

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 136

Romans ~ Part 24

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 2

The first of the three major parts of chapters 9–11 (see 9:1–11:36) asks whether **God** is in any degree at fault for **Isra'el's** currently rejecting the **Messiah**. This is the logical place to start, for it was the questioning of **God's** ability to fulfill His promises that raised the issue. The passage establishes—on the unshakable ground of **God's** sovereignty (vv. 19–23), justice, and mercy (vv. 14–18)—not only that the promises apply to but a limited “seed” (vv. 6–13) or “remnant” (vv. 27–29) of **Isra'el**, but also that at least some of them apply to certain **Gentiles** who never were part of **Isra'el** (vv. 22–26)

Basis of God's Promise

⁶ But the present condition of Isra'el does not mean that the Word of God has failed.

But none of this means that the Word of God has failed. This completes the explicit statement of the problem **Sha'ul** is dealing with in chapters 9–11 - ***"In the case of the Jews, has the Word of God failed?"*** (see 9:1–11:36). But the question is raised in a way that anticipates the happy conclusion, ***"No, it has not failed."***

For not everyone from Isra'el is truly part of Isra'el; ⁷ indeed, not all the descendants are seed of Avraham; (2 Chronicles 20:7) ***rather, "What is to be called your 'seed' will be in Yitz'chak."*** (Genesis 21:12) ***⁸ In other words, it is not the physical children who are children of God, but the children the promise refers to who are considered seed. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: "At the time set, I will come, and Sarah will have a son."*** (Genesis 18:14) "

God decides what His promises mean and how they are to be carried out. Although the phrase ***"seed of Avraham"*** seems self-explanatory, **God** decided that ***what is to be called your "seed,"*** for purposes of the promise, ***will be in Yitzchak,*** not in **Yishma'el**, of whom the same word, ***"seed,"*** is used in the following verse of the **Tanakh**, Genesis 21:13, but not in connection with the promise. (Some **Muslims** claim that the **Land of Isra'el** belongs to the **Arabs** on the ground that they are ***"Abraham's seed"*** through **Ishmael**. These verses of **Romans**, in passing, refute that claim.)

¹⁰ And even more to the point is the case of Rivkah; for both her children were conceived in a single act with Yitz'chak, our father; ¹¹ and before they were born before they had done anything at all, either good or bad (so that God's plan might remain a matter of his sovereign choice, not dependent on what they did, but on God, who does the calling), ¹² it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23) ***¹³ This accords with where it is written, "Ya'akov I loved, but Esav I hated."*** (Malachi 1:2–3) "

The case of Rivkah is **even more to the point** of demonstrating **God's** absolute sovereignty in determining such matters independently of anything human beings do. For **Ya'akov** and **Esav** were **her children**, the fact that **Yishma'el's** mother was **Hagar** and **Yitzchak's** was **Sarah** might lead one to conclude that **Sarah's** greater worthiness had ***earned Yitzchak*** the promises. Nor can one look for a difference in deservedness on the father's side, ***for both were conceived in a single act by Yitzchak;*** the **Greek** word ***"koitê"*** does not mean merely that both had the same father, which is, of course, true, but that both were conceived in the same act of sexual intercourse. Also, in the case of **Yishma'el** and **Yitzchak**, you might say that **Yishma'el**, who was fourteen years old when **Yitzchak** was born, had already proved himself unfit. But in the present instance, the decision was made by **God** before they were born and before they did ***anything at all, either good or bad.*** **Sha'ul** makes as explicit

as possible **God's** motivation *so that God's plan might remain a matter of his sovereign choice, not dependent on what they did but on God, who does the calling.* **God's** decision, contradicting the normal rules of that society, was that *the older will serve the younger*, which is consistent with the pronouncement made centuries later: *Ya'akov I loved but Esav I hated* (in which "hated" is a relative term meaning "loved less"; see Luke 14:26). This is quoted from Malachi 1:2–3, and as the context there shows, it not only looks back to those two brothers, but forward to their posterity as well; for **God** punished the **Edomites**, who were descended in part from **Esav** (Deuteronomy 2:4; Obadiah 1, 6), and blessed **Isra'el**, **Ya'akov's** seed.

God Can Have Mercy on Anyone

¹⁴ So are we to say, "It is unjust for God to do this"? Heaven forbid!

That a loving **God** can hate (v. 13; Psalm 139:21–22) and that His hatred can seem arbitrary might tempt one to say, *"It is unjust for God to do this."* **Sha'ul**, concentrating on both **God's** sovereignty and His justice, replies, *"Heaven forbid!"* (on this phrase, see Romans 3:4). *"He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He."* (Deuteronomy 32:4)

¹⁵ For to Moshe, he says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will pity whom I pity." (Exodus 33:19) "¹⁶ Thus, it doesn't depend on human desires or efforts but on God, who has mercy.

In quoting Exodus 33:19, **Sha'ul** focuses on God's mercy, sovereignty, and justice. Though **God** is within His rights to hate whom He will so that standing with **God** doesn't depend on human desires or efforts, **God** nevertheless does have mercy and does show pity. Non-**Messianic Judaism** understands **God's** attribute of mercy as even greater than his attribute of justice. Although this seems a beautiful idea, it can lead to the false hope that **God**, in His mercy, will somehow overlook the just punishment for sins. It is easy to see why such a hope is sought. People who do not have Yeshua to satisfy God's demand for justice by being the kapparah (atonement) for their sins know that they need **God's** mercy desperately. The wish is father to the thought that **God** is more merciful than judgmental. Messianic Judaism does not have to elevate mercy over justice because Yeshua, the Messiah, combines in Himself **God's** perfect justice with His perfect mercy and demonstrates how they dovetail and coincide (see Romans 3:25–26). This is why **Sha'ul** can quote Exodus 33:19 in answer to a question about **God's** justice, thereby placing **God's** mercy alongside his justice and not above it.

*¹⁷ For the Tanakh says to Pharaoh, "It is for this very reason that I raised you up, so that in connection with you I might demonstrate my power, so that my name might be known throughout the world." (Exodus 9:16) "¹⁸ So then, he has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants.*¹

Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, and especially 14:4 speak of **God's** hardening **Pharaoh's** heart. **Sha'ul** sees history repeating itself. **Isra'el's** rejection of **Yeshua**, like **Pharaoh's** rejection of **Moshe**, provides the circumstances for **God** to demonstrate His power through an act of deliverance from the "Egypt" and "bondage" of sin and death. Further, knowledge of this deliverance continues to be publicized: just as the **Exodus** became known through the **Tanakh** and the annual reading of the **Haggadah** at **Pesach**, so the **Messiah's** atoning death and resurrection are being made known through evangelism (and now, after **Sha'ul's** day, through the **Brit Hadashah**). All this is a direct result of **Isra'el's** apostasy (a point reiterated at 11:11–12, 15, 19, 25, 30–32—for **Isra'el's** self-will, like **Pharaoh's**, serves **God's** merciful ends.)

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

¹ Romans 9:6–18.