

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 13)



Part 13/20

The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

This is the first of four teaching sessions in which we will be working through Romans 9–11. We will work through them systematically. You've been provided with an outline which will help you to follow and, you need an open Bible in front of you if that's at all possible.

The title of these four sessions is "The Destiny of Israel and the Church." Their central theme is God's sovereignty and grace operating through His choice. I want to say those words again because they are vital. God's sovereignty and grace operating through His choice.

These are great central truths of the New Testament, but according to my observation, very few contemporary Christians really have laid hold upon them. There's a kind of wide gap in the understanding of Christians today.

If I could use a little comparison, much of the church is like astronomy was before Copernicus, when people still believed that the sun revolved around the earth. And you remember it was an intellectual and a religious revolution before the truth could be established that the earth revolves around the sun. Before that, man's view of the universe was earth centered, and because of that, there were many other areas that he couldn't accurately measure or understand.

Why do I say that? Because I think many Christians have a view of God which is man centered. They view Jesus Christ as somehow revolving around us and there to meet our needs and answer our prayers and do what we want. That is a totally distorted picture of God. Thank God, Jesus is there, He does answer our prayers, He does take care of us, He does love us and provide for us, but we are not the center. Jesus Christ is the sun, and our little earth revolves around Him. And when you put that in the center of your picture, many other things fall into place which you cannot accurately understand when you're viewing everything from a self-centered perspective.

I have taken a little time to define the word sovereignty. Again, that's a word that's very little used amongst contemporary Christians. My definition of sovereignty, which is a sort of simple down-to-earth definition, is that it means this: God does what He wants when He wants, in the way He wants, and He asks no one's permission. I think I'll say that again. I meet a lot of Christians who really think God needs their permission to do things in their life. So,

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that's sovereignty. Just try and see how you adjust to it. God does what He wants when He wants, the way He wants, and He doesn't ask my permission and He doesn't ask your permission.

Now, there is a contrary philosophy which is also a kind of religion which is very prevalent in our contemporary society, it's called humanism. And humanism says man is at the center. If God does anything, He has to get our approval. And if we don't approve, God oughtn't to have done it. That's not a new philosophy. Actually, by my background I am a professional philosopher. I spent many years studying Greek philosophy and other philosophies. I was qualified to teach them at the university. If you go back to about 600 BC, the first Greek philosopher of whom we have any recorded sayings—there were not many, but his shortest and pithiest saying was, "Man is the measure of all things." His name was Heraclitus. That's precisely humanism. So, it's not new, it's just come back to the surface.

So you have two opposing views of the world and of life. The Biblical view: God centered. Everything begins with God and ends with God. The humanistic view which has infiltrated the church, as a matter of fact, to a remarkable extent, which is: God needs our permission before He does anything. And if we don't like what He does, we'll withhold our permission. I don't know exactly what difference that will make to God but that's the attitude.

Now, I've selected a number of key verses from these chapters, that's chapters 9–11, which kind of pick out the main themes. If you have your outline in front of you, it's on Page 7. I'll just go through them rather quickly. Romans 9:11:

> "That God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls."

You see, that's God's sovereignty. It happens because God chose. And God didn't choose because we earned it or deserved it, He just chose because He chose. See, I want to ask you this question: Do you trust God to choose? It's a very important question in your life. I'll tell you one way that I learned how important it was. Just about 15 years ago God called my first wife home, Lydia, after we'd been married, living happily, and serving God together for almost 30 years. That was the hardest single blow, the most painful experience that I have ever yet had to endure. As I was in the midst of deep grief, I thought of the words of Job when he said, "The Lord gave and the Lord took away." The Holy Spirit posed this question to me: If you trust God to give, do you also trust Him to take away? I saw that it was completely illogical if I only trusted God to give and not to take away. If I believed He did the right thing in giving Lydia to me, then I had to believe He did the right thing in taking her in His timing. I know that some of you have been through bereavement. When I minister to widowers or widows, I always empathize with them in a special way. Maybe that's a question that some of you need to ask of yourself. Do I trust God? Do I trust His choice? Do I trust His timing? When you can come to the point of trusting Him, you'll be a very much more peaceful person.

