

KINGDOM.

LESSON 34

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God’s kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> ISAIAH 5 - 8
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Isaiah 5, 6, 7 and 8). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSE IN ROMANS]</i> (14) ROMANS 10:12
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Review two by two.

(14) Romans 10:12. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) <i>[THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS]</i> ROMANS 9:1-33
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Introduce. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study Romans 9:1-33 together.

In Romans 1:16-17 Paul stated that “the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (non-Jew)”. However, the fact that the Jews had a position of priority (cf. Matthew 10:5-6) does not seem to be justified by the subsequent history. Instead of the justification by faith of a large number of people in Israel, there was rather large-scale unbelief and apostasy on the part of Israel (cf. Hebrews 4:2,6).

Therefore, in Romans chapters 9 to 11, Paul describes the worldwide design of God in reference to Jews and Gentiles. He shows how God’s diverse dealings with the Jews and the Gentiles react upon each other and interact with one another for the promotion of God’s plan of salvation for both.

God chose a nation on earth and gave to them certain privileges (Romans 9:1-5).

God chose a remnant (Romans 9:27,29; cf. Genesis 45:7; Isaiah 1:9; 4:2-3;10:20-21; 46:3-4; Jeremiah 50:20) out of this nation to whom he gave salvation. God is sovereign and saves whom he wants (Romans 9:6-16) and hardens whom he wants (Romans 9:17-18). The sovereign God has complete disposal over his creatures (Romans 9:19-21). He shows much patience (Romans 9:22-24). But he effectively calls only those he wants to save (Romans 9:25-29)(Romans 9:6-29; cf. John 17:2,6).

God chose Jesus Christ to be the Rock (Saviour) on which he builds his new community (his people, the Church) (Romans 9:30-33; cf. 1 Peter 1:20) or to be the Stumbling block over which unbelievers keep falling (Luke 2:34; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

STEP 1. READ.	GOD’S WORD
LET US READ Romans 9:1-33 together.	
Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART?	
Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook.	
Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

9:1-5

Discovery 1. A description of Israel's privileges.

The privileges of the natural nation of Israel were the following. God had set them apart to know him, to serve him and to make him known (cf. Acts 13:16-23; Ephesians 2:11-13).

"The adoption of sons" is a term referring to Israel as God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1), which means that Israel was *the beginning of God's people* on earth, but not the only people belonging to God's people on earth (Ephesians 2:11-13; 3:2-6).

"The divine glory" is a reference to God's manifestation to them and God's presence with them in the past history – the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). God's glory is the radiance of his divine characteristics (like his presence, his power, his justice, etc.) (cf. 2 Chronicles 7:1-3).

"The covenants" in the plural is a reference to God's one covenant of grace, which he made with Abraham, and thereafter reaffirmed again and again during the Old Testament period (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17-18; Exodus 6:1-7; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. promises in Galatians 3:16).

"The receiving of the law" is a reference to the laws, which Moses received (cf. Galatians 3:16-19).

"The temple worship" is a reference to the worship of the living God in the tabernacle and temple during the Old Testament period (cf. Hebrews 9:6-10).

"The promises" is a reference to the many promises in the Old Testament revelation, for example, they would become an uncountable large nation (Genesis 15:6; cf. 1 Kings 4:20). They would possess a great land (Genesis 15:18; cf. 1 Kings 4:21). The barren women will receive children (Genesis 18:10,14). With the help of God, they would do impossible things (Psalm 18:29).

"The patriarchs" is a reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They had passed on from generation to generation the words and deeds of the LORD long before the laws were given to Moses (cf. Galatians 3:16-17). They are the beginning of God's covenant people on earth.

"The Christ according to the flesh" means Christ according to his human ancestry (cf. Luke 3:23,37; Romans 1:3). This is a reference to the many promises concerning the coming Messiah. These promises had not been given to any other natural nation on earth! And these promises were only fulfilled within the natural nation of Israel (John 4:22). Only with respect to his human nature is Christ a descendant of the natural nation of Israel (Galatians 4:4). With respect to his divine nature, Christ does not belong to the natural nation of Israel. Jesus Christ is much more than just "the flesh". Jesus Christ is God who took on the human nature in creation and in human history (cf. Philippians 2:5-11) in order that we human beings may become children of God and be transformed more and more into the likeness of God (cf. Philippians 3:8-21).

9:6-13

Discovery 2. A vindication of God's faithfulness.

"God's word" (that is, God's covenant promise) has not expired. The unbelief of the natural nation of Israel and their consequent rejection by God does not mean that God's covenant promise has failed! God did not make his covenant promise with everyone, but with those he chose by grace.

