

## **“They Are Not All Israel ...”**

*“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish myself anathema from Christ for my brethren’s sake, my kinsman according to the flesh”* (Rom. 9:1-3). It is evident from this reading, that the apostle breaks from his previous subject to deal with another; the contemplation of which brought constant pain to his heart and, could it have altered the situation for the better for those for whom he had such sorrow, could have wished himself anathema from Christ. The cause of this grief was the spectacle of his own kinsmen, who were *“Israelites, whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the services of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever”* (9:4f). That Paul viewed the unbelieving Jews of his day as lost is indisputable. Paul’s introduction of the state of physical Israel: why it had happened and whether it could be remedied, what future plans for physical Israel, if any will, occupy the balance of this chapter and the next two. That Israel had been in a favored station with God is beyond dispute. That they had rejected the Messiah they had preached about and prayed might come is undeniable. What, then, about God’s word through the ages; His covenants with them; His promises? What did that imply? Paul anticipates such questions as these and assures his readers by saying, *“But it is not as though the word of God hath come to naught”* (Rom. 9:6). God had made promises to Abraham which found beginning and fulfillment in Isaac. With Abraham’s seed he had made a covenant at Sinai (Deut. 5:1-4). He had blessed them, chastened them and kept them through long years of tribulations. Now they had rejected the very one He intended for them: their Messiah, but His Son! Is it all for naught? No, Paul resounding responds!

First, he reminds his readers of a fact they should surely know. *“They are not all Israel, that are of Israel: neither because they are Abraham’s seed are they children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called ... That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God: but the children of the promised are reckoned for a seed”* (9:6-8). It is certain that while Ishmael was *“seed of Abraham”* and Abraham’s oldest son, he was not the intended seed God promised to make a great nation from. Ishmael was a *“child of the flesh;”* a physical son, but when God had promised Abraham, *“I will make of thee a great nation,”* even then God had Isaac in mind. Even Ishmael’s birth before Isaac did not offset God’s purposes and intentions for *“in Isaac shall thy seed be called.”* This reminder prepared the way for his statement: *“It is not the children of the flesh that are children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed.”* The apostle is showing that just as God

selected Isaac over Ishmael (even though he was the seed of Abraham); so today determination as to whether one is a child of God or not is not predicated upon whether one is physically Abraham's seed. To be children of God is based upon promise and Paul writes of this truth when he wrote Galatians: *"For ye are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed: heirs according to the promise"* (Gal. 3:26-29).

Furthermore, the apostles show that even though God said *"in Isaac shall they seed be called."* even that was subject to purposes of God. *"And not only so; but Rebecca having conceived by one, even our father Isaac, the children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the election might stand, not of works, but of him who called, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger"* (9:10-12). One could be the seed of Abraham and not inherit the promises. One could be a son of Isaac and be cut off from the promises God made with Abraham. Does not the unspoken word show also one could be of the seed of Jacob and not share in the promises? Let the physical Jew beware, for of whichever tribe he descended, all twelve tribes sprang from Jacob! Indeed then, they are not all Israel who are of Israel! Some were children of the flesh and some were children of promise! Next: "Is There Unrighteousness With God?"

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