
Paul's Grief for Israel

The truth I am speaking in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears witness to me in the Holy Spirit that my grief is great and my anguish is unceasing. For I pray to be cursed from Christ on behalf of my brothers according to the flesh. They are Israelites who have the sonship, the glory, the covenant, the law, spiritual service, and the promises; from whom are the fathers, and from them comes the Messiah according to the flesh, who is above all God blessed into the ages, Amen.

Lament Opening, 9:1-5

Like a dark blue patch of material sewn into the middle of an ornate tapestry, Paul's expression of deep pathos, 9:1-5, arrests the attention of his listeners.¹ Only moments before he rejoiced in Christ's love, 8:34, yet here sadness fills his soul. Despite this emotional shift, Paul writes in parallel form (vv. 1-2 concern Paul's veracity and his grief, and vv. 3-4 elaborate on the reason for his grief, his fellow Israelites).

1. "Pathos" here is not meant in the ancient rhetorical sense; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.4—though Paul likely was aware of this basic element needed in argument. For a stronger emphasis on Paul's use of pathos, see Keck, "Pathos in Romans?" 71-96; and Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory*, 234-38.

He expresses his relationship to Christ and the Spirit concerning the veracity and reason for his grief—the nation of Israel—and includes a list of God’s gifts to them, followed by a doxology.

- 1 *The truth I am speaking in Christ, I am not lying;
my conscience bears witness to me in the Holy Spirit*
- 2 *that my grief is great
and my anguish is unceasing.*
- 3 *For I pray to be cursed from Christ on behalf of my brothers according to the flesh.*
- 4 *They are Israelites who have the sonship, the glory, the covenant,
the law, spiritual service, and the promises;
from whom are the fathers,
and from them comes the Messiah according to the flesh,*
- 5 *who is above all God blessed into the ages, Amen.*

Similar to the Old Testament prophets, Paul writes as one who has received revelation—as an Israelite moved by God to intercede on behalf of his people.² Yet Paul’s experience seems different, for he communicates to his readers that he is “in” Christ, 9:1.

It is important to understand what is happening *to* Paul—he intercedes for his people as one brought into Christ’s perspective.

2. In Romans 9–11, Paul identifies with Moses (9:3; 9:15; 10:5), Isaiah (9:27), and Elijah (11:1–5). Lamenting for Israel is a common motif in the Old Testament and Judaism; Dunn, *Romans*, 524. What is significant is not so much that he relates to these men from a literary standpoint but that he has received direct revelation, too. Paul experiences God’s heart on behalf of Israel, a steadfast compassion. From this perspective he rightly perceives the experiences of the Old Testament prophets as they encountered revelation. This view lessens the significance that Paul expects his attitude to be modeled here as an appropriate expression of faith—see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975–79), 454—and it contrasts the idea that Paul seeks to personally defend a negative reputation with the Jews—for an “anti-Jewish” defense, see Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 556.

His midrashic arguments that follow, 9:6—11:32, build and depend upon the opening oath and prayer of lament, 9:1-5, leading to praise for God's infinite wisdom, 11:33-36. After exploring the possible meanings of Paul's phrases and key words in this lament section, 9:1-5, a brief discussion follows concerning the thematic continuity of "intercession" within Romans.

Intercessory Prayer, 9:1-5

Paul's overwhelming grief receives the focus of the first sentences (vv. 1-3).³ He describes his feeling as "unceasing" and that he "could pray to be cursed from Christ." The degree of sacrificial love begs the question as to the source of his grief. Paul either speaks in a less sincere rhetorical manner or he speaks with genuine emotion. After having just written in detail about the intimate expression of God's love on behalf of the believer, 8:1-39, it seems odd for Paul to suddenly shift from a neumenological perspective—God's perspective—concerning creation, redemption, and Christ's intercession, to a phenomenological one—his own. It makes more sense that Paul's words follow a natural progression from Christ and the Spirit's intercession for the believer (8:26-27, 34) to God's heart through Paul interceding for the nation of Israel. In this context, God receives glory (9:5) and Paul's willingness to intercede is made known—his words express his experience.