(1) God acts faithfully according to his promise (Romans 9:6-9).

The words "Israel" and "seed" (descendants or children) are used in both a more general sense and in a more exclusive sense. The more exclusive sense is determined by God's promise.

God does not regard all the people that belong to the natural nation of Israel as belonging to the genuine Israel.

The natural nation of Israel consisted mainly of Jews, the twelve tribes that descended from the twelve sons of Jacob. But certain non-Jews joined the natural nation of Israel. For example, certain Canaanites (the Gibeonites, Joshua 9, and the Moabite Ruth). Also aliens from non-Jewish nations who began to believe in the God of the Bible (the LORD, Isaiah 56:1-8) joined the natural nation of Israel. The natural nation of "Israel" included unbelievers and is not the same as the spiritual nation "Israel" that only consisted of believers in the God of the Bible, whether they were believing Jews or believing non-Jews.

"Children of the flesh" are the natural children of Abraham. God does not regard the natural children as children of God. God reckons "the children of the promise" as children of God. God made a promise to Abraham and Sarah and it concerned their son Isaac. God did not make a promise with Abraham and Hagar and so it did not concern their son Ishmael. God's promise concerns only individuals in whom his promise is also realised (becomes a reality).

Conclusion I. People do not become the children of God by birth or natural descent. They become the children of God only through God's sovereign promise!

(2) God acts faithfully according to the purpose of his election (Romans 9:10-13).

On the one hand, the words “Jacob” and “Esau” are used in a more inclusive sense and on the other hand they are used in a more limited sense. The more limited sense is determined by the words “God’s purpose according to election” (Romans 9:11), “God’s call” (Romans 9:12) and “God’s love” (Romans 9:13).

Conclusion II. People do not become the children of God by human works (not by religious works of the law and also not good works of people). They become the children of God only through God’s sovereign election, God’s sovereign call (which is always effective) and God’s sovereign love!

9:14-18

Discovery 3. A vindication of God’s righteousness (justice).

(1) God is sovereign and thus free to give grace to whomever he wants (Romans 9:14-16).

We can only speak of “justice” or “fairness” when someone has a right or can make a just claim. Paul defends God’s justice or fairness (in particular that God saves whomever he wants) with the argument that no one on earth has the right that God should save him. No one possesses an entitlement on salvation!

For example. If God regarded all people on earth as born in complete innocence, they would stand on the zero line between good and evil at the beginning of their lives. Then they would be able to determine themselves whether they move in the direction of good (salvation) or whether they move in the direction of evil (condemnation). Then God would be completely arbitrary and unjust if he chose some of the people on earth for salvation and not the others! Then they could claim that God was unjust.

However, because all people stand far below the zero line between good and evil, no one has the right or free choice or ability to choose between salvation and damnation! All people have already been born with a sinful nature (Romans 5:12; Psalm 51:5; Job 14:4). All people have sinned and fall short of God’s holy and righteous demands (Romans 3:23). God regards all people as “sinners” (people who miss God’s goal), “ungodly” and “enemies” (Romans 5:6,8,10). All people have already fallen in sin together with the whole human race (Romans 5:17-19). All people are already lost, condemned and subject to God’s wrath (Romans 1:18; cf. John 3:16,18,36). Therefore, if God would condemn all the people on earth and not save one single person, he would still be completely and perfectly (100%) holy and just!

The fact that God nevertheless saves an uncountable great number of godless and unrighteous people on earth is because God’s love for lost people far exceeds his justice! “God’s mercy triumphs over God’s judgement” (James 2:13)!

We can only speak of “grace” when no one can make a rightful claim. Grace or mercy is God’s free gift, which no man deserves! God says that he will have mercy and compassion on whomever he has mercy or compassion (Romans 9:18). The fact that God has mercy and shows grace to an uncountable great number of people who do not deserve it (Revelation 5:9; 7:9), is a sheer wonder of his love!

Conclusion III. People do not become the children of God by their own desire, free will or effort. They become the children of God only through God’s sovereign grace (mercy, compassion)!

(2) God is sovereign and thus free to harden whomever he wants. (Romans 9:17-18).

Human guilt and hardening. In Exodus 3:18 Moses had to tell Pharaoh to let God’s firstborn son, Israel, go. Pharaoh completely freely refused to comply. This proves the responsibility of Pharaoh. That is why God would kill (in the tenth plague) the firstborn son of Pharaoh.

In Exodus 3:19 God says at Horeb, “I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand (that is, by means of ten plagues) compels him. This proves the omniscience of God. God says this before it happens so that Moses would not become despondent.

