

H O U S E o f W I S D O M

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Vessels of Mercy

Recently, I watched a movie about the early years of Billy Graham, portraying his worldly attitude as a youth, his Christian parents, how he felt called to serve the Lord, and his struggle with traditional beliefs with which he was raised. I was reminded of being raised a Christian and how that when I made a personal commitment to serve the Lord (i.e. join the Church), I assumed that I correctly understood the relationships I was to have with God, His law (the Bible), my wife and others. Looking back to that time 26 years ago, I realize that about the only thing I had right was that God existed, and that I should be making an effort to live according to His ways.

I do not see myself as different from any other person who has begun their spiritual journey in this life, and the fact of how I, and everyone, carry the ways of world at the beginning of our walk with the Lord.

For this study, it would be helpful for the reader to become familiar with all of chapters 9, 10, 11 in Romans. The two points I will attempt to explain as I understand them, not necessarily in the same order, are:

1. The law, the Old Testament in the early church, the Christian Bible today.
2. God's purpose in raising the nation of Israel and how we are to relate to Israel today.

Scripture quoted will be from various Bible translations, with a different meaning of some words, taken from a Lexicon, in order to convey the best possible meaning in modern English. Words supplied for clarity are in (parenthesis); Alternate meanings for words of the original language, and sometimes corrections of entire phrases appear in [brackets]. Extra scripture references are to support certain statements.

Rom 9:1-8: *1. I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in [a] Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are (literal) Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the (temple) service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers (descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. 6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For (this reason) they are not all (spiritual) Israel who are of (literal) Israel, 7 nor are they all (spiritual) children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." (not Ishmael's seed - cp Gal 4:22-24) 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. (NKJV)*

It is important to recognize that Paul, in Romans 9, 10, 11, makes a distinction between literal and spiritual Israel. It would be helpful to mark these chapters - L=literal, S=spiritual Israel. A literal Jew is not necessarily a spiritual Jew, and both a non-Jew (a Gentile) or a Jew can become a spiritual Jew (Israelite).

Rom 2:28-29: *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.* Notice in verse 4 in the preceding paragraph, particularly that the giving of the covenants and the law, including the temple service, was given to literal Israel. We will come back to this point later in the study.

It would be safe to say that Jesus was both a spiritual and a literal Jew, and also the expected Messiah, though not accepted by most of Israel. **Rom 9:31-33:** *but Israel (L), pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a*

stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame (Isa 28:16)." Paul's heartfelt grief was because the majority of his fellow countrymen had rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

He continues, **Rom 10:1-4**: *1. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel (L) is, that they might be saved. 2. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge ⁽¹⁹²²⁾. 3. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. 4. For Christ is the end ⁽⁵⁰⁵⁶⁾ of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. The Greek word *epignosis* ⁽¹⁹²²⁾ indicates "full discernment, correct, precise knowledge." It has been established in another study that what Jesus nailed to the cross was not the actual law, but the Jew's interpretation of it (handwriting of ordinances, Col 2:14). They attempted to attain righteousness by doing as they understood, called by Paul works of law - 9:32. They did not understand the purpose or the Sonship of the Messiah, as Jesus is the *objective* ⁽⁵⁰⁵⁶⁾ (not the end - Gal 3:22-24; Mt 5:17-18) of the law. This lesson also applies to professed believers today. God's righteousness comes by means of Christ's faith (Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16), or his spiritual understanding of the law.*

The law: Gal 3:10-11: *10. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. 11. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith (Hab 2:4).*

The curse to which Paul refers is explained in **Dt 28:15**: *But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee*: The Hebrew word for "hearken" ⁽⁸⁰⁸⁵⁾ also carries the meaning of "to listen, understand and obey." So, when Paul refers to "works of the law," he is speaking of law-keeping without listening to the spirit of God as how to do it, because life is not in the law (Gal 3:21), it is in Christ (1 Jn 5:11). Does that mean that literal Israel is totally out of the picture now?

