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IS GOD THROUGH WITH THE JEW?

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My text is taken from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 9, verses 1-5. Bible scholars are agreed that the Roman epistle is probably the greatest treatise ever to come from the pen of man. We bear in mind of course that the apostle was inspired by the Spirit of God. The Roman epistle divides itself into three major divisions. Chapters 1-8 are the doctrinal portion of the epistle setting forth the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Chapters 9-11 have been referred to as the parenthetical portion of the epistle. In these three chapters Paul deals with Israel. He sets forth her past, present, and future. The last five chapters, 12-16, are the practical portion of the epistle. In these chapters Paul applies the basic Christian doctrines to our everyday Christian living. He insists that, if we have accepted these great truths into our hearts, they should be manifest in our lives. Our lives should be so changed that we would willingly present ourselves as "living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God" (Rom. 12:1).

We are concerned primarily with the first five verses that introduce the parenthetical portion of this epistle. In verses 1-3 we have Paul's Prayer for Israel. In verses 4-5 we have God's Promises Concerning Israel. The late Dr. Alva J. McClain refers to these verses as "The Jewish Problem." The problem was not with the Word of God, nor the apostle Paul, but in the minds of Christian men and women. These Christians had listened to the apostle set forth the great doctrines of the Christian faith. These doctrines were Church doctrines and do not refer to God's dealings with His people Israel. Israel was an earthly people--the Church is a heavenly people. The apostle makes it plain that our "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The teachings of Paul presented a problem to the early Christians. Many of them were well acquainted with the O. T. teachings concerning Israel. They had looked forward to the

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coming of the Messiah. The prophets spoke of a day when David's greater Son would sit upon the throne in Israel and reign as King. Messiah has come but the people did not accept Him. They cried out, "Away with him, crucify him! We will not have this man to reign over us." He was crucified, buried, and rose again the third day. He ascended on high. The problem that the Jewish Christians are now faced with concerned the covenants and promises that God made with Israel. Promises that have to do with an earthly kingdom and king. Are these promises set aside? Has Israel been cast off? Will God ever deal with Israel again? Are we to spiritualize the O.T. promises and apply these promises to the Church because the Church has become spiritual Israel?

History has a strange way of repeating itself. The problems that these early Christians were facing are the same problems that many Christians are facing today. They are asking the same questions. They are applying the O. T. Scriptures to the Church, spiritualizing that which God has not spiritualized. Someone has said, "Whenever you spiritualize that which God has not spiritualized, you become guilty of telling spiritual lies." In Romans 9, 10, 11 the apostle Paul is dealing with this Jewish problem and he solves the problem on the basis of God's Word. We would do well if we followed the example of the great apostle. These so-called "problems" would no longer be problems if we would deal with them according to the teaching of God's Word. Consider with me then the manner in which Paul deals with the Jewish problem. In verses 1-3 we have

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR HIS PEOPLE

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

These verses are often used as a text for a missionary message to challenge God's people for world missions. Usually they are taken out of context and the real meaning is lost. These verses give us a little insight into the heart and soul of the apostle Paul. He shares with us the deep-rooted feelings towards his "brethren. . . according to the flesh." These feelings are based upon his understanding of the teaching of God's Word concerning the holiness, justice and wrath of God.

Paul's concern for Israel, and his desire to see them saved, reminds us of Moses and his intercession on behalf of his people. You will recall that at the time God gave Moses the commandments the people complained that "he delayed to come down out of the mount." They went to Aaron and asked that he make a calf of gold which was to be worshipped as God. In

Egypt they had been exposed to the Apis bull. They saw the Egyptians worship the Apis bull as the god of creation. Apparently they were not cured of idolatry and so they command Aaron to "make a molten calf" in order that they may worship it and say, "These be thy gods, Oh Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." God's wrath was kindled by this ungodly deed so that He pronounced judgment upon the people. In Exodus 32:9-10 we read,

And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

A lesser man may have been intrigued by the promise that God gave to Moses. He promises to destroy Israel but, from out of the loins of Moses a great nation will come forth. Moses wasn't intrigued by what God said, however, but rather pours his heart out to God on behalf of his people. In Exodus 32:31-32 we have the prayer of Moses:

And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

Notice verse 32 very carefully. Moses prays, "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--." The translator places a dash after the word "sin" because Moses had not finished his prayer. In other words he pauses in the middle of his prayer. He knows what it is going to mean to his people if God does not forgive their sin. Realizing the awful wrath of God that is pending he continues by saying, "and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."