The second key scripture is Romans 9:16:

> "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."

Ultimately, it's not our effort, it's not our cleverness, it's God's mercy. I feel this kind of silence inside of you at that moment. I feel that some of you scarcely ever faced that issue. The results that really matter in your life don't come with all your efforts or all your cleverness, they come because God is merciful.

And you see, it's good because we can much better trust God's mercy than we can trust our own cleverness.

The third scripture:

> "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes."

Many of us are familiar with that scripture but many of us have not really applied it in our religious lives. We're still somehow trusting in keeping a set of rules to achieve righteousness with God. And, it doesn't work.

I was in this auditorium, I believe, if I remember rightly, about two or three years ago, and I was preaching on these issues and without really planning what I was going to say, I said, "Of course, Christianity is not a set of rules." I looked at the faces of the people in front of me and they were shocked. I think they would have been less shocked if I said there is no God. But, Christianity is not a set of rules. What is it? That's another question.

Romans 10:9:

> "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God

> raised him from the dead, you shall be saved."

That's the most important single piece of information you need in your whole life: How can I be saved? And that's the answer.

Then Romans 11:5:

> "There has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice."

That's the NASB translation. More literally, "according to the choice of grace." And we're back again, it all depends on God's grace and His choice.

Then 11:22, words that are desperately needed in the contemporary church:

> "Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness, otherwise you also will be cut off."

See, there's a lot of preaching that really only deals with God's kindness. But, there's another side to God, that's severity. And it's the way we relate to God that will determine which side of God we see.

Then Romans 11:29:

> "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable."

Once God has given something, He never withdraws it. Once God has called someone, He never withdraws His calling.

And finally, what is really a summation of these chapters:

> "For from him [that is God], and through him, and to him are all things."

Everything starts with God, is maintained with God and ends with God.

Now we'll go into a more detailed review of these chapters. If you want to follow in your outline, we are now on Page 8. I don't quite know how we got as far as Page 8, but that's where we are.

Now we're dealing only with chapters 9–11. Often theologians and preachers have referred to these chapters as a digression or a parenthesis. Just dealing with Israel as a sort of side issue that really isn't of importance. There's nothing in the chapters whatever to support that view. Furthermore, as I've already pointed out, right in the middle of chapter 10 you get God's answer to the most important question in human life: How can I be saved? That's in the middle of chapter 10. How ridiculous to call that a parenthesis or a digression. I am not Jewish but I have to say in my opinion to classify those chapters as a digression or a parenthesis is an expression of Gentile prejudice. That's really what it is.

God's dealings with Israel, which are the main theme but by no means the exclusive theme of these chapters 9–11, provide a historical demonstration of many vital spiritual principles which apply equally to Christians. They've been outworked in the history of Israel, they're part of recorded history, but they're there for our benefit because God hasn't changed His principles, the same principles are working in our lives. We need to know them. They concern us vitally.

Now we'll go into the actual chapters and I'm going to deal with them in short sections, reading from the chapters and then commenting on them. So we begin now with Romans 9, beginning at verse 1. We need to bear in mind that the chapter divisions were not in the original letter. They were put in by a translator, I think, in the 16th century—as were a lot of other things. In the original text there are no capitals, there are no periods, there are no paragraphs, there are no new chapters. I perfectly understand it's important for modern readers to put those things in, but you have to bear in mind that they're subjective; they're not necessarily correct, they're just the best that the translator could do. And so, we should not make too big a gap between chapter 8 and chapter 9, do you understand? Chapter 8 ends with this glorious conclusion that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. And then Paul goes on with what is a remarkable contrast. He actually says, "I wish I could be separated from the love of God for the sake of my fellow Israelites." But, of course, God doesn't agree to that. Here is what he says—I think you need to understand that Paul has always been viewed with real hostility by the Jewish people. A lot of Jewish people say Jesus we can accept but Paul... And one reason is they consider him to be a source of anti-Semitism. And even in his own life he was bitterly persecuted by the Jewish people because he was taking the gospel to the Gentiles. His own Jewish people felt that he was taking something that belonged exclusively to them and giving it to people whom they considered to be very inferior and unworthy. If you study the life of Paul as