Rom 11:1-4: *1. I say then, Hath God cast away his people? [May it not be]. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. [Perceive you] not what the scripture saith of Elijah? how he makes intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3. Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and [torn down] thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Consider Paul's quote of 1 Kings 19:18 as a type. Why? Israel rejected Jesus in Paul's day, and he applies the number 7000 figuratively to the future conversion of the Jews, which is shown to be in the last generation (Rev 11:13). Paul went on to explain that there was a remnant of the Jews in his day (Rom 11:5), and that the fall of the Jews became the riches to the world and salvation to the Gentiles (Rom 11:11-12).*

What are the circumstances that cause literal Israel to finally accept Jesus as the Messiah? **Rom 11:25-27**: *25. For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel (L), until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. 26. And so all Israel (S) shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: 27. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.* Jacob's experience is used as an allegory. His name was changed after he wrestled with the Angel (Gen 32:24-28). It is the concept of the Son of God with which every Jew will have to wrestle and that will change their attitude and characters (name). Christ is in the fullness of the Father (Col 1:9) and we are to come into the fullness of Jesus (Eph 3:19; 4:13). Therefore, since God is love (1 Jn 4:8), then the fullness of the Gentiles is accomplished once they are filled with God's love. So the purpose of Israel is twofold - 1) to give the gospel to the world, which they have not done as yet; 2) As a type, especially in the last generation, to reveal the hidden things of God (Lk 8:9-10).

It is also significant to note that deliverance comes out of Zion. **Rev 14:1:** *And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.* The book of Revelation is about the development of God's character in the 144,000, and their message to the world will bring about a conversion of many literal Jews (referred to in Rev 11:13).

Rom 11:30-32: *30. For as ye (Gentiles) in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their (Israel's) unbelief: 31. Even so have these (Israel) also now not believed, that through your (Gentiles) mercy they also may obtain mercy. 32. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all (spiritual Israel).* When the fullness of the Gentiles is reached, God will use the 144,000 as vessels of mercy (Rom 9:23) to show literal Israel God's mercy by giving them understanding of the cross.

The covenants: **Rom 11:27:** *For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.* To understand what is being said here, requires us to understand the covenant to Israel. Hebrews chapter 8 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 regarding the covenant to take away their sins. The first/old covenant given was, what we refer to as the ten commandments (Dt 4:13). Added to this covenant (law) were the ceremonial services (Heb 9:1; Ex 34:27). This covenant was given to Israel - NOT the Gentiles. How do I know that this is true? **Heb 8:8-9:** *...Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: 9. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt...* It was Israel, not the Gentiles who were led out of Egypt. The Gentiles are being led out of "spiritual Egypt," a type for the world's way of thinking. The issue of law-keeping, being pushed by the Pharisees which believed (Acts 15:5), was brought before the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem. Peter referred to the law as a "yoke" which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear (Acts 15:10), and it was determined and agreed that the Gentiles did not need to keep the letter of the law (Acts 15:13-24).

The second/new covenant given to Israel: **Heb 8:10:** *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:* God will speak through the 144,000 to explain to the Jews, who have ears to hear, the spiritual understanding of the law and that He is not condemning them for their part in the cross - it is a figure of the human heart. THIS is how God will remove Israel's sins (cf Heb 8:12).

Are spiritual Jews required to keep the literal ten commandments? No - the letter will kill you, spiritually (2 Cor. 3:3-11). All the law was given to teach us how to love God and each other (Mt 22:36-40, Lk 10:25-28), and not what day of the week to attend church. **1 Cor 13:2:** *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.* (NKJV) All spiritual Israel is to keep the spirit of the law, which is love.

Then, what covenant are the nations (Gentiles) under? **Gal 3:13-14, 16-17:** *13. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law... 14. That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith . . . 16. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. 17. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.* When Abraham accepted the promise of God, he was uncircumcised, and faith was imputed to him (Rom 4:9-14). The law Abraham kept was spoken (Gen 26:5) and not written. While the law is a tool to bring a person to Christ (Gal 3:24), anyone can be saved if they follow the voice of God in their conscience: **Isa 55:3:** *Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-The sure mercies of David.* (NKJV) Praise God, His mercy endures forever (Ps 106:1). Amen.