

- Week 13 -

Paul and the Jews (Read 9:1-5)

Consider the relationship Paul expresses concerning the Israelites (Jews). Does he sound like someone who has *rejected* or *abandoned* his Jewish heritage?

There are two words used to describe Paul's relationship to his fellow Jews:

1. *adelphoi* (brothers) – indicating a familiar relationship
2. *sungenōn* (shared family) – indicating a broader, almost tribal connection

These are both seen as “according to the flesh.” Given how Paul has been talking about “the flesh” so far in Romans, what can we read into this relationship? (Look back to the usage in chapter 8).

How is Paul using the word “belongs” in verses 4-5?

Notice the way that verse 5 ends. Given what you know about the overall attitude of Jews toward Christ, is Paul speaking positively about the Jewish “possession” of these things?

The Meaning of “Spiritual Israel” (Read 9:6-14)

In verse 6, Paul emphasizes that the spiritual nature of Israel. This idea was not wholly unique to Paul. Other Jewish groups argued that not all Jews were true, spiritual Israel. He takes it further and argues that not all of true, spiritual Israel is Jewish.

Paul uses two illustrations from Genesis to make his point. They are tied deeply into the Old Testament narrative.

1. Isaac as the “child of promise” (6-9). How many sons (or heirs) did Abraham have?
 - **His nephew Lot (Gen 13:1-7).** Although his nephew, Abraham calls Lot his “brother” (Gen 14:14). He is the father of Ammon and Moab, two groups of people who live to the east of the Levant in Syria and Jordan today.
 - **His servant Eliezer of Damascus (Gen 15:1-4).** It is missed in most English translations, Abraham calls him *beniy-meshak*, “son of my possessions.” This was apparently a legal arrangement. (Abraham's family was from what is Kurdistan in northeastern Syria.)
 - **Ishmael, Hagar's son (Gen 16:1-16).** It was wholly within Abraham's power to name Ishmael his natural son and successor. Abraham had him circumcised as his son, even after the promise that Sarai would have a son (Gen 17:23). Ishmael is traditionally the father of what became the Arabs.
 - **His sons by Keturah (Gen 25:1-5).** Abraham had at least six other sons, one of whom was Midian – the ancestor of Moses's wife Zipporah (Exo 2:21). These peoples all lived in what is today Saudi Arabia.

As near as we can tell, these families – all of which are referred to as “brothers” (*’ach*) in Genesis – rejected the worship of Abraham’s God. The only exception was one tribe of Midianites, who Moses married into later.

There is a distinction between being a physical son of Abraham and the child of promise. Paul applies this to being a “spiritual” Israel.

2. The sons of Isaac and Rebekah - Jacob (Israel) and his brother Esau (Edom) – had a complicated relationship (Gen 25:19-26). Notice how Paul emphasizes *redemption* in his use of this narrative.

Both were “sons” and yet the younger was chosen as heir in the womb.

- Jacob, the younger son, was the “rebellious” problem child and yet, he eventually married correctly and had sons who became the father’s of the tribes of Israel.
- Esau’s marriage were bitterness for his parents (Gen 26:34).

So, which son “deserved” the promise and the inheritance?

Questioning God’s Justice (Read 9:14-29)

It is important to note here that Paul’s conclusion to this entire passage is verses 30-33, and expanded in the next chapter. Briefly stated, it is this:

1. FAITH is born out of believing one *does not* deserve righteousness
2. LAW fails to attain righteousness because one believes he *deserves* righteousness.

With that conclusion in mind, Paul asks two questions:

In verse 14, he asks “Is there injustice on God’s part?” In other words, is it wrong of God to *not* give salvation to the Jews simply because of their physical descent from Abraham.

In its extreme form, this is the theological question of whether God picks and chooses randomly. Is it just the luck of the draw?

What is Paul’s answer to this question (verses 15-18).

In verse 19, he asks, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” In other words, how can God condemn if salvation is purely by his own righteousness and will?

On the flip side, **why even try if God will save whoever he saves?** This may have been the argument of those who said salvation did not require that we live holy lives, because it is God who does the saving.

Paul answers this in verses 20-24. How can we resolve the apparent tension between this and the previous answer?