revealed in the New Testament, you'll find that that was the main reason why he was persecuted by his own people. He was making a speech on the steps of the Roman castle after they tried to kill him in the temple in Romans, I think, chapter 21. When he spoke Hebrew to them, they listened carefully and with great attention—until he came to the place where Jesus had told him to go to the Gentiles. Then they shouted out, threw dust in the air and said he's not worthy to live.

So, you have to bear in mind that Paul who deeply loved his own Jewish people, had this tremendous burden all through his ministry that they regarded him, in a sense as a traitor. And so, here he begins this chapter by declaring his complete commitment to the well-being of his own people. You have to understand it from that background.

> "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit [something he takes very seriously], that I have great sorrow and increasing grief in my heart."

What's the cause of his sorrow and his grief?

> "For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh..."

He was so deeply concerned about the condition of his fellow Jewish people that he said, "I could wish that I would become lost if God could accept them in my place." That's an amazing statement. I think there are only two men that have ever felt that way. The one is Paul, the other is Moses. Two of the men whom God used as much as any other man to fulfill His purposes. And it speaks to me as someone called to the ministry that one of the conditions for doing what God wants done is a real burden for the well-being of God's people.

Keep your finger in Romans 9, you're going to need your finger pretty frequently, and turn to Exodus 32, which is the scene after Israel had made the golden calf. Moses had to go up and intercede with God on their behalf. Exodus 32:31 and following:

> "Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, 'Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now [and he's speaking to God], if thou wilt forgive, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from the book which thou has written!' [Blot me out of the book of life. God's answer is worth listening to:] The LORD said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out of my book.'"

Do you think that still applies? I think God has only one book. I think it's very rash to assume automatically that because of some event in your past your name remains indelibly in the book of the Lord.

At any rate, Moses and Paul, as far as I know, were the only two men who had that intense devotion to God's people that they were willing to become lost if that could bring salvation. Of course, it couldn't. There was only one person who could do that. Who was that? Jesus, that's right. He did what Moses and Paul wished they could do but could not.

I'm returning now to Romans 9:4, where Paul describes his fellow Jewish people. He says:

> "...who are Israelites..."

I'd like you to observe that in almost every place, with perhaps one or two exceptions, where Paul in these chapters uses Israel, it would be absolutely impossible to apply the words to the church. Here's why. Because he's writing about his fellow Israelites who are lost. That's his deep grief. And then he describes what makes them a special people, which was God's dealings with them over a period of, shall we say, two thousand years. And he speaks about eight specific, distinctive privileges which Israel enjoyed. As I read these verses, see if you can pick out the eight privileges. Beginning in verse 4:

> "...who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh..."

Did you pick out the eight? Shall we go through them briefly? Number one, adoption as sons. When the Lord was

telling Pharaoh to release Israel in Exodus 4:22, he said:

> "Israel is my son, my first-born, let him go that he may serve me."

Then he said to Pharaoh:

> "If you do not let him go, I will demand your first-born."

And that's what happened, of course, on the night of the Passover. So there is God's declaration, "Israel is my son, my first-born." First-born amongst the nations.

Then the second thing is the glory, the visible manifest presence of God. In various forms: as a cloud, as a fire, and so on.

Then covenants. All the covenants of the Bible were originally from Noah onwards were revealed to Israel.

The giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. That's number four, I think, isn't it?

Number five, the temple service.

Number six, the promises of God were all given to the Jewish people.

Number seven, whose are the fathers, the patriarchs.

