

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 135

Romans ~ Part 23

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

As I've stressed in my previous post, our journey to comprehend the profound significance of **Sha'ul's Letter to the Romans** is not just a study but a crucial cornerstone of our faith.

Regarding the Jewish Experience ~ Part 1

We've reached a critical juncture in our study of the **Letter to the Romans**, so I want to share **David Stern's** introduction to the following three chapters.

Chapters 9–11 of the **Book of Romans** contain the **Brit Hadassah's** most essential and complete discussion of the **Jewish** people. In them, **God** promises that *"all Israel will be saved"* (11:26) and commands that **Gentile Believers** show the **Jews God's** mercy (11:31). In the face of what these chapters teach, every form of **Christian** antisemitism stands condemned. Every claim, whether by **Jews** or **Believers**, that the **Gospel** is not for **Jews** must collapse. This discussion of the **Jews** arises from what might seem unrelated: **Sha'ul's** assurance to **Believers** in **Yeshua** the **Messiah** that **God's** love for them will see them through every distress and can never be overpowered or withdrawn (Romans 8:14–39). Some theologians fail to find this connection, notably those **Dispensationalists** who hold that Romans 9–11 is merely a "parenthesis" in an argument that moves from chapter 8 directly to chapter 12.

But this is a severe mistake. Chapters 9–11 do proclaim the eventual salvation of the **Jewish** nation as an integral part of **God's** *"Good News promised in the Tanakh"* (Romans 1:2) *"to the Jew especially"* (1:16). Yet in context, these chapters serve another function, which is to answer the burning question any of the original readers would have asked at this point in **Sha'ul's** letter:

"Sha'ul, if God is as powerful and faithful as you portray him (in chapter 8), then why, as more and more Gentiles accept the Gospel, are more and more Jews rejecting and opposing it? Didn't God say repeatedly in the Tanakh how much he loves Isra'el—'with an everlasting love' (Jeremiah 31:2(3))? Suppose God's love for the Jews is everlasting. How can it be that, despite centuries of experience with God Himself and despite having God's Word with its Messianic promises (3:1–2), so many of the Jews individually and the Jewish nation as an entity are refusing this love as expressed through his Messiah? Apparently, with all their advantages, they are being lost, and God's 'everlasting love' won't do them any good. That worries us: how can we be sure of your promise that 'no created thing will separate us from the love of God' (8:39)?"

Therefore, it is because a **Believer** (either **Gentile** or **Jewish**), seeing the response of most **Jewish** people to the **Gospel**, might doubt **God's** faithfulness to his own promises or his capacity to fulfill them and thus call into question **God Himself** that **Sha'ul** is compelled at precisely this point in his letter to deal at length with how the salvation of the **Jewish** people will indeed be accomplished and thereby vindicate **God**. ¹

Concern for the Jewish Experience

¹ I am speaking the truth—as one who belongs to the Messiah, I do not lie; and also bearing witness is my conscience, governed by the Ruach HaKodesh: ² my grief is so great, the pain in my heart so constant, ³ that I could wish myself actually under God's curse and separated from the Messiah, if it would help my brothers, my own flesh and blood, ⁴ the people of Isra'el! They were made God's children, the Sh'khinah has been with them, the covenants are theirs, likewise the giving of the Torah,

¹ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary, Romans 9:1.

the Temple service, and the promises;⁵ the Patriarchs are theirs; and from them, as far as his physical descent is concerned, came the Messiah, who is over all. Praised be Adonai forever! Amen.²

Since **Sha'ul's** ministry was to **Gentiles** (Romans 1:5b–6, 11:13), perhaps some people thought he would no longer be interested in the **Jews**. Therefore, in this verse, he affirms in three different ways the sincerity of his great grief over **Isra'el's** failure, as a people, to honor their **Messiah**. Even as an emissary to the **Gentiles**, whenever he came to a new place, he brought the **Gospel** *"to the Jew first"* (1:16, Acts 13:5).

The anguish Sha'ul experiences as he considers the **Jewish** rejection of **Yeshua** shows him following in the footsteps of **Moshe Rabbenu**. When **Isra'el** apostatized and built the golden calf, **Moshe** prayed, *"This people has sinned a great sin and have made themselves gods of gold. Yet now, if you will forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray, out of your book which you have written"* (Exodus 32:32).

God's answer to **Moshe** was, *"Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore, now, go; lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel, will go before you"* (Exodus 32:33–34). This angel has been identified with **Yeshua**, the **Messiah** Himself (Yochanan 1:14, and the book is none other than the **Book of Life** (Revelation 20:12b). Every **Rosh-HaShanah** and **Yom-Kippur**, the synagogue liturgy calls for **Jews** to pray that their sins will be forgiven. Their names are written in the **Book of Life**. Revelation 20:15 says that those whose names are not written in it will burn eternally in the lake of fire and sulfur. Thus, **Moshe**, like **Sha'ul** after him, was willing to be under **God's** curse if it would help his fellow **Jews**.

I will pick up in my next post, looking closer at this passage beginning with verse 3.

Our next post continues to examine the theme: **Regarding the Jewish Experience**.

² Romans 9:1–5.