

All Roads Lead Here: Let My Heart Be Broken...
By Jason Huff
August 6, 2017
Deuteronomy 4:1-9; Luke 19:41-44; Romans 9:1-6

Our final Scripture reading is Romans 9:1-6. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. “I speak the truth in Christ -- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit -- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.”

What really gets your goat? Maybe it's the line at the Secretary of State when you're waiting for two hours for a change to your driver's license. Maybe it's when your grocery store is out of the ingredient you need to make a perfect dinner. Most of us get bummed out by taxes that are too high, winter months that last too long, and visits from friends that are far too short.

Our society tells us we should be upset about lots of things – social injustice, climate change, cruelty to animals, and healthcare for everybody. From a Christian point of view, we often fight against cancers on our society like human trafficking and abortion. But how many of us are focused on the things that matter most to God? All the good work we do in our world has two core purposes – to glorify God and to lead others towards Him.

As Paul turns a corner in Romans 9, he begins a new argument – one that starts with Paul's deep love for his people. That love is centered in the promises God has made to Israel. And as Romans 9 continues, Paul tackles some of the most difficult theological issues in the Bible as he explains how God's purposes and will work their way out in our world.

As you remember, Romans 8 gave us great joy in our salvation, assuring us that nothing could separate us from the love of Jesus and that, despite all our sins, God's chosen people are redeemed by Jesus, justified by Him, and will be claimed by Him at the end of time. It's one of the most upbeat, reassuring passages in the whole Bible.

But Romans 9 suddenly turns much darker. Paul says he is in incredible, unending anguish and torment. This is the same guy who told us, “Rejoice always – again I say, rejoice! Let your joy be evident to all.” How could Paul, the missionary of joy, the disciple who encouraged believers to celebrate in suffering, be in such misery?

His anguish comes from his people's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. He is so upset about their loss that he talks about the unthinkable. He says he would willing to be cursed for their sake. Now think about this. The word here is *anathema*, the word for excommunication, for being cut off from the body of Christ. Paul longs for his countrymen so much to become Jesus-followers that he would be ready to spend eternity in hell, away from the presence of God, if it could affect their eternal destiny so that they might accept God's love and be saved.

Now that's serious. I love you all, I pray for you, I pray that God has been working in your hearts and leading you to be His disciples and be saved, but I've never ever thought of going that far. Would I willingly give up my immortal soul so that you could make it into God's Kingdom? Frankly, no! Hardly anyone would! And this is hyperbole; Paul knows this isn't how it works. He cannot do anything to save someone else. Yet it shows the depth of his longing that the Jewish people would come to faith in Jesus as their messiah.

Why is Paul so concerned about his people? Besides them being his own blood relatives, he gives us a brief list of the history of Israel. The Israelites are the keepers of God's temple. They are the recipients of God's law. They are the ones to whom God made His promises. We'll work out the ramifications of all that in a minute, but the core is, God has revealed Himself to their forefathers, and they are the ones to whom God's blessings flow most directly. For them to be lost to God is nothing short of a tragedy.

For over 4,000 years, God has been keeping the Hebrew people together despite all odds, blessing them with land, with His presence, with His Word and His truth and His Spirit. Not only that, it's through that family tree that Jesus comes to us – Jesus who is Himself God in the flesh! The adoption as daughters and sons of God's Kingdom belongs to them.

So what happened? Did God fail to keep His promises? What does their rejection of Jesus mean? Paul gives us a simple sentence that explains it -- "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." The rest of chapter 9 gets into this topic specifically, but the part we need to recognize now is that the physical bloodline descendants of Abraham, the Hebrews, are not always the same thing as God's actual, true Israel.

Now we're going to work through the ramifications, the application, of these things in reverse order because of their relative importance for us. Trust me, it will all make sense when we are done! But the first thing I want us to take home from this passage is this: *God's true Israel includes all His chosen people, all those who believe in and trust in Him, throughout history, even those who aren't physical descendants of the Jews.*

When Paul says "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel," he means two things. First, not every blood descendant of Abraham is a saved member of God's Kingdom. This goes way back into Israel's history. Many descendants of Abraham were absolutely wicked – tyrants, murderers, idol worshippers who wanted nothing to do with Abraham's god. Most of Israel's kings were notoriously disinterested in following God's ways. There were corrupt priests and false prophets. At times, virtually the whole nation was engaged in idolatry. Those who did not turn back to God were not true Israelites.

