



Daily Faith Practices

Sunday, July 31-August 6 (A) – Romans 9:1-5

Focus: *A Lament for Israel*

word of life

“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.” (Romans 9:2-3 NRSV)

Read Romans 9:1-5

In the preceding chapters of Romans, the Apostle Paul passionately writes about the significance of being justified by God through Jesus Christ. God’s promises are realized through faith and not by following the law. These radical words are even more drastic because they are written by Paul, a Jew from birth. And yet, Paul could no longer live solely under the teachings of the Torah. In Christ, he had been freed from relying on the law to earn God’s favor.

1. *What (if anything) do you admire about Apostle Paul?*
2. *What would you love to ask him?*

The Apostle Paul invested his life in teaching, preaching and writing about God’s grace made known in Christ. He preached far and wide, understanding his own calling as one to reach the Gentiles. At no point does Paul forget his Jewish roots.

Despite the years which passed since the resurrection of Christ, Paul was acutely aware not all Jews believed Christ to be the Messiah. Many fervently clung to the same teachings of those who crucified Jesus. Paul was run out of town, persecuted, and thrown in prison—often by Jews. None of this dissuaded Paul from his commitment to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. *How did Paul hope the Jews might respond to Jesus?*
4. *Why might the people of the first century not have viewed Jesus as the Messiah?*

Chapter 9 begins with a personal lament from Paul. With great anguish he writes, “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.” (Romans 9:1-3 NRSV) His heart was heavy that his own people had rejected Jesus and his message.

5. *Describe the feelings of Paul towards the Jews.*
6. *What else could Paul have done to convince the Jews that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah?*

Paul raises relevant, pressing questions based on his own personal internal struggles with his heritage. A key question is: What happens to the descendants of the Israelites whom God adopted, freed from slavery, protected during the Exodus, and gave the Promised Land—but who now reject Jesus? As much as anyone, Paul believed his people to be God’s own people—sealed with a covenant. And yet, Paul realized God acted in a new way in Christ, extending adoption to all. Does the rejection of Jesus by the Jews mean God failed?

In Romans 9:1-5, Paul asks, but does not yet answer his own questions. Instead, he concludes this introduction with a doxology. God blesses Christ, the Messiah forever.

7. *Why does Paul write so passionately about the Jews?*

Word among us

Twenty-five years ago, racial tensions were at a heightened level in a community located in the Deep South. Local Christian and Jewish religious leaders decided to meet, dialogue, and find common ground. At their first meeting, the group discovered how little they knew about each other's beliefs. They made a commitment to visit each other's house of worship.

By the second and third meetings, they were reading from scripture held in common—especially the prophets. Their favorite verse was found in the prophet Micah, "...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"(Micah 6:8 NRSV)

From those dialogues, the group found common ground and decided to address hunger in their community.

1. *What do you know about Jewish beliefs?*
2. *Have you ever attended a Jewish synagogue?*
3. *What questions do you have about Judaism?*

Because the Apostle Paul grew up as a Jew, he was familiar with the teachings and traditions of Judaism in the first century. And yet, he followed Jesus Christ and invested his life in preaching the gospel message to Gentiles. Paul openly wrote of his struggle to reconcile his Jewish heritage and the Jews rejection of Jesus. He offered his deep-felt lament and did not rush to answer his own questions.

In the opening verses in Romans 9, Paul raises challenging questions. It is worth reading Romans 9-11 in its entirety to see how Paul answers his own questions. In these chapters, Paul also addresses the Gentiles who are boastful over the Jews.

4. *How do you think God responds to Jews—those of the first covenant?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

The Old Testament describes God adopting the Israelites and giving them the law of Moses. This adoption by God was sealed with the glory of the covenant. Through the stories of the Old Testament, we learn about God and God's own chosen people. "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." (Romans 9:4-5 NRSV)

Amen! God chose the Israelites to be a blessing to others. Through this chosen people, God blessed humanity with Christ and acted in a new way—a way which extends the possibility of adoption to all.

5. *What questions and/or lament would you like to ask of God?*
6. *What allows Paul to end his question with doxology—a praise of God?*

Prayer

God of all, be present and hear our struggles and our questions. Amen.

last word

Take time this week to offer a lament to God—
yours or on behalf of others.

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