

Romans

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Romans 9:1-6



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Vss. 1-3

- Paul opens this three-chapter sub-book with deep feelings, but not feelings of anger but deep grief toward the people who not only rejected and crucified Christ, but who have rejected him and have attempted to kill him for no other reason except that he dared to tell them what he **KNOWS** to be the truth. Paul realizes that the subject is a matter of life or death and these are people he knows and loves personally as well as people of a tradition that is part of his DNA and the idea that the Jews would reject the truth and choose death and not life, cuts him to the deepest part of his soul.
- Paul may be remembering the words of Moses in Exodus 32 where Moses stands before God after the people have created and worshipped the Golden Calf and Moses declares to God that if the punishment of eternal damnation is to come, let it come to him and not the people. "For I wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh" (vs. 3). The Greek word Paul uses for "accursed" is "anathema". This is a word which carried a terrible meaning, literally "to be under the ban". In the Old Testament and in ancient times in general, the word was applied to enemy cities which were to be utterly destroyed, erased from the face of the earth. In the 100 years between 1850 and 1950, many bible sceptics dismissed the Bible as ancient mythology, especially the Old Testament, because there was no archeological evidence that many of the places and cities mentioned in the Old Testament ever existed. Today many of those place have been identified, but with only scant evidence that anything was ever there. These pagan cities had been completely wiped out (Deuteronomy 2:30-34; 3:1-6: Joshua 6:17; 7:15). This was not an uncommon practice in the ancient world. When Rome finally subdued the North African city of Carthage, they destroyed the city completely and the sowed salt over it so nothing would ever grow there ever again, salt being an item so valuable it was paid out was wages. Such was the importance of wiping the city from the earth once and for all. Carthage became "anathema".

Vss. 4-6

- Despite all of this, Paul still recognizes the special place the Jews hold in God's eyes. For Paul, nothing will ever shake the Jews from being "God's Chosen People".
- First, the Jews are the "Children of God". The Jewish people were specifically chosen and elevated above all people. In Deuteronomy 14:1, God plainly says, "You are the sons of the Lord your God".

In Exodus 4:22, God instructs Moses to say to Pharaoh that he must let the Hebrews go because, "Israel is my son". The prophet Hosea, in Hosea 11:1, as he is trying to call the Jews back to God, shares that God is reminding them that, "When Israel was a Youth, I loved him and out of Egypt I called My son".

- Second, Paul mentions "the glory". Only Israel had seen the divine glory and light of God. Throughout the book of Exodus, Israel sees the Pillar of Fire by night and the Pillar of Cloud by day. They see the brilliant light on the top of the mountain. They would see the glory of God all over Moses after their leader would come back down the mountain from visiting with God.
- Third there were the covenants God gave to Israel. A covenant is a mutually beneficial agreement between two parties, growing out of strong relationship. In Scripture we first see the covenant of the rainbow God made with Noah. Then there was the covenant God made with Abraham and then again over Isaac. There was another with Jacob and then there was another Moses on Mt. Sinai when God gave the Law. Frankly the Jews did not do particularly well with any of those covenants and were not receiving the new covenant in Christ's blood very well.
- And it was impossible for Israel to plead that they didn't know. They had the Law and sinned against it. God gave them worship in the Temple and they made it a den of thieves. They had God promises and their marching orders. They were to be a "Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6) and a "Light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). God had purposed them for great things and they refused. And they had the Scriptures handed down to them from "the fathers". They had so many examples and great traditions and such a rich heritage, but they took it all for granted and frittered it away.
- And ultimately they had The Promise. All through the Old Testament scriptures was the promise of the greatest gift of God, the coming of the Messiah from Heaven. The Christ, the Savior of the world, would come to the Jews, would come from the Jews to the world, and would come for the Jews that they might be forgiven.
- William Barclay: "Therein lies tragedy, for therein is the waste of love's labor and the defeat of love's dream. The tragedy of Israel was that God had prepared her for the day of the coming of His Son--and all the preparation was frustrated. It was not that God's law had been broken, it was that God's love had been spurned. It is not the anger, but the broken heart of God, which lies behind Paul's words."