

IS GOD FAITHFUL TO ISRAEL?

In the early chapters of Romans (1-8), Paul expounds the gospel of God's righteousness for the salvation of all who believe in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles. In the middle chapters of the epistle (9-11), he grapples with the perplexing theme of the Jews' unbelief in their own promised Messiah. This matter not only causes Paul great anguish, but also raises questions about God's faithfulness to the Jewish people.

An accusation was circulating in the first century that God had not kept His promises to Israel - that He had unjustly abandoned His chosen people in favor of idol-worshipping Gentiles. Although many Jews believed in Christ, the majority of the Jewish people adhered to their old leaders and traditions. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of Gentiles were becoming Christians.

How was one to view these developments? What was God's plan for Jews and Gentiles in this decisive period of the history of salvation? Why were most Jews unresponsive or opposed to the gospel while Gentiles were becoming the majority in the young Church.

Paul's letter to the Romans indicates how important such questions were to Christians in the sixth decade of the first century. Has God been fair to Israel? Paul's conclusion is yes: He has been faithful to Israel, and through them to the Gentiles. God's unchanging faithfulness is seen in several ways.

1. *Through Paul* (Romans 9:1-3). God miraculously saved the Jewish zealot Saul (Acts 9:1-22), who later, as Paul the Apostle, confesses, "I am indeed a Jew" (Acts 22:3). The faithfulness of God to Israel and to the Gentiles is witnessed "in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 9:1) through Paul, who is even willing to be "accursed from Christ" (9:3) if by that Israel could be saved.

2. *Through Providence* (Romans 9:4, 5). God the Father shows His sovereign care for both Israel and the Gentiles through bestowing on them His adoption, glory, covenants, law, service (Gr. *latreia*, a reference to proper worship) and promises. The gospel itself came to "the Jew first" (Romans 1:16) and then to the Gentile.

3. *Through the patriarchs* (Romans 9:6-13). God has been faithful to Israel and thus to the Gentiles through His servants Abraham (v. 7), Isaac (v. 10), and Jacob (v. 13). As Isaac's birth came by the promise of God (vv.6-9), so the new birth comes to us by His promise. For just as it was possible to be in the nation of Israel but not truly a child of God, so being born into a Christian home, church, and culture does not de facto guarantee our faithfulness. We must, like Isaac, be born of God's promise. For

the Christian this new birth comes from the watery womb of baptism, with the injunction that we grow to serve the Lord with all our heart, mind, and strength.

4. *Through the prophets* (Romans 9:14-29). Beginning with Moses (v. 15) and including Hosea (vv. 25, 26) and Isaiah (vv. 27-29), the prophets reveal God's faithfulness in His sovereign mercy and election of His faithful - Jew and Gentile alike. The "potter" has "power over the clay" (v. 21) "that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy" (v. 23).

We therefore conclude that God is faithful to Israel as He is to the Gentiles. But we also see that to benefit from His faithfulness to us, we must be faithful to Him.