Historically Israel had been a "stiffnecked and rebellious people." At the time of our Lord they took great pride in being the covenant people through whom God gave the world the prophets. They failed to remember that their fathers rebelled against the prophets' message and took action to silence their lips. Jesus said,

Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

In Luke 19:43, Jesus said,

For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children with thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

The apostle Paul was well acquainted with these promises. Twenty years have passed since the Lord went home to glory and Paul knew that time was running out for Israel. Within ten years after the writing of this epistle Titus came down and laid Jerusalem waste. Historians tell us that over one million Jews were in Jerusalem at that time. Those that were outside the wall were captured. Many were crucified; others were sold into slavery. Those that lived inside the wall were courageous and held the Romans off for some time. As time went on food became scarce. The people resorted to eating rats and mice and whatever else would keep them alive. When all their food was gone they became cannibals and ate their own children. This also was according to the prophecy set forth by Moses in Deuteronomy 28:49-53,

The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straightness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee.

These were not idle words to the apostle Paul. He knew that judgment had been pronounced and was soon to be executed. Not only would Israel experience God's wrath in time but also throughout eternity. Realizing the awfulness of this judgment Paul cries out, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

God's judgment of Israel presents a great problem. The problem centers around the covenants that God made to this people many years ago. What about these promises? What about these covenants? Are they null and void? Are they to be put aside forever? Is God actually through with the Jew? and will have no further dealings with them as a nation? This is the problem that the apostle Paul seeks to solve. He begins by setting before us

GOD'S EIGHT-FOLD PROMISE TO ISRAEL

This eight-fold promise to Israel is set forth in verses 4-5. Notice carefully the way the apostle begins. In referring to his kinsmen according to the flesh he says, "Who are Israelites." Israel means "a prince with God." In the 32nd chapter of Genesis, Jacob wrestles all night with the angel of the Lord at Penial. As the dawn of a new day was breaking the angel said to Jacob, "Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, what is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou powers with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:26-28).

In Genesis 35:22-26 we are given the names of Jacob's twelve sons. These twelve sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel and these twelve tribes are referred to throughout Scripture as "the whole house of Israel."

In verses 4 and 5 of our text the apostle Paul makes it clear that the eight-fold blessing of God is upon Israel. The first blessing referred to is that of

Adoption

The word "adoption" is a New Testament word. The apostle Paul uses it in Romans 8:15 where he says, "But ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

In Romans 8:23 we read, "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

In Ephesians 1:5 Paul says, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

It is quite obvious from these verses that the word "adoption," as used in the New Testament, speaks of a unique relationship between the

individual believer and God. In Romans 9:4, however, the word is used in a different way. Whereas it speaks of a unique relationship, it refers here, not to a relationship between the individual and God but the relationship of the nation Israel to God. In other words Israel has a unique relationship to her God, a relationship that no other nation can claim.

This relationship is clearly indicated in the message that God gave to Moses to give to Pharaoh. When God sent Moses down into the land of Egypt to tell Pharaoh to let His people go He said, "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Ex. 4:22).

The word "firstborn" does not actually mean that Israel was born first, but rather it speaks of a place of preeminence that Israel shall have among the nations. In Colossians 1:15 we read that Jesus is "the firstborn of every creature." In verse 18 we read, "Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Paul does not teach that Jesus Christ was the "firstborn" in the sense that He was born first. But he does teach that Jesus Christ is the preeminent One. He is the Head over all things. The word "firstborn," as it relates to Israel, speaks of the place of preeminence that she has, and will have, among the nations. It is good for us to remember that Israel is a nation, chosen of God, for a special purpose.

This is clearly set forth in Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

The question may be asked, "If Israel is God's chosen people why have they suffered the way they have down through the years?" The answer is found, I believe, in Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." In other words there is a family relationship here and God is punishing His children because of their waywardness. God is not seeking revenge by punishing His people but He is preparing them for the task whereunto He has called them. This task has not as yet been completed.