The Jewish people who rejected Jesus in His time were in the same boat. Now keep in mind that many Jews – the same ones who were excited to see Jesus crucified – changed their minds and were cut to the quick when Peter preached to them that Jesus was actually their messiah. They became Jesus' followers and showed themselves to be true Israelites. But most of the people under the leadership of the Pharisees did not. According to Paul, they aren't true Israelites either.

If that's the first point, the second is that everyone who turns to Jesus as their Savior and Lord is, in fact, a true Israelite. That's you and me! We are part of the spiritual descendants God promised to Abraham. When we trust in Jesus, we're adopted into the family. Through Jesus, the way is open to us to become a part of the true Israel. This is how God's Word is proven true. God has made descendants for Abraham out of every people and generation. When the physical descendants of Abraham rejected the Messiah God sent for them, those outside those bloodlines were offered a way into God's Kingdom.

That means when you read stories from the Old Testament, when you hear about places with strange names or you read historical ideas that don't mean much, take a second look. The history of the nation of Israel is now your history too. These are *your* people, *your* place.

You may not have any connections to the homeland you came from. My ancestors came to America close to 300 years ago; I really don't know a thing about my ancestor's origins in Ireland and Germany. As Americans, we've splintered into different factions and identities; it's hard to know who we are anymore. But as Christians, we can claim Israel's story as our own. Through Jesus, we are adopted into that family. If you feel a little lost for a sense of place, for who you are, know that in God, you have a home, you have a family, you have a history and identity. You are a part of God's chosen people.

This brings us to a second, related idea: *we should deeply respect the Jewish people and pray for their redemption – and we should recognize all the Scripture as important for Christians today.* The world has an awful pattern of anti-Semitism. Until the formation of modern Israel in 1947, the Jewish people were regularly forced out of their homes and land for nearly two thousand years. Often, Christianity was used as an excuse, that the Jewish people were responsible for Christ's death and thus deserved no respect. When the nation of Israel was created in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the surrounding nations were determined, in their own words, "to drive them into the sea."

Yet the reason that so many people are angered by the Jews is because God has continued to bless the physical descendants of Abraham even to today. Despite being a relatively small group of people, God has blessed them with land, property, and wealth. Despite that they do not follow the Messiah Jesus that the Father sent for them, God is still true to His promises long ago.

We should, as much as possible, be friendly to Jewish neighbors and co-workers. We should encourage them to read the Scriptures and look for signs of the Messiah. Because if they study their own Scriptures carefully enough, they will see that very detailed and specific events in Jesus' life are prophesied in plain language. A number of years ago, we did a video study on Isaiah 53 that featured a number of Jewish biblical scholars who had come to faith in Jesus through a detailed study of the prophecies of Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

The truth is, God cares for the descendants of the Hebrews, the Jewish people. He has promised that there will always be a remnant of them who will be devoted to Him. And even now, many – not most, but many – Jewish people find Jesus through the ministry of groups like Jews for Jesus. Nobody knows whom God will change and touch, so pray for those around you who are of Jewish descent.

This also leads us into the second part of this point – we remember that God gave us the entire Bible, not just the New Testament. We typically focus on the New Testament because it tells about Jesus and the love He has for us; books like Romans by Jesus’ disciples explain what God did through Jesus and why. The New Testament is simpler to read. Some people complain that the Old Testament is too violent, that God is too harsh before Jesus’ coming, that parts of the Old Testament are long and boring and difficult to understand.

But here’s the thing: the New Testament makes no sense without the Old Testament. In our study of Romans so far, Paul has made at least 14 direct quotations from the Old Testament. The whole book refers back to the Old Testament – to the creation, to the fall of humanity into sin, to the promises made to Abraham, to the law given to Moses. In order to know what God is saving us from and how He’s saved His people throughout time, you need to know about the Old Testament story. The New Testament gives us much of what we need, but the Old Testament is the original context. It tells us the whole of stories that the New Testament assumes we know.