3. The "truth" refers to Paul's emotion in verse 2 rather than the "truth of the gospel." The absence of the article before ἀλήθειαν, the order of the words, and the content of the verse suggest that Paul is concerned about the truth of the statement he is about to make (in verse 2) rather than the 'truth of the gospel'; Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 451. The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ is to be taken with λέγω; *ibid.* The conjunction γάρ can be taken in a causal sense; Paul's emotion brings him to pray, or in an explanatory sense, Paul discloses the reason for his grief. The latter interpretation makes better sense. It is also interesting that of the four oath formulas in Paul's letters (Rom. 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; and 1 Tim. 2:7), only 9:1-2 includes all three phrases: "not lying," "in Christ," and "in the Holy Spirit."

Paul claims that he speaks as one “in” Christ and his conscience bears witness to him “in” the Holy Spirit, 9:1. The various interpretations for Paul’s “in” phrases fall into three general possibilities: Paul makes an oath (1) by calling upon Christ and the Spirit as his witnesses; (2) in the presence of Christ; or (3) in some form of union with Christ and the Spirit.⁴ Paul does employ an oath formula here—“The truth I am speaking . . . I am not lying . . .”—but to imply that he does so for argument’s sake discounts the action of God within Paul. In other words, if the emphasis is on his feelings and conscience, then Paul receives the respect for his great love on behalf of Israel rather than God, and something more is needed to harmonize the paradox of Paul speaking “in” Christ yet praying to be cursed “from” Christ.

Of the possible interpretations above, the connotation of “union” expresses more accurately the mutual nature of both Christ and the Spirit working within Paul. Paul’s use of the preposition in the “in Christ” phrase intends a spatial connotation.⁵ He does not stand

4. For the view that Paul makes an oath calling upon Christ and the Spirit as witnesses, see C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Hendrickson, 1991), 176; Black, *Romans*, 123; John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and the Thessalonians*, eds. Ross Mackenzie, David W. Torrance, and Thomas F. Torrance (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 242; and Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 543. For “in the presence of,” see Leon Morris, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 346; and Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 258. For some form of “union,” see Abasciano, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:1-9: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 92; Dunn, *Romans*, 523; and Murray, *Romans*, 2:3.
5. For the varied uses of ἐν, see BAGD, s.v., “ἐν.” Concerning the preposition “ἐν” with the dative to connote “agency,” very few clear examples occur in the New Testament, and when they do, they involve a perfect passive verb; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 373. If Paul has been brought “into” Christ for the purpose of revelation, then the preposition with the dative could refer to a spatial connotation. This does not mean that other grammatical possibilities are eliminated, such as association or instrumental emphases. The “in Christ” phrases in Paul are theologically difficult to explain; Murray Harris, “Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1976), 3:1192–93. A locative understanding does not violate grammatical rules, and since Paul’s oath formula stresses the veracity of what he says, this sense fits well his

outside of Christ, observing a vision in front of him, but speaks as one who has been brought into the perspective of Christ, a compassionate, sacrificial love for Israel that has its source in God.

Paul, then, is either brought into the perspective of Christ in the moment as he writes, or he presently feels deep emotions based on past revelation. It seems that Paul expresses an immediate emotive response that comes from a previous experience, such as his conversion. But Luke's record of Paul's Damascus event (Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-11; 26:13-19) describes him as standing outside of the person of Christ, seeing light and hearing the voice of the Lord. And on other revelatory occasions, Paul sees visions (Acts 9:12; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; or an angel, 27:23), and in each instance he looks "at" something. But in Romans 9:1-5, he writes as one "in" Christ, feeling deep compassion, and his mind is "in" the Holy Spirit. A closer look at Paul's use of the "in" phrases in his other letters gives helpful insight.

"In Christ"

Paul's "in Christ" phrase (Rom. 9:1) corresponds to what he describes to Corinthian believers where a man is taken to the third heaven and sees "surpassingly great revelations" (2 Cor. 12:7).⁶ But the man was

supernatural experience. In contrast, Constantine Campbell finds the instrumental and locative rendering insufficient for the "in Christ" and the "in the Holy Spirit" phrases, arguing for a nuance of cause as expressed in "under the control" of Christ and the Spirit; Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 95-96. He places this use in a subcategory referring to people's actions "in Christ" (Rom. 9:1, 5:17; 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Cor. 2:17, 12:19; and Phil. 3:3), but this subcategory can also mean kind and manner and close association. His final definition of "union" involves a spectrum of possibilities: union, participation, identification, and incorporation—each with its own semantic issues; *ibid.*, 101 and 412-14.