And in Exodus 4:21 God says that the miracles that were originally meant for Israel (Exodus 4:4-5 8-9), were now also meant for Pharaoh. “I will harden (Hebrew: Pi. chizeq, literally: strengthen, make obstinate, make stubborn) his heart”, so that he will not let the people go.” This proves the absolute sovereign freedom of God. What God knows beforehand, he causes to happen - but God’s sovereign knowledge and sovereign act does not exclude Pharaoh’s responsibility. God already knows the end of the struggle and carries everything to its end (including the hardening of Pharaoh). It is not only foreknowledge, but also predestination (cf. Isaiah 14:24,27). That is why God says in Exodus 9:16 with regard to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for this very purpose that I might show you my power and that my Name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

On the one hand God’s hardening means that God is withholding his grace. “But to this day the LORD has not given you (Israel) a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear (the miraculous signs and great wonders the LORD did in Egypt)” (Deuteronomium 29:3-4).

On the other hand God’s hardening means God is punishing the resistance (hardening) of man. “A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6:7-8). The hardening about which the Bible speaks is a legal or judicial concept. The person who

hardens his heart always deserves this punishment! For example: Because the Gentiles deliberately suppress or change the truth (of God's revelation) (Romans 1:18,25), God has given them over to a life of sexual immorality, a depraved mind and every kind of wickedness (Romans 1:24,26,28). The Gentiles have continually hardened their hearts against the God of the Bible and therefore God has finally given them over to a hardened heart! Whoever hardens himself continually, eventually becomes hardened.

We may therefore not define "divine hardening" apart from "human responsibility or guilt" (Exodus 4:21-23)! Because Pharaoh persisted to harden his heart against God and his warnings, his heart remained hardened. In this way God used Pharaoh to spread his name across the whole earth.

The divine will and hardening. From a legal (judicial) point of view all people deserve to be hardened, because they have all sinned. The fact that God nevertheless has mercy on an uncountable number of people and does not harden them (that is, does not withhold his grace from them) shows God's sovereign freedom.

Thus: certain people do not become children of God because of two reasons:

- On God's legal (judicial) level, all people have sinned and deserve to be hardened. If God would justify people without punishment, he would no longer be righteous (just). And even if God would not justify a single person, he would remain perfectly righteous (just)! On the legal level God must punish sin.
- On God's sovereign level, he has the right to justify some people and not justify other people. God has the right and sovereign freedom to grant or to withhold his grace (mercy)!

Conclusion IV. People do not become the children of God by their own will, choice or decision. They become the children of God only through God's sovereign and all-determining will!

9:19-26

Discovery 4. The vindication of God's sovereignty.

God's sovereign will and determination does not relieve people of their personal responsibility and blame.

(1) God's sovereign will is an ultimate thing (a root cause) (Romans 9:19).

The ultimate things are things with limits far beyond man, things that are unchangeable and things upon which man can have no influence at all. Man must submit himself to these ultimate things. For example:

God's sovereign work in the creation determines who people are, when they live in history and where they live on the earth (Acts 17:24-27).

God's sovereign rule over heaven and earth brings through Jesus Christ all things together under one Head and works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:10-11; 1 Corinthians 15:25)

God's sovereign judgement of the world will judge all the unrighteousness of people with perfect justice (Romans 3:6; Luke 12:47-48).

God's sovereign will or purpose according to his sovereign election determines to whom he shows mercy and from whom he withholds his mercy (Romans 8:28-30; 9:6-26).

God's sovereign thoughts (plans, purposes, devises) (Hebrew: machshebah) for people, events and circumstances determine his sovereign ways (Hebrew: derek) of doing things (Isaiah 55:9).

Every time we are confronted with ultimate things we should submit ourselves to them. Then we will be content with God's will, purpose or plan. Then we will not doubt his ways or question his decisions. God's sovereign and all-determining will is an ultimate thing. Who are we that we should doubt his way or question his decisions? We should rather keep quiet and show deep respect before God's sovereign majesty! Of course, we may ask God to give us insight into his plan (will). We may also speak with enthusiasm about his plan (Romans 11:33-36).

(2) God's sovereign will deals with the real world of fallen man (Romans 9:20-23).

The Bible speaks about God's sovereign rule, not over ideal (perfect) people, but over sinners! Man is as clay in God's hand, has already fallen, is already depraved and completely lost. The Potter has the right to make anything out of that hump of clay.