When Paul was writing Romans, when all the disciples were teaching others about what Jesus said and did on our behalf, they taught from what we call the Old Testament. In Acts 17 and 18, Paul reasoned with people from the Scriptures – that’s the Old Testament. When new converts with no knowledge of Judaism became interested in Jesus, they were taught the Old Testament and then explained how Jesus fulfills the promises taught there. The Old Testament Psalms were the songs the early church sung. The prophets were the early church’s assurance that Jesus was in fact the awaited Savior.

So when you do your Bible reading, don’t skip over the Old Testament. It’s there for a reason. If you try it and get bogged down in it, move on to parts that makes more sense. I’m here as a guide to help you through the difficulties, and there are plenty of commentaries and books that make those parts easier to understand. But ultimately, when we read the Old Testament, we see that God chose a people for Himself that He blessed immensely – and when we believe in Jesus, we become a part of that true Israel.

Finally today, and probably most important, is this question: *are we deep in prayer and steady in action about the things that are closest to God’s heart?* Paul, the joyful disciple, anguished over his people. He prayed fervently that God might save his cousins and relatives, that they might be brought into the Kingdom and accept Jesus their Messiah. Paul makes at least four missionary journeys spreading news of Jesus – and while he became known as the missionary to the Gentiles, those outside the Jewish people, at every stop along the way, Paul went to the local synagogue first and taught about Jesus there until the synagogue leaders threw him out. He was passionate about seeing his people saved. His heart broke for them.

Are our hearts breaking for the lost, for those who don’t know God around us, who may be separated from Him forever? Let’s pray that God would do this in us. It’s painful to be burdened for the salvation of others, and yet it’s a wonderful thing because it reveals more of God’s heart to us. When you pray, you don’t have to give up praying about the health concerns of others or temporary circumstances, but also pray about eternal circumstances. When you pray for someone’s health, pray for their souls at the same time. That’s why when we pray together, we often pray that someone would know God’s presence when we pray for their healing.

But I also want to encourage you not just to pray that God would put people on your heart, but that you'd move in faith to get to know people who need Jesus. When Jackson and I joined our gaming group close to two years ago, it was to meet some new people and hopefully invite a few to the church. But what I didn't really expect was for them to become good friends. Most of them are atheists; if they have a Christian background, they aren't living it. And I feel for them. I pray for them when God brings them to mind. I care about them. I don't want to see them spending an eternity apart from God. The trajectories they are on pain me. I don't pretend to be at the same place the apostle Paul was, not even close. But I get what it is to want others to come to Christ enough to be in regular prayer about and to do something about it. The more new people you open your heart to, the more people God will put on your heart to pray for and share your love of Christ with.

I'm going to close today with a story that shows what opening your heart up for the lost can do to change the world. It's 1947. There's a young evangelist with an organization called Youth For Christ – Robert Pierce. Robert heads towards China to share Jesus, but he only has enough money to get to Honolulu. While he's there, he meets a teacher named Tena Hoelkedoer. She introduced him to a battered, abandoned child named White Jade, but she has no way to care for her. She asks Pierce, "What are you going to do about her?" Robert gave Tena his last \$5 and pledged to send Tena \$5 a month to take care of White Jade.

Now Pierce eventually made it to China, and in four months thousands of people made commitments to Christ. But he saw hunger everywhere, and he was so gripped by compassion that he wrote in his Bible, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." Pierce went across Asia making short films of the poverty there, and he sent the films to churches in America asking them to help "adopt" these children by sending funds to help. His mission to take care of these people both body and soul became the start of World Vision, which now helps children in 97 countries and raises \$2.8 billion a year for the world's poor. If your heart breaks for the things that break God's heart, it will hurt, but you will see God working through you to accomplish His purposes and to save His people.

God has brought us into His family, making us the true children of Israel. He has given us a legacy in the history of His people that we can read about in the Old Testament. We are so blessed, friends! Let us ask that our hearts be broken with the things that break the heart of God so that we might care for the needy, bring hope to the downcast, and share Christ with those whom God will bring into His Kingdom.