And then number eight, from whom the Messiah came according to the flesh. According to His human nature, Jesus was a Jew.

And then it says of Jesus:

> "...who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."

So there is one of the various places in which Paul specifically gives the title "God" to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we're going to continue with the next section which begins at verse 6 and continues through verse 13. The heading that I've chosen for this section is "God's Choice Determines Who Are His People." Here we are now dealing with the sovereignty of God and the calling of God. Here is where it is brought out more vividly than in any other passage of the Bible. And two examples are given from the early history of Israel to emphasize that it's not our decision that really matters but it's God's decision.

Let me put this to your personally in the meanwhile. You are not a Christian because you decided to be a Christian—primarily. You're a Christian because Jesus chose you. If Jesus had never chosen you, you could never had made the choice. The initiative does not come from you, but from the Lord. You have the privilege of responding but you do not take the initiative. And this is what Paul is emphasizing. That's why these lessons are so important for us as Christians today, because the same principles that were worked out with the history of the Jewish people are likewise worked out in our lives.

So now let's look at what Paul says. He takes two examples where God made a choice in the descendants of Abraham and in each case, in a certain sense, it was, let me say, an unnatural choice. But it was God's choice that determined history. So he says in Romans 9:6:

> "But it is not as though the word of God has failed."

That is, the word of god that came to Israel. You might say Israel failed. In a certain sense, that's true, although not totally true. But God's word didn't fail. It accomplished His purpose. And then he says:

> "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel..."

That's very important that we understand that. What he's saying is not all people who are Israelites by natural birth are accepted as Israel by God. This is an exception use of the word Israel. We have to deal with it because it's right here. In two cases, in this and the next case, Paul says, "God didn't include all who might have been included, but he separated out sons to whom he gave the title." Rather than try and explain it, we'll go into the example.

> "...neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants..."

And then he quotes the words that God spoke to Abraham about the son whom he promised:

> "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED [or your seed will be named]."

So what he's saying is Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael by Hagar, Isaac by Sarah. But the only one

that's counted as descendants of Abraham in this sense are the ones descended from Isaac. So, out of the two, God excluded the older and chose the younger. And always in this passage, God is reducing the number, not extending the number. There's no suggesting here that God gives the name Israel to us as Christians. That's not even near what God is saying. What God is saying is He reduces the number of people to whom Israel applies, who are recognized as Abraham's descendants. The descendants of Ishmael in that sense are excluded and only the descendants of Isaac are included. You see that? I hope you do.

But that's not the end, because we go to the next generation and we go to Isaac's wife Rebekah. Rebekah became pregnant with twins that were struggling together in her womb. And when she went to the Lord in prayer, the Lord told her, "You've got two different kinds of nations in your womb. And," He said, "one will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger." Again, that's contrary to the normal tradition of the Middle East where the older is the senior son with the preeminence. But, not so. See, twice God excluded the older and chose the younger.

And now we see here's where Paul does everything he can to emphasize it didn't depend on anything that Esau or Jacob had done. Because, before they were actually born, while they were still in their mother's womb, God said, "I reject Esau and I choose Jacob." See what Paul is emphasizing here? Most of you are not used to this emphasis. It is that it really depends on God's choice. I wish you could see your faces. I knew we were going to be somewhat controversial at this point, but the controversy is not mine, it's God's. I raised the question earlier, I want to raise it again. Do you trust God to make the right choice? Do you or don't you? Lots of people don't. It's a personal decision and each of us has to make that decision.

I've known the Lord almost 50 years and I really have come to see by experience His choices are right. I didn't always agree with some of them but I do now. He knows what He's doing.

Let's read now and you'll see this. Verse 8:

> "That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."

It isn't merely fleshly descent by natural inheritance that makes Israel. Let's keep our fingers in Romans 9 and turn for a moment to 1 Peter 1:23. Speaking to us as born again Christians, Peter says:

> "For you have been born again [I hope that's true of each one of us], not of seed which is perishable [not of natural seed], but imperishable; that is, through the living and abiding word of God."