While we can say that "the objects of God's wrath" are the cause of their own destruction (they deserve it) (Romans 9:22), we cannot say that "the objects of God's mercy" are the cause of their own salvation (that is, that they deserved it or earned it)! God himself is the only One who in a sovereign way has planned their future glory in advance (even before the creation of the world) and has revealed that future glory in time (Romans 9:23).

There is continuity between the present and future life of "the objects of God's wrath". There is an exact correspondence between what they are in this present life and the perdition to which they are consigned. There is no release from their human responsibility or their personal guilt. The wages of their guilt is perdition (cf. Romans 6:23a).

There is also continuity between the present and future life of “the objects of God’s mercy”. There is a correspondence between the process of grace that operates in this present life and the glory that is ultimately achieved in the life to come (Romans 8:29-30)!

Conclusion. All people on earth are vessels that either display God’s judgement (Romans 9:17,22) or God’s mercy (Romans 9:23)!

(3) God’s sovereignty determines his call of the non-Jews (Romans 9:24-26).

God calls people from both the Jews and the non-Jews. God has been faithful to his covenant promise. This is first manifested in the objects of his mercy (that is, the elect) among the Jews (Romans 9:24a; cf. 9:6). This is secondly manifested in the objects of his mercy (that is, the elect) among the non-Jews (Gentiles) (Romans 9:24b; cf. 8:33; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9). It is very important that God’s covenant promise and grace reaches much further than the Jews. God’s covenant promise and grace reaches every tribe and language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9; 1 Peter 2:9-10)! God’s covenant promise finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, in whom all the families on earth are blessed (Genesis 12:3)!

- “I will surely bless you and make your descendants (Hebrew: zera, seed, here: the believers from all nations) as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.
- Your descendants (Hebrew: zera, here: the people of Israel) who will take possession of the land of Canaan) will take possession of the cities of their enemies.
- And through your offspring (Hebrew: zera; Greek: sperma, here: Jesus Christ) all nations (Hebrew: goi, Gentiles) will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3; 22:17-18)!

God’s call to the non-Jews during the Old Testament period. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah said, “Let no alien who has bound himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely exclude me from his people;’... “My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations. The Sovereign LORD declares – he who gathers the exiles of Israel: ‘I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered’ ” (cf. Isaiah 56:3-8) (740-680 B.C.). God promises to gather others to his people.

Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 (754-714 B.C.) refer to the Jews, who were “Not my people” (Hebrew: Lo Ammi) and “Not Loved” (Hebrew: Lo-Ruhamah) during the period of the godless and wicked kings of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Nevertheless, God promised to again show mercy to Jews in the future. This was fulfilled at the return of the Jews from exile from Babylon (538 B.C.) (cf. Isaiah 43:5-7) and at the later outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jews in Jerusalem during Pentecost (Acts 2:5-11) (30 A.D.) and still later during the proclamation of the gospel to all nations (cf. Romans 11:4-5) (Spring 57 A.D.).

God’s call to Gentiles during the New Testament period. In the letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul applies this principle to the non-Jewish people (Gentiles). The initial rejection and later restoration of the nation of Israel has its parallel in the initial exclusion of the non-Jewish nations from the privileges of Israel and their later inclusion into being God’s people on equal terms with the believers among the Jews (cf. Ephesians 2:1-22; 3:1-6)!

All people from among the Jews and the non-Jews, who believe in Jesus Christ, form together the true or spiritual Israel (Romans 9:6; cf. Galatians 6:14-16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10). The emphasis is on God’s sovereign call to people to share in his grace. It is pure grace that people, who were previously not God’s people, may become God’s people (Romans 9:25-26; cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10)!

9:27-33

Discovery 5. The explanation of who is “the remnant”.

(1) The prophecies of the Old Testament clearly speak of a “remnant” of Israel (Romans 9:27-29) “survivors” (Isaiah 1:9).

Already during the Old Testament period, the number of Israelites was “uncountable” (1 Kings 3:8), “as the dust of the earth” (Genesis 13:16; 2 Chronicles 1:9), “as the stars in the sky” (Genesis 15:5; Deuteronomy 10:22), and “as the sand on the seashore” (Genesis 22:17; 1 Kings 4:20).

Nevertheless, although Israel was that numerous, only the remnant of Israel would return to the Mighty God of Israel (that is, will be saved) (cf. Isaiah 10:22-23; cf. 1 Kings 19:18; Jeremiah 50:20; Joel 2:32; Micah 2:12). This sovereign differentiation between the natural people of Israel and the spiritual “remnant” of the people of Israel ensures that God is always faithful to his covenant promise to Israel. Although many Jews reject the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and thereby fall away from God’s covenant promise, there will always be Jews who believe in the Name of Jesus Christ and therefore will be saved. They are the “remnant” or “rest” (John 1:11-13). They are “the little flock to whom God the Father has been pleased to give the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

In the same way God has chosen many people from among the non-Jewish nations in the world (Romans 8:29-30,33).

