

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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RIGHTLY INTERPRETING ROMANS

Many professing Christians are obsessed and dominated with the idea that God turned his back upon the people of Israel, thrust them aside, and had no further interest in them after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This is to a certain degree the way they think it should be, so that is the way it is according to their feelings about it. Therefore, they are shocked to find someone believing that God inspired Paul to write an exceedingly important letter to the 100,000 Jews that lived in Rome.

If they were more familiar with their Bibles this would not seem strange at all. Before Paul wrote, James addressed an epistle to "**the twelve tribes in the dispersion**" (**James 1:1**). From this it is plain that this letter was solely and exclusively for the descendants of Israel, outside the land, in the dispersion.

Peter addresses his epistle to "**the expatriates of the dispersion**"; however, these Jews are spoken of as being believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The second epistle of Peter is addressed to the same company (2 Pet. 3:1).

The document called "Hebrews" was most certainly intended for the people of Israel. So why should it be thought strange that Paul should send a letter to the 100,000 Jews in Rome. In fact there are hundreds of questions, problems, and obscurities in Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, that will be cleared up at once if we recognize that all these oracles were written with the people of Israel in view.

Take for example Paul's words in 1 Cor. 10:1,2: "**Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.**" What possible explanation can be given these words if the descendants of Israel are not in view? Furthermore, how can we explain Romans 4: 1 unless we recognize that the people spoken to were descendants of Abraham.

In view of these facts it can be seen that the right interpretation of everything declared in Romans is dependent upon recognizing the people to whom it was written and the administration (dispensation) of God that was in effect at that time. That it was written in the Acts period, all expositors are agreed, but in regard to the charismatic dispensation that prevailed at that time, most expositors disregard this. However, these things begin to stand out as soon as we begin to read this epistle.

In Romans 1:11 Paul declares that he longed to see these people so that he could impart unto them some spiritual gift, with the end in view that they should become established. And if we want to know what he meant by this, then we should turn back to Acts 8: 14-17 where the apostles which were at Jerusalem sent Peter and John down to Samaria to impart to these new believers a "spiritual gift," they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul has in mind. He would be a mediator of some special, spiritual gift to the Romans. All this was in complete harmony with the Acts period, but it has no place today when all mediators are ruled out except "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

The next truth we come upon, one which was true under the divine administration that prevailed in the Acts period, is that the gospel message was to the Jew first (Rom. 1:16). Paul had already declared this divine regulation in Pisidian Antioch when he said: "**It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you**" (Acts 13:46).

Restrictions and priorities such as this have no place in an administration of pure grace. If grace is God's favor shown to the undeserving, and it is, then there can be no priority that must be fulfilled before it can be offered. No nation or people can today claim any special privileges. The nations today are joint-bodies and they stand before God on the basis of absolute equality. There are no "most-favored nations" or "less-favored nations" in the acts of God today (See Issue No. **SB157**).

The dispensational character of Romans is seen in 3:1,2 where things are declared that are not true today. The Jew has no advantage under God's dispensation of grace, and he is not at any disadvantage except that which he brings upon himself by his prejudices against the man Christ Jesus. There is no profit today in circumcision; if so we would like to know what it is. Yet these things were positively true when Romans was written. Other things could be shown that set forth the character of the divine administration that prevailed when Romans was written, but the above is enough to show that it does not get its character from the present time of uncomplicated divine grace, God's method of dealing with mankind today.

The first word of the Roman letter gives the writer's name as a Roman citizen, Paul. The first apposition he gives to his name is "a slave of Jesus Christ," which if we

allow its full meaning tells us that he was purchased by Jesus Christ, is owned by Him, is wholly subject to Him, and has no will of His Own. He then declares that he is a named (**kletos**) apostle, and we can rest assured that whatever God names a man, that man is it. He then declares that as a slave who is now functioning as an apostle, he is separated for the gospel of God. Basically, the word gospel (**euangelion**) means a message, and we are told that this message was promised before through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, and that this message concerns His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

It should be noted that the name "Jesus Christ" is used four times in the first eight verses of Romans, but in none of these references does Paul relate these people to Jesus Christ as he does in the Corinthians and the Thessalonians. The Romans had not yet heard the gospel so they are neither credited with belief nor charged with unbelief.