6. Such an experience would be a constant memory within his heart and mind. Paul's conversion experience on the way to Damascus and his heavenly experience (2 Cor. 12:1-4) are likely not the same event. The time frame and Paul's purposes are different. It is also interesting that Paul only uses the word "visions" (ὄπτασία) here in 2 Corinthians, but elsewhere he uses "revelation" (ἀποκαλύψις) in reference to Christ as the source of his gospel, not men (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 3:3). Luke uses ὄπτασία in reference to Paul's visions of angels and Paul's

not sure where he was located—whether inside his body or outside his body (2 Cor. 12:1–4):

I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven . . . and I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

The “in Christ” phrases in Romans 9 and 2 Corinthians 12 complement each other as they express the nature of God’s revelation within Paul. In the Letter to the Corinthians, Paul’s revelation “in Christ” gives meaning to what follows (12:19): “Do you think that we are defending ourselves to you? We speak before God *in Christ* for the purpose of building you up in all things, beloved.” Paul does not speak defensively or persuasively but genuinely as one who has

Damascus experience (Luke 1:22, Acts 24:23, and 26:19), but Paul only uses ὀπτασίαιν 2 Corinthians 12:1. For the doxological view of Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus see S. Kim’s work, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1981). Alan Segal makes the case for a mystical theophany in 2 Corinthians 12:1f—as Paul’s “spiritual body that is received by and finds residence in Christ . . . [an] ecstatic or paranormal experience rather than a physical transport”; Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 39. Segal’s emphasis gives appropriate respect to Paul’s experience, that Paul sees the face of Jesus and experiences heaven in Christ, revealing to him a “universal and hidden meaning to history”; *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 164–68, 172. Segal understands Paul’s transformation language of glorification and suffering to include a participatory element, though Paul does not suggest that his ecstatic experience is typical of all believers; *ibid.* For the view that Paul’s experience is related to Merkabah mysticism (e.g., Ezekiel’s vision of God’s throne room and the Enoch tradition and Paul’s expressions, “caught up,” “third heaven,” and “paradise”) see John Bowker, “Merkabah Visions and the Visions of Paul,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16, no. 2 (1971): 157–73; and B. Young, “The Ascension Motif of 2 Corinthians 12,” *Grace Theological Journal* 9 (1988): 73–103. Two other works are worth noting: Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), and James Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul’s Ascent to Paradise in Its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986).

been given the perspective of Christ.⁷ He speaks unselfishly with confidence, for “the truth of Christ is in him” (cf. 2 Cor. 11:10).

The use of “in Christ” phrases—and similar phrases such as “in the Lord” and “in him”—are, for the most part, distinctively Pauline.⁸ His revelatory experience gives him a bold confidence in writing about mysterious heavenly realities.⁹ This means that Paul not only has an understanding of the effective work of God *through* Christ but Paul also sees this work as taking place *in* the sphere of the person of Christ. Thus in Romans 9:1-2, Paul describes a spiritual “sphere,” a union with Christ causing an overwhelming compassion, a desire he intensely expresses to the reader concerning Israel.

“In” the Holy Spirit

Paul speaks the truth in Christ with his conscience “bearing witness” to him “in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ Amidst great emotion, Paul’s intellect