His purpose in election that does not stand by human works, but by God who calls (Romans 9:11), already existed “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4), “before the beginning of time” (2 Timothy 1:9). In every generation (through the proclamation of the gospel) “there will be a remnant chosen by grace” (Romans 11:5). The significance of this remnant should never be underestimated, because without this remnant the natural nation of Israel would have perished like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:9) (Romans 9:27-29)!

(2) The prophecies of the Old Testament clearly warn against “stumbling” (Romans 9:30-33).

Righteousness received versus righteousness pursued. The righteousness that is imputed (ascribed) is the righteousness of God, which Jesus Christ earned, and can only be obtained by God’s grace and through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). This righteousness means that God ascribed the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the life of a person who believes in Jesus Christ. Only in this way God declares a believer completely (100%) righteous in his eyes and from that time onwards regards and treats him as completely (100%) righteous.

However, *the righteousness pursued* is the righteousness of religious people¹, who try to be justified in God’s eyes by their own religious worship and works. That is what the Jews and many other religions still try. They hope that God would declare them righteous on the basis of their own religious merits and accomplishments.

Warning and promise in the Old Testament. Already in the Old Testament revelation God warned people who tried to pursue their own righteousness and rejected God’s righteousness in Jesus Christ. To them the Coming Messiah would be “a Stone that would cause them to stumble and a Rock that makes them fall” (Isaiah 8:14). But the people who put their trust in him (and his righteousness) would never be put to shame (Isaiah 28:16; cf. Luke 2:34; Matthew 21:44; 1 Peter 2:6-8).

The relationship between God’s will and man’s will. On the one hand, the sovereign and determining will of God never excludes the responsibility of man to believe, to obey and to live a holy life! The sovereign will of God does not replace or override the will and actions of man. On the other hand, the so-called free will of man never determines the sovereign will of God (cf. Romans 8:5-8)!

Conclusion. The sovereign will of God includes the responsibility of man (to believe, obey and live holy) and guarantees that God’s sovereign will on earth will certainly be done (Matthew 6:10; Ephesians 1:4-14; 2 Timothy 1:9).

“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12-14).

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 9:1-33 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

9:4-9

Question 1. Does the Bible regard Israel in national or religious terms?

Notes. There are Jews and Christians today, who regard “Israel” exclusively in ethnic, racial and nationalistic terms. They believe that the nation of Israel is “the national people of God”. They also believe that God has a different plan of salvation for the physical and national people of Israel than for all the other nations in the world. However, a closer study of both the Old and New Testaments will show that all the writers in the Bible, not only used the term “Israel” to refer to the natural physical nation of Israel, but especially to refer to “the spiritual people of God”. They regarded their own people not primarily as a nationalistic entity, but as a religious entity!

(1) The view of the Old Testament prophets.

For the prophets “Israel” was the community (Church) of those who have the LORD as God. They regarded true Israel as being “the seven thousand whose knees have not bowed down to Baal” (1 Kings 19:18) or as “the survivors or the remnant whom the LORD has left for the natural nation of Israel” (Isaiah 1:9; 10:20-22; Hosea 1:10; Joel 2:32; Micah 2:12). While the majority of the nation of Israel would perish, only the remnant would be saved. God would fulfil his promises to Israel in this remnant. Therefore, the term “Israel” in the Old Testament is as elastic as the term “Church” in the New Testament.

¹ Jews, some Christians and Muslims, even all other religions in the world!

(2) The view of Jesus Christ.

Among the Israel of his day Jesus Christ clearly distinguished between Jews who would not inherit the kingdom of God and the Jews as well as Gentiles who would inherit the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11-12; 21:42-44). He distinguished between temporary disciples (who followed him on their own terms) and true disciples (who followed him on his terms) (John 6:60-66 and 8:30-47). And he spoke of Nathanael as “a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false” (John 1:47).

(3) The view of the New Testament apostles.

Paul makes this same distinction between *the physical nation of Israel and the spiritual nation of Israel*. He distinguishes the Jews who have been circumcised by men in their outward flesh from those who have been circumcised by the Holy Spirit in their inner hearts (Romans 2:28-29).