So what is the generative seed that makes us God's people? What is the seed? God's word, that's right. This principle goes back right into the history of the patriarchs. Because, it wasn't natural descent that determined the ones that were to be accepted by God as His people, but the embracing of the promise of God's word. See? What was the seed? It was the word of God. So, to be a true Israelite, you have to first of all be descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That was part of it but it was not sufficient. You also had to have the seed of God's word received by faith in your heart to make you really part of God's chosen people.

Go back to Romans 9 and read verse 8 with me again:

> "That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God [not by natural descent only], but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."

The promise is the word of God. And then he says:

> "For this is a word of promise [the word which the Lord spoke to Abraham], 'AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.'"

So that's the first example of the promise being the generative seed. So, within all those descended from Abraham, only those are considered the people of God who have received the promise of God by faith in their hearts. That's what makes them truly God's people.

And then we take this second example which is even more remarkable, verse 10:

> "And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac [they both had the same father]; for though the twins were not

> yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.'"

Esau will serve Jacob. Look at the way Paul absolutely uses every resource of language to emphasize it was God's choice that was decisive. I have to say that this is a very difficult truth for people to accept in our contemporary western civilization. Because, everything in our civilization has been permeated by the influence of humanism. Much more has the church been permeated by humanism than most of you realize. And so we really have the attitude, "God, if you're going to do that, you better give an account to me." The Bible says God doesn't give an account of anything He does. He doesn't. Remember what sovereignty is? God does what He wants when He wants, the way He wants, and He doesn't ask our permission.

And so, to demonstrate this with the utmost clarity, God took the case of two twins in a woman's womb, both had the same father, and before they were born, before they had any opportunity to do anything good or bad, He said, "The one I'm choosing is the younger, Jacob. And I'm rejecting the older, Esau."

And incidentally, I'd like to say if you follow the life of them for awhile, by contemporary standards, Esau was the good guy, Jacob was the heel. You know what his name means? It means a heel. Because he caught his brother by the heel. I mean, it just happens that contemporary slang is exactly appropriate. By our contemporary standards, Esau did not nobody any harm. Whereas, Jacob, I mean, he chiseled him. I mean, the things that Jacob did we would frown on today. I'm not saying God endorsed them, I'm saying God doesn't choose the people we might choose. That's why some of us got chosen!

Let me say, I mean, if I'd been God, I would have never chosen me. I was away from Cambridge University for about six years, and in the meanwhile I became a born again Christian in the British Army. When I got back I began to tell some of my former associates what had happened to me, their attitude was, "Anybody but you." They couldn't believe it had happened to me. I'm glad the choice wasn't left to them. I'm glad the choice wasn't left to me because I'd have to say, if I'd been God, I don't think I would have ever taken the risk He took when He chose me.

I want to ask you, do you really trust God to make the right choice? You're probably here because God made that choice. But the thing about it is that we tend to believe God made the right choice with me but some other people, well, I wouldn't have chosen them!

All right, we're going on here. We're now in verse 13.

> "Just as it is written, 'JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.'"

That's quoted from the last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi. And it begins the book of Malachi. God tells Israel, "I've loved you." He says, "Esau, I hate you." That's another thing to ponder. God is a good hater as well as a good lover. Really, in a way, you can't love if you're not also prepared to hate. The Bible says, "Ye that love the Lord hate evil." Your capacity to love probably determines your capacity to hate. You've got to be sure you're loving the right thing and hating the wrong thing. Anyhow, God is capable of hatred in certain respects.

Now we're going to go into an area that is not easy, but it's essential because you really can't understand these chapters unless something is cleared up. And that is who in the New Testament is called Israel? And I say this because there's a very widespread teaching today that Israel is no longer Israel, the church is now Israel. There's hardly a person here that's not been exposed to that teaching. Let me say for me the New Testament is the last authoritative word of God. First the Old Testament, then the New. Since that time there have been church traditions, there's been theology, there's been many different opinions held, but for me the ultimate, final authoritative deciding factor is what does the New Testament say? I'm not opposed to church traditions—if they're scriptural, they can be helpful. But if they are contrary to scripture, I myself do not accept them.

