

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 95
Romans 9-16

Key Concepts: The key concept in Paul's letter to the church in Rome is that Jesus the messiah has completed the work of God, begun in Abraham and continued in the people of Israel; that is bringing about the restoration of humanity and blessing the world, by defeating the powers of sin and death.

Background: Paul's letter addresses a particularly difficult time in Jewish-Christian/Gentile Christian relationships. In the late 40s CE the Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome. It is likely that the Gentile Christians saw this as a repudiation of Judaism and God's covenant with them. Paul's letter however aims to show that this is not so and that the Good News of Jesus is intended first for the Jews and then the Gentiles.

Brief Summary: God's Plan and God's Promises (9:1-11:36) Paul opens this next section of his letter by describing his sorrow over Israel not accepting Jesus as messiah. At the same time he makes it clear that to Israel still belongs the "...sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship and the promises." Nonetheless, Paul reminds us that being genetically Jewish was never a guarantee of being part of the renewed people of God (this is the OT concept of a Remnant). Being part of the people of God is contingent on two things. First a person has to be called and chosen by God; this is God's doing whenever and wherever God so chooses. Second a person must accept their place through faith. Simply following rules is not adequate. Paul emphasizes that what is required is a willingness to confess that Jesus is Lord and to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. God, Paul claims will make both steps available (calling and profession) for both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul then asks the central question about God's relationship with Jews who have rejected the call to believe; has God rejected God's people. The very direct answer is, "By no means." Paul makes reference to Elijah, when the prophet thought he was the only faithful Israelite left, but God showed Elijah that there was still a faithful remnant. The inference is that through God's grace, God has chosen a remnant of Jews who will be brought into the new people of God. Paul then warns the Gentile Christians that they have been grafted into the people of God (the people of Israel) and should therefore live with great humility. Finally Paul adds that God plans to have mercy on all.

Practical Application (12:1-16:27) Paul now moves to applying to the Roman church the great story of God's faithfulness. He begins by calling on the Roman Christians to offer their bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" in order that they not be "conformed to this world" but be transformed by the Spirit's renewing of their minds. This means living humbly, sharing one's gifts with the church, letting love be genuine, hating evil, holding fast to the good, living peacefully with all and caring for one's enemies. Christians are to be subject to the government (which is instituted by God) and follow the Ten Commandments. In essence, believers are to conduct themselves as did Jesus.

The Apostle continues by reminding people that though they are free in many ways, they are to be conscious of the impact of their actions on other believers. They are also not to pass judgment on other believers who see the world differently. Instead they are to help bear the burdens of their fellow believers. The letter is completed with some personal notes; why Paul has not made it to Rome, where he is headed next and greetings to a considerable number of people; both men and women.

1. What do you think of Paul's statement that God has not forgotten Israel?
2. How do Paul's words about humility impact your understanding of how you are to live?
3. Which of Paul's ethical commands seems most difficult for you to adhere to?