Likewise, in Romans 9:4-9a, he used the term “Israel” first in the more inclusive sense as the ethnic nation of Israel and then in the more restrictive sense as the elect remnant within the nation of Israel (Romans 9:6b). Not all the natural descendants of Abraham are regarded as children of Abraham, because God’s promise was made only to Isaac and not to Ishmael. But not even all the natural descendants of Isaac are regarded as children of the promise, because God’s promise was made to Jacob and not to Esau. Likewise not all the natural descendants of Jacob (the twelve tribes of Israel) are regarded as children of God (Romans 9:27), because not all of them believed (Romans 9:32; cf. Hebrews 3:18-19).

Paul even regards the Christians from the Gentile nations (in the churches in the province of Galatia) as “children of promise” and as “the Israel of God” (Galatians 4:28-29; 6:16), because they believed in Jesus Christ!

The apostles Peter, Matthew and John had the same view (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10; Matthew 8:11-12; 21:42-44; John 10:16).

(4) A comparison between expressions for God’s people in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

- God’s firstborn son (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Hebrews 12:23)
- God’s sons and daughters (Isaiah 43:6-7; 2 Corinthians 6:18)
- The city of Jerusalem (a symbol for God’s people) is called: a woman, or the bride, or the wife (Isaiah 54:1,11-12; Revelation 21:9-10)
- The twelve tribes (Genesis 49:28; ; James 1:1; Revelation 7:4; Revelation 21:12)
- A kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6)
- A holy people (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9)
- God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2:9)
- A God’s treasured possession (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6), “a people that are his very own/ of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:14). “a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9)
- God’s covenant people (Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16)
- A dispersed people, strangers (Deuteronomy 30:1; Psalm 105:10-12; Ezekiel 12:15; Esther 3:8; 1 Peter 1:1)
- The first fruits of his harvest (Jeremiah 2:3; James 1:18)
- Sheep (one flock) out of the sheep pen of Israel and the sheep pens of the other nations (Ezekiel ch. 34; John 10:16)
- Israel (1 Samuel 7:23; Galatians 6:14-16)
- Jews (Zechariah 8:22-23; Romans 2:28-29)
- Zion (also a symbol for God’s people)(Isaiah 51:16; Isaiah 52:7; Hebrews 12:22-24)
- The present Jerusalem (that is below) and the Jerusalem that is above (Galatians 4:25-26), the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22), the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2), the Holy Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10)
- Temple of God (also a symbol for God’s people) (2 Corinthians 6:16)
- Jewish and non-Jewish believers that are heirs together (of God’s people), members together of one Body, and sharers together in the promise n Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6; 2 Corinthians 1:20).
- Christians (anointed people)(Hebrew: meshichi; Greek: christoi) (Psalm 105:15) (Acts 11:26) (christianous) who live among the non-Christians in the world!

The Jews and non-Jews who believe in Jesus Christ form *one organism* that is symbolised by the following:

- one flock (John 10:16)
- one family with children of God (Galatians 3:26-29)
- one new man, one household of God, one dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-22)
- one Body (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 3:6)
- one olive tree (Jeremiah 11:16-17; Romans 11:17-24)
- one chosen people, one holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9-10).
- one New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-14, cf. Hebrews 12:22-24 for Jews and Galatians 4:21-31 for non-Jews).

THEREFORE

- God’s God’s Old Testament people (Israel) has not been terminated or replaced.

- but has been continued on a higher plane in which “the shadows” have become “the realities” (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 9:7-10)
- and has been enlarged (extended) to include believers in Christ from all the Gentile nations.
- Together they form on a complete equal footing the people of God (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6).

(5) The Church comes into being through the gospel and the Spirit of God.

- God called his Church to himself through the proclamation of the gospel during the Old Testament period (Romans 10:18-21; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 4:1-3) and during the New Testament period (Acts 20:24; cf. Acts 13:44-49).
- Believers from among the Jews and the Gentiles are baptised with one Spirit into one Body (also a symbol of God’s people). They were all given one Spirit to drink (cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27; 1 Corinthians 12:13)
- The believers gather together in one Church (church gathering) (Hebrew: qahal; Greek incl. LXX: ekklesia) (Psalm 107:32; Matthew 16:18; Acts 8:2; Acts 9:1) with a council of elders as leadership (Hebrew: moshab zekenim; Greek: presbuterion) (Psalm 107:32; 1 Timothy 4:14).