It needs to be remembered that in the Acts period the heralding of the gospel was an official act performed by the deputies (apostles) of Jesus Christ. This is clearly seen in the words later spoken by Paul when he asked the four rhetorical questions: "**How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a herald? And how shall they herald except they be commissioned with authority (apostello).**"

All heralding in the Acts period was accompanied with divine enlightenment, the message heralded was confirmed with signs following, and it resulted in the hearers either being credited with belief or charged with unbelief. It was a serious matter indeed to have come under an official presentation of the gospel in the Acts period, as Hebrews 6:4-8 clearly shows. The Jews in Rome had not yet come under this responsibility.

In this portion we find the word **kletos** three times, translated "called" in each occurrence. Far too often this word is looked upon as setting forth a bidding or an invitation, as if God had said to Paul, "**Come, be My apostle!**" and Paul responded, resulting in him being a called apostle; or that He had said to the Romans, "Come be My saints" and they responded favorably and thus were "called saints."

In 1:6 where *kletos* is used as a noun, Paul declares that their position under Jesus Christ was "among the nations" and thus designated as those who are to hear the gospel. So when we come to the ones addressed we read: "To all that be in Rome."

Thus it follows that this letter was intended for everyone who lived in that great world capital, or for a certain company that lived in that city. The first idea is impossible because of what is said later; the second is logical and is soon seen to be the truth.

He speaks to these as those beloved of God, a most fitting designation for the 100,000 Israelites who lived there. In this connection the following passages should be carefully read: Deut. 7:6-8; Isa. 43:4; Jer. 31:3; Hosea 11:1; Malachai 1:2.

He declares that they are "named saints," a designation that is used over and over in regard to the seed of Abraham. See Psalms 37:28; 50:5; 15:3; Acts 9:13. His desire for these saints is that: **"God our Father may graciously grant unto them the rich abundance of His undeserved favor."**

Paul then gives thanks unto God through Jesus Christ for all of them because their **"faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."** These words present a stumbling block to many, since they cannot see how a company of dispersed Israelites living in Rome could be credited with such faith. There is no doubt that Paul had these Israelites in mind when he declared before Agrippa: "Unto which promise our twelve tribes earnestly serving God night and day expect to attain" (Acts 26:7). In fact everyone (except Rahab) mentioned after Abraham in the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11 was an Israelite, and most of the terrible things which they overcame by faith were persecutions that happened to Israelites in the dispersion. The Jews in Rome were following in their train.

That there were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ among the Jews in Rome is true.. But it is also evident that these were not commissioned to herald the gospel to the Israelites dispersed among the nations. This was to be the work of Paul who had received "grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations" (Rom. 1:5). Paul was anxious to do this, but was hindered in doing it. He was quite ready to herald the gospel to the Jews in Rome. The suggestion may have been made that Paul, a mere provincial, who was born in Tarsus but was identified with insignificant Judea, was hesitant about bringing his message to Rome, the world's center of power, glory, and magnificence.

It could be that someone will say that all that has been said in this study is invalidated by Paul's words in Rom. 11:13 in which he says: **"For I speak to you Gentiles."** But if we look at this in the Greek we see at once the word **de** which is used over and over in the New Testament to mark a transition to something new, often spoken of as "*de* metabatic." This should read; **"Now to you the nations I say, inasmuch as I am the commissioned one of the nations, I will glorify my service."** Paul does speak to the Gentiles at this point, those Gentiles who had linked themselves to Israel in the hope of sharing the blessings that were the portion of that people. His words of warning are quite explicit.

When Paul finally arrived in Rome, about two years after writing this letter, he waited three days and then he called the foremost men among the Jews together. They

responded readily, their minds already prepared by the letter they had received. They appointed him a day, and this day was spent expounding and certifying the kingdom of God, also persuading them concerning Jesus. They heard the gospel.

However, it was on this day that the great administrative change was made official by Paul's pronouncement in Acts 28:28. Israel's priorities and privileges were suspended. From this time forth, as far as we know, Paul welcomed everyone who came to him, heralding to them the kingdom of God, and teaching them that which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ.

End Issue No. SB178