans 9:1–5 points to the tragedy of Israel.

1. We are meant to have a special concern for the salvation of Israel. Paul introduces the matter sympathetically. He says: *I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience witnesses to me in the Holy Spirit, ²that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.* He regards Israel's condition as tragic and distressing. He assures his readers that he is not anti-Jewish, and is very distressed at Israel's failure to receive Christ and be used by God in blessing the world. Actually he loved his people so much that he would have been willing to become a curse for them. He says: ³*For I could wish that I myself were accursed, cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers and sisters, my relatives according to the flesh.* He goes on to list the privileges they had.

2. Great privileges do not guarantee salvation. ⁴*They are Israelites.* Their name, 'Israelites', reminds them of the time when God gave special promises to Jacob and his children concerning how that nation would be used by God. Notice that Paul does not say 'They **were** Israelites', but 'They **are** Israelites'. Their position in the purpose of God has not fallen aside. *Theirs is the adoption.* The idea is not so much 'adoption as sons' (as some translations have it) but 'adoption as God's son'. Israel was made

¹ 8:28-39

• *Israel was made a son of God as an entire nation*

• *Unbreakable covenants with David and Abraham*

• *The law of Moses – restrained sin and kept the nation in existence*

• *The tabernacle – symbolic instruction on how to approach God*

• *The Saviour came from Israel*

• *Despite these privileges Israel, speaking generally, rejected God*

• *But blessing is not automatic – faith in Jesus is needed*

a son of God as an entire nation. *Theirs is the glory and the covenants . . .* There were times in Israel's history when God revealed his visible shining holiness, to Israel. He made covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, promising to give Abraham's line 'a seed'. He took an oath, swearing by himself, that the 'seed' of Abraham would come and all nations would be blessed through him. He made a covenant with David, promising him the Saviour would come from his line. Once that covenant with David was made, nothing could stop its coming to fulfilment. God had sworn and nothing would make him change his mind.

The covenant of law on Mount Sinai was different. The people took the oath, not God. But even that was a privileged matter, for Paul continues . . . *and the giving of the law . . .* The law had no value in one-to-one relationship with God. It was 'weak through the flesh'. But it was a great blessing to Israel. It restrained sin. It kept the nation in existence. It prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. It took steps towards the righteousness and purity that God wanted.

Then there was another matter: . . . *and the system of worship . . .* The tabernacle gave symbolic instruction about how to approach God. Paul goes on, . . . *and the promises.* The people of Israel had promises about the coming of a Saviour in the line of King David. No other nation had such a revelation given to them. In Romans 9:5 Paul continues: *Theirs are the fathers . . .* They had great and godly men who were the fathers of the entire nation and gave it a great spiritual heritage, people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and David.

The greatest privilege of all is next mentioned: . . . *and from them is the Christ, according to human descent, who is over everything and is God blessed for ever. Amen.* The Saviour came from Israel. The translation of this line is disputed. Is it a separate sentence, 'God be blessed for ever'? Or does it continue to speak of Israel's privilege and refer to Jesus as God blessed for ever, as I have translated it? The carrying-forward of the thought demands the latter. The Israelites had the privilege of seeing God himself in human flesh! Yet that nation – still speaking generally – rejected him. It is a proof that the greatest privileges in themselves do not bring a person to salvation. You could even have met Jesus personally and you could greet him or shake him by the hand or embrace him – and yet not believe in him. Israel was the people chosen by God for the privilege of having Jesus come to them. Yet this did not prove that they were saved.

It was a great privilege to belong to Israel. Yet one can be in the midst of a place of blessing and yet not be personally blessed oneself. The danger for Israel was always that they might feel that blessing was somehow 'automatic' simply because one was a Jew. But that is not so. Faith in Jesus is needed.



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