

Romans 9:1-5 - Paul's Sorrow Concerning Israel

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9:1-2 - Paul's Sorrow

- **Topics Many Christians are Uncomfortable With**

These three chapters (Romans 9-11) are foundational to an understanding of the role of Israel in the plan of God after having rejected her Messiah. Paul emphasizes two key doctrines which many find unsettling:

1. the sovereignty of God,
2. the uniqueness of the nation of Israel in God's plan.

- **A dramatic shift in Paul's presentation.**

The chapter break is evident in the transition which occurs from the lofty heights of [Romans 8:35-39](#) and the dark valley of Paul's anguish over Israel. This transition serves as an *exclamation mark* to us as readers: **take note!** *What follows is very important teaching close to Paul's heart and also that of the Holy Spirit!*

9:3 - Accursed from Christ

- **Accursed from Christ for his brethren**

"Accursed" is *ana'thema* : to be slain, doomed to destruction, without hope of redemption. (This is the term applied by the Roman Catholic church to those who are placed outside of the salvation of the church--they are considered lost.) If it were possible, Paul would trade his own salvation in order to see Israel accept Messiah Jesus. Paul may have had the similar offer by Moses in mind ([Ex. 32:32](#)) .

- **"according to the flesh"**

Paul is sorrowful over his "countrymen" (*sungenw'n = together/with + kind/race = relatives*) **according to the flesh** . Paul is being especially careful that the reader understands that he is speaking of the *nation* of Israel, *Jews*, and not some "New Israel" or "Spiritual Israel" as some teach in error.

- **National Israel**

The meaning which Paul attaches to Israel here and *throughout the New Testament* is that of the physical offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul knows nothing of the idea that "the church replaces Israel."

9:4 - Adoption

- **"the adoption"**

"Adoption" is *huios* = "son," *thesi'a* is from *tithemi* = "to place as." Israel has "sonship" under God.

- **Israel's Adoption**

In Egypt, Israel was adopted by God ([Ex. 4:22](#)) . She was called out of Egypt at her adoption ([Hos. 11:1](#)) The nation became God's special treasure ([Deu. 14:2](#)) .

- **Believers are Adopted**

The security of a believer as God's adopted son ([Rom. 8:15](#) , [23](#) ; [Gal. 4:5](#) ; [Eph. 1:5](#)) extends also to the *national* adoption of Israel. If God can "unadopt" Israel, then he can "unadopt" New Testament believers and our salvation is insecure! The security of adoption is based upon:

1. promises God has made (to believers and to Israel),
2. the character of God,
3. God is the One doing the work.

9:4 - Glory

- **"the glory"**

This refers to the visible manifestation of God's localized presence, often called His *shekinah* (dwelling) glory. His glory descended upon Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Law ([Ex. 24:16](#)) . His glory filled the tabernacle of Moses ([Ex. 40:34-38](#)) and Solomon's Temple ([1K. 8:11](#)) . His glory will illuminate the New Jerusalem ([Rev. 21:11](#) cf. [Rev. 22:5](#)) .

9:4 - Covenants

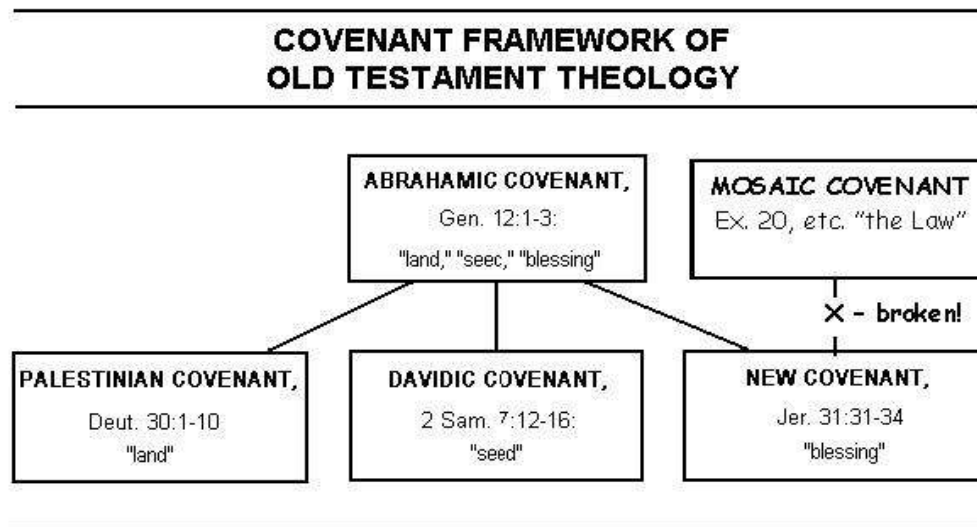
- **"the covenants"**

Various covenants (plural) were made between God and the nation Israel:

1. Abrahamic Covenant - between God and Abraham ([Gen. 12:1-3](#) ; [15:18](#) ; [17:2-10](#)),
2. Mosaic Covenant - between God and Israel as a nation, ([Ex. 24:7-8](#) ; [34:27](#)),
3. Land Covenant - permanent possession of the Promised Land ([Deu. 29-30](#)) ,
4. Davidic Covenant - between God and David ([2S. 7:12-16](#) ; [Jer. 33:20-25](#) ; [Ps. 89:3](#) , [34](#)),
5. New Covenant - Initially made with Israel, believers participate through Jesus ([Jer. 31:33](#) ; [Mtt. 26:28](#) ; [Heb. 8:6](#)).