7. When Paul speaks “in Christ” along with those with him, it is God who has established them in Christ (2 Cor. 12:21). Campbell understands Christ as the cause and reason for Paul’s speaking, not self-defense; *Paul and Union*, 99. For a more rhetorical stance that Paul defends himself against questioning in the 2 Corinthians 12:21 context, see Henrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief: Kommentar* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder), 284.
8. Of Paul’s 153 “in” phrases, 73 are “in Christ,” 6 include the article (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ), 24 are “in him,” and 50 “in Lord” phrases. One phrase refers to “in the Lord” (Eph. 1:15) and one “in Jesus” phrase (Eph. 4:21). Paul uses the “in Christ” phrase in all of his letters except Titus and 2 Thessalonians. There are only a few other “in Christ” references in the New Testament; see 1 Peter 3:15, 5:10, and 5:14. Most of the uses of “in Christ” phrases emphasize what God has done through Christ or some participation or action of the believer(s) through Christ. But even so the use of the preposition “in” (ἐν) involves a spatial element. For example, Paul boasts “in Christ” and not himself (16:7; 1 Cor. 15:31; and Phil 1:26) and his proclamation is in Christ, before God (1 Cor. 3:1 and 2 Cor. 12:17, 19).
9. Paul’s apocalyptic view in this midrashic narrative is the Christ event; Munck, *Paul*, 192. Paul’s uses of the “in Christ” and “in him” phrases beg for an explanation of the source of his insight, such as, “For *in him* all the fullness of the Deity in bodily form dwells” (Col. 2:9); “For he chose us *in him* before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph. 1:4); “God raised us and seated us in the heavenly realms *in Christ Jesus*” (Eph. 2:6); “God the Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies *in Christ Jesus* (Eph 1:3); or “The peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and minds *in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:7).
10. Paul’s use of the word “conscience” (συνειδήσεως) refers to an internal guide in choosing right and wrong, much like its use today (see 2:15, 13:5; Acts 23:1, 24:16; 1 Cor. 8:7-12, 10:25-29; 2 Cor 1:12, 4:2, 5:11; 1 Tim. 1:5, 1:19, 3:9, 4:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; and Tit. 1:15). It is interesting

witnesses his heart's anguish. The unique combination in verse 1 of "bearing witness *with*" (the prefix *συν*) and the pronoun "to me" (*μοι*) and the pronoun "of me" (*μου*) seems redundant, but this repetition accurately reflects the intensity of what has happened within Paul.¹¹ More importantly, Paul's syntax and word choice show that his intellect is functioning well as the Spirit moves within him and his mind is brought into the Spirit.¹² Just as Paul's heart grieves because he has been given Christ's perspective, so also what follows in the discourse in Romans 9–11 comes from the revealed wisdom of God *by* the Holy Spirit.¹³ Thus, in Romans 9:1–2, Paul employs a rhetorical

that within the New Testament "bearing witness" (*συνμαρτυρέω*) and "conscience" only occur together in Romans 9:1 and 2:15, and the difference between these two verses is that in 9:1 another witness than his "conscience" is present with Paul as he speaks of his grief for Israel. Or the meaning could be that Paul's conscience bears witness "with" him in the Holy Spirit. Paul's use of *συνμαρτυρέω* in 2:15 and 8:16 may also signify the meaning "to testify." Some representative interpretations are as follows: "as my conscience bears witness to me in the Holy Spirit"—Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 543; "the testimony of Paul's conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit"—Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 453; "My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit"—Dunn, *Romans*, 523; "by the Holy Spirit"—Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 592. The text does not suggest that Paul is brought into Christ by the Spirit, though this is consistent with Pauline theology.

11. Although Paul appeals to his conscience as an independent witness (see William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1898], 227; Dunn, *Romans*, 523; conforming to the biblical rule of two or three witnesses—Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007], 558), it does not exclude the intensive force of the prefix *συν*-.
12. The word "conscience" (*συνειδήσεως*) has no Hebrew counterpart. It is always used in relation to the intellect; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 128. In addition, "Holy Spirit" cannot be linked adjectively with "conscience" without a repetition of the article after the noun; see Bosman, *Conscience in Philo and Paul: A Conceptual History of the Synoida Word Group* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 255.
13. Although most of the time an author intends a single meaning for a preposition, semantically speaking there is a little more flexibility in language. It seems more likely that an author emphasizes a primary meaning, such as a "locative," "agency," or "instrumental" sense, but this is not as clear cut and discernable with expressing abstract reality. The Greek case system for nouns allows for subtle imprecision that is held accountable by context. For explanation purposes, a *retired* professor made the statement that according to his wife there is a difference between him being "in" the house and "around" the house. Such subtleties are not so clear in the Greek case system. If indeed, Paul is brought into Christ's perspective, how much more would the preposition *ἐν* be interpreted as present "in" the Holy Spirit, and also what his mind experiences as "by" the Holy Spirit. The anarthrous expression *ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ* has various interpretations: Cranfield describes this as Paul's mind being "renewed and illumined by the

device, an oath formula, to affirm the genuine, continual sadness that he feels in behalf of Israel, and his use of the “in Christ” and “in the Holy Spirit” phrases describe the nature of God’s revelation “in” Paul.