“The Church” in the New Testament is called “the Israel of God” (spiritual Israel) (Galatians 6:14-16; cf. Romans 9:6) in contrast to “the Israel according to the flesh” (natural Israel) (1 Corinthians 10:18 in the Greek text)(cf. Galatians 4:24-25). The Israel of God consists of believers who boast in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified for Christians and Christians to the world (Galatians 6:14; cf. Romans 2:28-29 and 1 Corinthians 1:22-26)! “Israel” in this sense is definitely limited to believers in Jesus Christ coming from Jews and non-Jews in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

While the natural Israel had become unfaithful to God and his Messiah (John 1:11), Spiritual Israel has never rejected God and his Christ (Romans 9:6)! Spiritual Israel remains for ever God’s covenant people. God has never rejected spiritual Israel, that is, the believers in Israel (Romans 11:1-6). Spiritual Israel or the Church remains for ever God’s chosen people (*Read* Romans 8:29-30,33; Romans 9:6-18; Romans 11:1-5,28-29; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; cf. John 6:44,37; John 17:3,12).

In spiritual Israel (in the worldwide Church, among Christians in the world) “there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. Because one and the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him” (Romans 10:12-13; 1 Corinthians 1:24; Galatians 3:28-29; Colossians 3:11). “He made no distinction between us (Jews) and them (Gentiles) for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9).

9:4-5

Question 2. How does the Bible regard the election of Israel?

Notes.

- (1) The election of Israel was an election of the whole natural nation of Israel.

The Old Testament speaks of “the election of Israel” as *the election of the whole natural nation*. It views the relationship of God to the people of Israel in a collective, inclusive and theocratic sense. For example, Deuteronomy 14:2 says, “You are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession” (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8; 10:15; Amos 3:2).

- (2) The election of the nation Israel was an election unto certain privileges.

Romans 9:4-5 teaches that God gave the natural nation Israel certain privileges. God had adopted them first in history as his children and gave them the covenant with Abraham and the law of Moses.

However, their “adoption as sons” does not mean that they are all saved. Galatians 3:23 to 4:7 explain the difference between Israel as “children underage” (Greek: népios) (Galatians 4:1) who stood under the protective guardianship of the law (Galatians 3:13-16) and Christians who “have been adopted by God as (mature) sons” (Greek: huiiothesia) (Galatians 4:5). Christians are all “sons of God” (Greek: huiioi theou) through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26). During the Old Testament period, the natural nation of Israel was regarded as children underage that stand under the guardianship of the law of Moses. As “a teacher or an educationalist (Greek: paidagógos) the law had to lead the Jews to Christ, so that they would be justified through faith in Jesus Christ (and not through keeping the law) (Galatians 3:24).

In contrast, the Jewish and non-Jewish Christians in the New Testament period are regarded as “mature sons who are led by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 8:14; Ephesians 1:5). The people of Israel were *the phase of preparation*, but the New Testament Church consisting of believers from among the Jews and the non-Jews is *the phase of fulfilment*.

The message of the letter to the Galatians is that that people (certainly non-Jews, but also Jews) become sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.:

- without any differentiation (Galatians 3:28)
- and without having to pass through the phase of preparation consisting of the guardianship of the law.

Moreover, Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:4-6 and 2 Corinthians 1:20 clearly teach that the exclusive privileges of the natural people of Israel continued only till the first coming of Jesus Christ. From the first coming of Jesus the believers from among the non-Jews (Gentiles) are heirs of all God's special privileges and promises in the Old Testament and the New Testament on complete equal footing (1 Peter 2:9-10; 2 Corinthians 1:20)!

- (3) The election of the nation Israel
was not an election unto salvation.

In Romans 9:6-9, Paul teaches that not all Jews belonging to the natural nation of Israel become children of God, that is, are being saved. In Romans 9:6, Paul says, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." He intends to say that not all who descend from physical nation of Israel belong to spiritual nation of Israel! God has elected the whole natural nation of Israel to enjoy certain privileges, but he has only elected a part of the natural nation of Israel unto salvation.

Throughout God's history of salvation, "God's purpose in election" (Romans 9:11) was the determining principle:

- God made a covenant with Abraham, but the covenant promise did not take effect in all Abraham's natural descendants. For example, he chose the individual Isaac and not the individual Ishmael.
- God repeated his covenant promise to Isaac, but this promise did not take effect in all Isaac's natural descendants. For example, he chose the individual Jacob and not the individual Esau.
- God then repeated his covenant promise to Jacob, but the covenant promise did not take effect in all Jacob's natural descendants. For example, Isaiah 10:20-22 and Romans 9:27 say that although the number of the descendants of Jacob be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.

9:10-13

Question 3. Does Paul understand "God's purpose according to election" in terms of a specific goal for collective nations or in terms of salvation for individuals?