- **Jewish Covenants**

These covenants are with *Israel* --even the New Covenant. Apart from the work of Christ, Gentiles would forever remain strangers from these formal promises made with Israel ([Eph. 2:12](#)).



Source: Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 35 (Mosaic Covenant added by instructor.)

9:4 - Giving of the Law

- **"the giving of the law"**

This refers to the Law of Moses given on Mt. Sinai, which includes the Ten Commandments ([Ex. 20](#) ; [Ne. 9:13-14](#) cf. [John 1:17](#)). Paul spoke of this earlier when he discussed the advantage of the Jew: " Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles (*lo'gia*, utterances) of God. " The Gentiles were without the law ([Rom. 2:14](#)).

9:4 - Service of God

- **"the service of God"**

"Service" is *latrei'a* : religious service based in worship. The service of God took place in "God's House" -- the Temple. The service of God in the Temple would be meaningless if it were not for the fact that the glory of God (His localized presence) resided there.

9:4 - Promises

- **"the promises"**

Paul has already mentioned the *covenants*. Now he speaks of additional promises which are not explicitly included in the formal covenants.

- **The Coming Messiah**

Intertwined with the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, many additional promises concern the

coming of the Messiah (e.g., [Deu. 18:15](#) ; [Isa. 9:6-7](#) ; [42:1-7](#)). Many additional promises relate to the coming kingdom on earth, the *Millennial Kingdom*. These promises concern topics such as:

1. the Messianic reign from Jerusalem ([Isa. 2:1-4](#) ; [Mic. 4:1-8](#)),
 2. the gathering of Israel to *permanently* possess the Promised Land ([Amos 9:8-15](#) cf. [Isa. 11-12](#) ; [Eze. 37:21-25](#)),
 3. the restoration of Jerusalem, a time of great blessing ([Isa. 65:19-25](#) cf. [Isa. 62](#) ; [Zec. 8:1-8](#)).
- **How do we become aware of these promises?**
We become aware of these promises made to Israel by:
 1. carefully reading the entire Old Testament,
 2. paying attention to Jewish expectations at Christ's first coming (e.g., [Acts 1:6](#)).

9:5 - The Fathers

- **"of whom *are* the fathers"**
This refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through whom the Abrahamic covenant was passed down to the offspring of Jacob (who is the man "Israel" ([Gen. 32:28](#)) . By mentioning "fathers" (plural), Paul is excluding other descendants of Abraham who are not the recipients of the promises to Abraham, for example:
 1. Isaac's brother Ishamael - from whom the Arabs and Muhammed claim descent,
 2. Jacob's brother Esau - from whom the Edomites and Idumaeans, including Herod the Great, descended.

9:5 - From Whom Christ Came

- **"according to the flesh"**
Paul uses the same phrase he used when describing his countrymen ([Rom. 9:3](#)) . Paul describes the dual origin of Jesus, born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit. He is both *God* and *Man*. According to his human nature, He came in the the line of the Jews ([Mtt. 1:1-18](#) ; [Luke 3:23-38](#)). According to his divine nature, He is from eternity ([John 1:1-3](#)) .
- **the importance of His Jewish lineage**
If Jesus were not a Jew by birth:
 1. He would not qualify as the promised Messiah,
 2. believing Gentiles would remain strangers to Israel's covenants ([Eph. 2:12](#)) !

Our participation in salvation (the New Covenant) hinges upon the Jewishness of Jesus because the New Covenant was given to the Jews ([Jer. 31:31](#)) .

9:5 - Eternally Blessed God

- **"the eternally blessed God"**

There are three general ways the Greek of this phrase has been understood:

1. "the blessed Christ is God."
2. "Christ is blessed by God."
3. "Christ is over all, God be blessed."

- **The original Greek**

Differences in translation are not due to differences among Greek texts, but due to differences in how the phrase is parsed.

- **Context favors Christ as the subject or object of blessing**

The context of Paul's lament concerning the special privileges of Israel reaches a climax in her production of Messiah. The focus is on *Christ* and especially Israel's failure to accept her own Messiah. It makes less sense for the last phrase to be taken as a doxology of the Father ("God be blessed").