The second blessing referred to in our text is

The Glory

"To Israel pertaineth. . . the glory." The "glory" speaks of the symbolic, visible presence of God. The first mention of this "glory" is in Exodus 13:21 where we read, "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night." The psalmist said, "He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night" (Ps. 105:39). This cloud, which spoke of the presence of God, was for Israel's protection. The people would have been scorched by the hot sun as they travelled through the desert if God had not provided a covering for them. At night the temperature drops so that the children would be in great danger if there was no heat. The Lord took care of this, however, by providing a covering for the day and a fire for the night.

The second mention of the glory is in Exodus 14. The children of Israel have reached the Red Sea but, much to their dismay, the armies of Pharaoh are coming up behind them to take them back into bondage. The people cry out to Moses saying, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?" (verse 11). Moses' answer to them was, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever" (verse 13).

Do you remember what the Lord did? Notice verse 19, "And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them." The cloud, the symbolic presence of God, stood between Israel and the Egyptians. God commanded Moses to stretch forth his hand over the sea. As he did so "the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

The next mention of the cloud is in connection with the building of the tabernacle. You will recall that when God called Moses into the mountain, to give him the law, He also shewed him the pattern after which he was to build the tabernacle. The tabernacle was to be the dwelling place of God. In Leviticus 16:2 we read, "And the Lord said unto Moses, speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat." God wanted to

dwell in the midst of His people in order that He might reveal Himself to them in a very special way. Later when they came into the land of Canaan you will recall that Solomon built a temple. The purpose of the temple was the same as the tabernacle. God would dwell in the midst of His people. He would dwell upon the mercy seat in the form of the shekinah glory.

In Ezekiel 10 and 11 the Lord speaks to Ezekiel in a vision. Ezekiel saw the glory rise from the mercy seat; it passed through the veil into the holy place; out the holy place; down the valley of Kidron; up the Mount of Olives where it ascends up into heaven. The glory of the Lord departed from Israel. Israel had sinned and so God withdrew Himself from their presence. For many years there was no glory in Israel, then something tremendous happens. Luke tells us that out in the field of Bethlehem there were "shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The glory returns to Israel in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. John 1:14 says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."

What did John mean when he said, "We beheld His glory"? If you had lived in John's day, and had the opportunity to gaze into the lovely face of the Lord Jesus you would not have seen anything that would have made you think He was divine. We want to remember that although He was very God He was also very man. He was just as much God as if He had never been man; He was just as much man as if He had never been God. We should never lose sight of the fact that in the incarnation Jesus "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." There was no halo over His head; however, during His earthly ministry there were the outward manifestations of that inward glory. In the gospel of John there are seven miracles that the Lord Jesus performed before Calvary. These miracles were performed for a special reason. The reason is given in John 20:30-31, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Accompanying these miracles was the outward manifestation of that inward glory. John said, "We beheld His glory."

The Lord Jesus presented Himself to Israel as her long awaited Messiah. Though there were many that were willing to make Him king, the nation as such rejected Him. They cried out, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Instead of a throne He was placed upon a cross.

Little did the people know that this cross was to be the foundation of His kingdom. The Bible gives the meaning to His death: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scripture" (I Cor. 15:3, 4). Forty days after His resurrection He met with the disciples on the Mount of Olives. After commissioning them to be witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth we read,

While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

The glory that appeared to Israel in the Person of Jesus Christ is now taken up into heaven but the promise is that "in like manner" he shall come again. Revelation 1:7 states, "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Matthew, in his vivid description of the Lord's return, states, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (25:31).

John and Matthew are speaking of the Lord's return unto Israel to establish the fallen kingdom of David. Before this great event takes place there shall be another event. This is referred to as the rapture of the church. The rapture and the revelation are not the same. The glory that pertains to Israel will be seen at the revelation, that is, when He comes to establish His kingdom. There is no glory connected with the rapture. I Corinthians 15:51-52 states:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

In I Thessalonians 4:14-17 we read,

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together

with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The "clouds" spoken of are not clouds of glory but saints. They shall be in such great numbers that they shall appear as clouds. This is the secret rapture. No unbelieving eye will witness this great event. It is different, however, when the Lord returns to Israel because at this time the glory that pertaineth to Israel will return and they shall once again "behold His glory."