Notes. Paul clearly refers to God's election of individuals for salvation and not to the election of a nation as a whole.

- (1) God's purpose according to election
is God's determinate will expressed in his election unto salvation.

In the New Testament, the term "election" (Greek: eklogé) in all its forms refers unmistakably to "election unto salvation". For example, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 says, "From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through believe in the truth." Whenever the term "purpose" (Greek: prothesis, purpose, will, decision, plan) is used of God, it uniformly denotes the determinate will of God (Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9)! Thus the whole expression "God's purpose according to election" means nothing less than the determinate will of God expressed in election unto salvation!

- (2) God's purpose according to election
affected God's love for the individual Jacob.

In Romans 9:12-13, God says, "The greater (in position) (or: the older in age) (Greek: meizón) will serve the lesser (or younger in age) (Greek: elassos)" and "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated". These are quotations from Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2-5. In the Old Testament these quotations clearly refer to the *nations* of Israel (descendants of Jacob) and Edom (descendants of Esau).

However, in Romans 9 they cannot refer to nations, but must refer to *individuals*. If they referred to "nations", then they could not explain the unbelief and apostasy of so many people in the nation of Israel! Then they could not explain the difference between the two words "Israel" in Romans 9:6. And then the notion that the whole natural nation of Israel is elected for salvation would contradict Romans 9:27 and 29, which say that only a remnant of Israel would be saved!

Because God's revelation of his plan of salvation for individuals was not yet completed during the Old Testament period, these Old Testament quotations in their Old Testament context do not reveal God's criterion for who should be regarded as children of God as in the New Testament context. The New Testament revelation clearly states that not all who belong to the nation of Israel are elected to be saved. Likewise, the New Testament revelation clearly states that not all who belong to the nation of Edom are rejected to go lost (Revelation 5:9).

Finally, the tense of the verbs "to love" and "to hate" (aorist, active) point to a *one time action* towards the individuals Jacob and Esau and not to continuous or repeated actions in history towards the nations of Israel and Edom.

The fact that many Jews within the nation of Israel did not believe in Jesus Christ, does not mean that God's covenant promise to Israel had failed. Throughout history God never made his covenant promise to every individual in the nation of Israel. His covenant promise is realised in those Jews who God has elected by grace, as for example, Isaac and Jacob.

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from Romans 9:1-33.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from Romans 9:1-33.

- 9:1. Always speak the truth and let your conscience under the control of the Holy Spirit confirm that.
9:2. Be concerned about the salvation of the people of your own nation and of the people of other nations (Matthew 28:19).
9:8. Never depend on your ancestry for salvation. You become a child of God only through God's grace and your faith in what God in Christ has done for you.
9:11-13. Never depend on your works for salvation. You become a child of God only through God's election, call and love.
9:14-15. Never accuse God of being unjust, because he has the right to save whomever he wants out of all the people that are already lost. He saves an uncountable great number of people, but they are all saved by grace and not because they deserve it.
9:16. Never depend on your own desire (free will) or effort for salvation. You become a child of God only through God's mercy.
9:17. Realise that God uses every single person in history to accomplish his eternal plan (Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 45:7).
9:33. Remember the warning: you either stumble over Jesus Christ or he becomes the Rock of your foundation. (Luke 2:34).

2. Examples of personal applications from Romans 9:1-33.

I rejoice in the fact that God has drawn me personally to Christ (John 6:44-45) and that Jesus Christ will never reject me (John 6:37; cf. John 17:2,6)! The fact that I now belong to Jesus Christ, is a deep assurance that God has chosen me, called me and loves me.

As "an object or vessel of God's mercy" (Romans 9:23-24) God has first loved me (1 John 4:19) in the sense that he chose me beforehand and prepared me for his glory. That is why I want to continue the realisation that God has created me for his glory (Isaiah 43:7; Matthew 5:16; 6:13).

STEP 5. PRAY.

RESPONSE

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in Romans 9:1-33. Prepare the parable of "the rich fool" in Luke 12:13-21 and the parable of "the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus" in Luke 16:19-31. Make use of the six guidelines for interpreting parables. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5

PRAYER (8 minutes)

[INTERCESSION]
PRAY FOR OTHERS

Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6

PREPARATION (2 minutes)

[ASSIGNMENT]
FOR NEXT LESSON

(*Group leader.* Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study Romans 9:1-33 with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Isaiah 9, 10, 11, 40 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. (15) Romans 10:17. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Teaching. Prepare the parable of "the rich fool" in Luke 12:13-21 and the parable of "the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus" in Luke 16:19-31. Make use of the six guidelines for interpreting parables.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.