

Romans Summary
Week 16, Wednesday January 18, 2017
Romans 9:1-17

Paul finished his last section on one of the greatest declarations Scripture has to offer. He is proclaiming that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus! But, then, in this section, he has a huge shift in tone to sorrow. He uses rhetorical means to express his grief and to draw his readers into it, to share it with him. He is moved to this sorrow in light of this great announcement of God's love, because he recognizes the state of his fellow Jews according to the flesh apart from Christ and the Spirit.

He casts himself into a Moses like role when he says that he could wish to be separated from Christ if it would lead to his fellow Jews to come to saving faith in the Messiah. After all, and what makes it particularly acute, is everything he has said both Jews and Gentiles (emphasis on Gentiles right now) enjoy in Christ, rightly belong to Israel according to the flesh: adoption, glory, covenants, Law, service, promises, the fathers, even the Messiah who is over all, God. They are rejecting God himself.

But, that brings up an old question: has God's word failed? If God has made promises to Israel, but not all Israel is receiving the fulfilled promises, does that make God's word fail? No! Because, not all who are a part of Israel (according to the flesh) are Israel. In other words, God's promise has always moved through God's chosen means not by a particular flesh.

He demonstrates this by looking at Abraham's children: Abraham had two sons, Ishmael the son of Hagar who was firstborn and Isaac the son of Sarah who was younger. Ishmael was simply the child of flesh, but Isaac was the child of promise.

If someone had concern that the boys had a different mother, so the choice may have been based on that fact, Paul shows this is not a concern in the next generation. Rebecca had twin boys, to emphasize, one conception by Isaac. Before they were born, able to say or do anything, God chose Jacob the younger to love rather than Esau the older whom he hated. So, it isn't age, parentage or behaviour, only God's choice for his purpose.

But, then, is God unjust? Has what Paul said about God's justice and righteousness called into question by this? No! Paul goes back to the Exodus, back to the moment he alluded to earlier when Moses stood before God. This is the point in history that God had established covenant with Israel and Israel agreed to covenant with YHWH. Then, while Moses was away, Israel made the golden calf and God's wrath was ready to break out, destroy Israel and begin again with Moses. That's the moment that Moses says, no. If you're going to do that cut me out as well. So the point of the quote is that, like all Jews and Gentiles described in the earlier chapters, all Israel deserves death. So, the mercy that comes isn't based on behaviour or any other factor, just God's gracious choice to show mercy on some. In short, it shows God amazing justice!

The exodus motif continues; now Israel is cast into the role of Pharaoh. He was chosen for God's purpose of having God's name, God's mercy, God's grace told throughout the whole world. So, even unbelieving Israel is still the agent through which God is working to bring about his purpose — it's not their choice but God's. Just as Pharaoh's disobedience was used to rescue Israel, Israel's disobedience has the same purpose for the world.

“The Clue on the Beach” reflection and discussion questions:

1. Why must all Christians live with the terrible fact that European churches turned away their face at the Holocaust?
2. Would you be willing to be damned for the glory of Christ, if people would come to know him?
3. Do the Jewish people remain the Chosen people?
4. How is the continuing presence of the Jewish people the sign that God is faithful?