And so, we have to face this question: To whom does the New Testament give the title "Israel"? Has the New Testament withdrawn the title from historical Israel, the Jewish people? And, has the New Testament now given the title to the church? I believe there can be two answers to that question. One is right and one is wrong. The problem for most people is that it demands work. A lot of people would rather take their religion the easy way and live by somebody else's conclusions and not search the truth out for themselves. You've heard the definition of prejudice, I'm sure. "Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up."

Well, I'm going to do my best to confuse you with the facts. I'm going to do my best as far as I'm capable to confront

you with objective statements from the Bible, and principally from the New Testament.

Now, to do this I worked through the entire New Testament and checked every passage where the words Israel or Israelite are used. For your benefit, they're contained in an appendix in your outline, beginning on Page 36. Now, we cannot spend the time involved in going through every reference. But they're there so you can check on me in your own time if you wish to, and say, "Did Brother Prince say the right thing or did he say something wrong?" I'll just give you a sort of summation.

The word Israel or Israelite—and they're interchangeable—those words are used 74 times in the New Testament. 70 times, to the best of my ability to understand, there is no possibility they could be applied to the church. In fact, in many passages they're applied in a sense that distinguishes Israel from the church. I'm aware that we're dealing with a kind of tradition which is hard to unthink. I remember when I first started to study the Bible, I read it in the I611 King James Version—which is such a beautiful version, I love today. But, the version had a lot of things in it that weren't the Bible. There were a lot of headings which were not part of the Bible which were put in. And whenever I was reading through the promises of God to Israel in Isaiah the prophet, the heading would say, "God's Gracious Promises to the Church." You see, it was subliminal. I was being brainwashed without realizing what was going on. Many of you have a background like that, you've got to be prepared to unthink some things you thought a long while.

So, there are 74 occurrences, 70, as I understand it, and you can look through them personally. I hope you'll do so. 70 out of 74 could not possibly be applied to the church. That leaves about 5 percent that could. Now, in any case of translating or interpreting, if a certain usage is as small as 5 percent, then you have to have very strong external objective reasons for accepting that usage. Understand what I'm saying? Out of those 70 passages, 9 are direct quotations from the Old Testament and in every one of them Israel has precisely the same meaning in the New Testament as it had in the Old. So, we're left with about 4 which could possibly be interpreted some other way. I say possibly because I don't believe any of them should be. In other words, I want to say categorically I don't believe that Israel is ever used in the New Testament as a title for the church. I am sure that some of you have probably never heard that statement before. I don't want you to receive it because I say it, but I advise you to research it for yourself. And I've made it possible for you to do that with a minimum of effort because I've listed every single case. Where the passage is a quotation from the Old Testament, it's marked with an asterisk. And where there is some possibility of understanding it another way, I've put a question. So, I've bent over backwards not to influence you by my thinking.

There are two passages, one of which we've already looked at. Going back in Romans 9, Paul says in verse 6:

> "They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel."

Let me put it around:

> "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel."

He is not talking about people not descended from Israel. As I already pointed out, what he is saying is some of those who are descended from Israel are not accepted by God as His people. He is not extending the use of Israel, he's reducing the use of Israel. Did you get that? I want to say that again. He is not extending the use of Israel, he's reducing it. What he's saying is some people who would be called Israel really don't qualify. But this is a very rare use, it's not the normal use.

Then in Galatians 6:16 we have a phrase which has, I think, confused many. Verses 15–16:

> "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God."