The third blessing referred to in Romans 9:4 is

The Covenants

The covenants pertain to Israel. In the Old Testament there are three major covenants. I am mindful of the fact that numerous covenants are mentioned in the Old Testament but there are three major covenants. There is the Abrahamic Covenant found in the book of Genesis. This covenant deals with a land, the borders of which are outlined in the Word of God. This land is promised to the people of Israel. The covenant was ratified through sacrifice. It is unconditional and God had promised to fulfill it. Israel has never possessed the land set forth in this covenant, but God, Who is faithful to His promise, will some day bring it to pass.

The second major covenant is the Mosaic Covenant. This is for the most part a covenant of works. God gave Israel a law. With the law was the promise of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. This is a conditional covenant.

The third major covenant is the Davidic Covenant. This covenant has to do with a kingdom. In 2 Samuel 7:12 we read,

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

This promise has never been fulfilled. Solomon was not the one the Lord referred to. His kingdom came to an end. This kingdom is forever and ever.

One of the questions that was going through the minds of the disciples was, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The Lord did not say, "There will be no kingdom--Israel has been put aside." He said, "It is not for you to know the times or the

seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8). What the Lord is actually telling them is that the kingdom is yet future. Between the time of His ascension and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom He is going to call out His church from among the Jews and Gentiles. When this body is complete He will take them unto Himself.

Following the rapture of the church He will return to earth and establish the kingdom of David. This truth is clearly set forth in Acts 15:14-17. In verse 14 we have the calling out of the church. In verse 16 we have the restoration of Israel and the establishment of David's kingdom. In verse 17 we have the universal blessing that shall be experienced by all men because now Israel is in the land; the king is upon the throne; the universal blessing as promised in the Abrahamic covenant is being experienced by all mankind. At this time the angel's message will be fulfilled, for he said in Luke 1:32-33,

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Let us ever remember that

Jesus shall reign where ere the sun
Doth his successive journeys run,
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

There are five other blessings in this eight-fold blessing to Israel, which require little comment. The fourth one is

The Law

To Israel pertaineth the law. I take it that the Law he refers to is the law that God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Romans 2:14 states: "When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves." The fact is that unto Israel the law was given. This law is the greatest document ever given to man.

The fifth blessing is referred to as

The Service of God

The service of God refers to the temple services and these services were carried on by Israel's priesthood.

The sixth blessing is

The Promises

The promises refer to the Messianic promises. Promises concerning the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was to come as the suffering servant of Jehovah to die for humanity's sin; He was to come as David's greater Son to reign.

The seventh blessing is set forth in these words,

Whose are the Fathers

The fathers refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Every Jew is able to proudly point back to the patriarchs and say "These are our fathers." No Gentile can make that boast.

The eighth blessing is Christ:

Of Whom as Concerning the Flesh Christ Came

The apostle Paul states in Galatians 4:4,

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

When "the fulness of time was come" God chose a Jewish maiden to be the earthly parent of His eternal Son the Lord Jesus. Israel was the channel through whom God was going to give the world the Saviour. No greater blessing could ever have been bestowed upon a people. No people under God's heaven can make this boast. To Israel. . . Christ came, and Paul says, "Who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen" (Rom. 9:5). The apostle wants us to know that, as far as His humanity was concerned He was born of a Jewish maiden, but as far as His deity was concerned He "is over all, God blessed forever."

As we bring this study to a close, may I ask the question once again, "Is God through with the Jew?" Would you conclude from the evidence that God has turned His back upon Israel and will never deal with them again? Let the Word of God speak for itself. In Jeremiah 31:10 we read,

Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.

God has promised to make a new covenant with Israel and with the house of Judah. In verses 35-37 we read,

Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever. Thus saith the Lord; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord.

Do you grasp the prophet's message? Or, I should say, God's message to the nations? Unless you are able to pluck the stars from the heavens, or measure the heavens, or search out the foundations of the earth, Israel will remain a nation before God. God is not through with the Jew. He has hardly begun. Israel is referred to as the "people of the unfinished task." Soon God is going to deal again in mercy with her and, when He does, the world will marvel at the goodness and mercy and the wisdom of God, in calling this people.