There we have the phrase "the Israel of God." Most people today in the English section of the world interpret "the Israel of God" as the church. I think that's a mistake. I think Paul is talking about two different categories of people. He's talking about Gentiles who've come into a relationship with God by becoming a new creation, Gentiles who previously had no relationship with God at all. And, he's talking about Israel, who has a history of 15 centuries at least, who have been completed by their relationship to the Messiah, and have thus become "the Israel of God." In this sense Paul is applying the word Israel only to those Israelites or Jewish people who are not merely Israelite by birth but have also received the seed of the promise of God's word and experienced new birth in Christ. This is not the normal use of Israel, but it's Paul's use here in Galatians 6:16. The Israel

of God are those who are both Israelites by natural descent and have received the word of promise of the Messiah, and through their faith have acknowledged and received Jesus as Messiah.

The difference is this: That the Gentiles are an unplowed field. God had never dealt with them in this way. So there was a new creation, they simply stepped out of the old into the new. Whereas Israel, or the Jewish people, was a people with whom God had been dealing with 14 or 15 centuries and they already had some kind of a relationship with God which only had to be completed by the acknowledgment of the Messiah.

You see, in Isaiah 43:21, speaking about Israel:

> "The LORD says, 'This people I formed for myself; they will declare my praise.'"

The word "formed" is the word that's used of a potter molding a vessel. God had been molding Israel for 15 centuries. It was a people that He had already formed for Himself, they needed to be completed by the acknowledgment of Messiah. On the other hand, if they failed to acknowledge their Messiah, as Paul says in Romans 11, they were broken off.

And then in Romans 15, a little further on in Romans but we'll have to go ahead just for a moment, Romans 15:8–9, Paul says:

> "For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision [that's the Jewish people, you understand] on behalf of the truth of God, to confirm the promises given the fathers."

It was not something new, they had the promises for many centuries. To them Jesus was a servant to confirm the promises they already knew and were expecting to see fulfilled.

Then Paul goes on in the next verse, verse 9:

> "And for the Gentiles, to glorify God for His mercy."

I hope you can see the difference. The Jewish people had many promises already given to them which had to be fulfilled. The Gentiles had no promises, they didn't depend on God's faithfulness to fulfill a promise, they only depended on God's mercy. Can you see the difference. That's why there's a difference between those who merely come into the new creation out of nothing spiritual, and those who've been completed because they already had received the promises.

I can't spend more time on that, I don't really know whether I've succeeded but at least I've given you something to think about.

Now, there's another passage that we need to look at in Romans 2:28–29. This speaks about the one who is a true Jew. And again, this is extremely controversial. I have read an article by a Christian theologian in which he said we're all Jews. I thought to myself, "Dear Lord, is it possible that anybody can really believe that?" But he did. And this passage is what he based his statement on. Romans 2:28–29:

> "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that which is in the heart by the Spirit, and not by the letter; and his praise is not from men but from God."

Again, it's not extending the use of Jew, it's restricting the use of Jew. What Paul is saying, it's not sufficient merely to be a Jew outwardly, merely to have natural descent, merely to have physical circumcision. That's not sufficient, it has to be the circumcision of the heart, it has to be something inside you which receives God's praise. So again, it's restrictive, not extensive. Have I communicated that? I hope I have. Some of you will have to think this over.

I was teaching about this once years ago, and a young man stood up at the next meeting and he said, "I got it at 5 a.m. this morning." He said, "I suddenly saw what he was trying to say." You see, Jesus Himself set the pattern for this in John 1:47:

> "Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, and said of him, 'Behold, a true Israelite in whom is no guile.'"

Nathaniel was a true Israelite because he not merely was an Israelite by natural descent, but he had the inner attitude of heart which God requires. Do you understand? So, the Israel of God, or the true Israelite, is not somebody who is a

Gentile that has come to Christ, but it's a Jew or an Israelite who has been completed out of all his background in the promises of God extending over many centuries.

So, I just hope that that covers it.

We'll look at one other example rather quickly, 1 Corinthians 10:18. I'm really weakening my hand, in a way, because I'm taking all the difficult cases, you understand, and not looking at the ones that are open and shut, where there's no possibility of any other interpretation. 1 Corinthians 10:18, Paul says:

> "Look at the nation Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?"

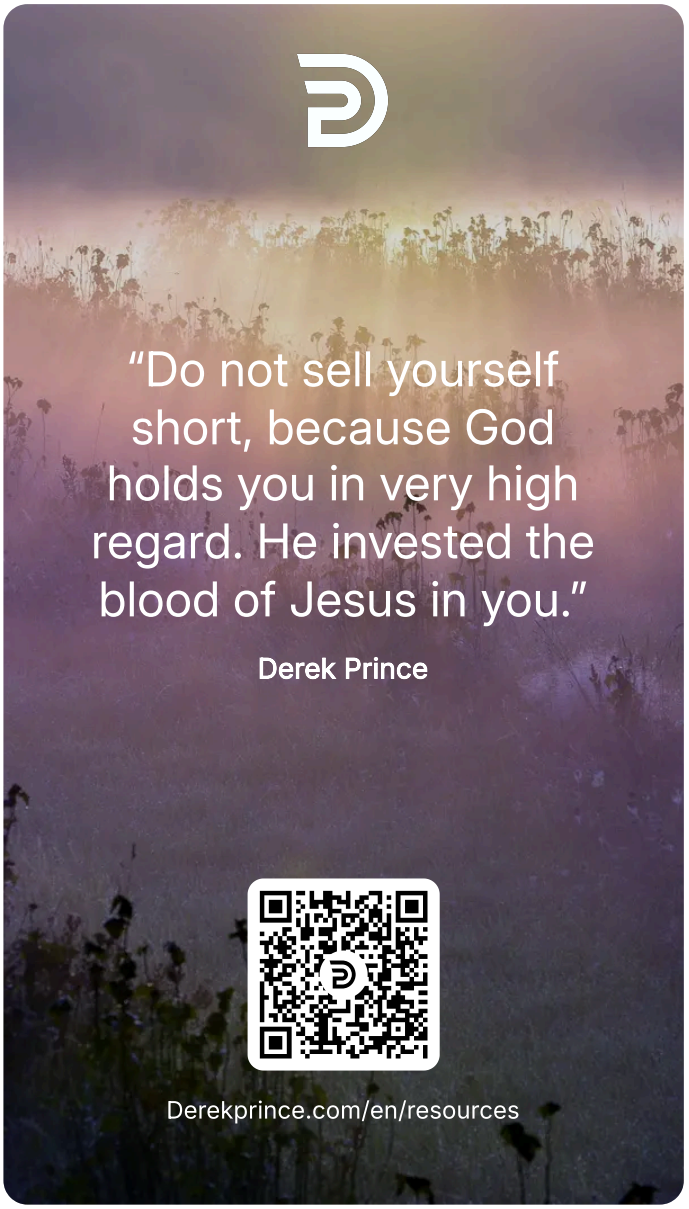
Here is a beautiful example of prejudice. Unintentional prejudice on the part of the translators. Because, in my margin it gives the literal translation. "Look at Israel according to the flesh." And this is translated "Look at the nation Israel." But you see, that is not an accurate translation. Let me point out that this book was not translated by the man who translated Romans. See what I'm saying? What is Paul saying when he says, "Look at Israel according to the flesh."? Look at those who are only Israelites by natural descent, but do not fulfill the inner conditions of heart. And the reason is they'd gone into idolatry. So, they were still Israelites by natural descent but they certainly were not accepted by God because of their inner condition of heart.

I think we'll have to pause there because if I go into the next issue, it will take us too long. So, let me just point out to you what I'm saying, that normally, Israel in the New Testament means precisely the same as Israel in the Old Testament. But, there are a few passages, maybe two or three, where Paul uses Israel in a restrictive sense, meaning people who fulfill two qualifications. Number one, they're Israelites by natural descent. Number two, they fulfill the inner requirements in the heart which God looks for to make them truly His people.

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Sermon

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