Paul’s Prayer

After expressing his grief, Paul writes, “*For I pray to be cursed from Christ on behalf of my brothers according to the flesh,*” 9:3. Trying to make sense of Paul’s use of the imperfect tense of the verb “to pray” in verse 3 has resulted in two general possibilities: either Paul prays a prayer that has an impossible outcome—more of a wish—or he prays a prayer that God would not honor, similar to the prayer of Moses (Exod. 32:32).¹⁴

In the context of Exodus 32, Israel rejects God and makes offerings before the golden calf. Moses intercedes before the Lord on behalf of Israel and then speaks directly to the Israelites concerning their

Holy Spirit” (cf. 8:1-16); *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 453; instrumental force—Dunn, *Romans*, 523; “within” the realm of the Spirit—Kuss, *Der Römerbrief* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1957), 3:670; “by means of”—Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 556; and “under the control of the Holy Spirit”—Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 479.

14. The infinitive of εὔχομαι in the New Testament makes more sense as translated “to pray” rather than “to wish” (Acts 26:29; 2 Cor. 13:7 and 13:9; and James 5:16). For the argument that the verb εὔχομαι means “to wish,” see Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 417; Schreiner, *Romans*, 476. For a reference to prayer, see Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 454; Dunn, *Romans*, 524; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 558. What seems to be just as much of a concern as the meaning of the verb is its imperfect tense with respect to reconciling the emphasis of the “past” and the “type of action” that unfolds. This is theologically difficult to make sense of in light of an actual prayer to be cursed from Christ. The classical imperfect is sometimes argued in the sense of “unattainable”; see Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 455f. In addition, the Old Testament parallel to Moses is used to make sense of this imperfect tense. Paul’s content in Romans 9:3 is similar to Moses’ prayer in Exodus 32:32, but there are no verbal similarities. Stuhlmacher draws a direct parallel between the old covenant when Moses intercedes for the people of God and offers himself as an atonement for their apostasy (cf. Exod. 32:32) and the gospel when Paul intercedes for Israel; *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 145. Abasciano argues in detail for the shared intercessory nature of prayer of Moses and Paul based on intertextuality (see also 1 Cor. 10:7; 2 Cor. 3; Phil. 4:3); *Paul’s Use*, 65–146. What seems to be different in Paul’s situation is that unlike the Old Testament prophets who stood away from God’s throne and beheld his glory or heard his council (1 Kgs. 22; Isa. 6; Ezek. 3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18–22; 11:22–25; 43:2–5; 44:4; Jer. 4:19–21; 14:17–22, and Dan. 9), Paul is brought into Christ’s perspective.

egregious sin, seeking to make atonement on their behalf. He prays to God and asks for his forgiveness for them. If God does not show mercy, Moses would rather die than live (“remove me from your book that you have written”).¹⁵ God shows his mercy and reveals his glory to Moses—a theophany—a visual and audible experience (30:12-23). It is likely that Paul relates to Moses’s experience in some degree.

The imperfect tense often emphasizes a past event *and* its unfolding action. But the idea that Paul prays in the context of a “continuous” grieving in the past does not make sense in the present context of his letter. To further complicate the understanding of his prayer is that he refers to eternal damnation when he prays to be “cursed” from Christ on behalf of Israel.¹⁶ While this reveals the serious consequence for his fellow Jews who do not believe in Christ, it raises the question concerning his sincerity—how can Paul be “in Christ” yet be cursed “from Christ”? However, since Paul is brought into union with God through Christ, he sees from Christ’s perspective, causing his heart to grieve for the chosen people who reject the Messiah. In other words, God’s selfless love through Christ moves Paul, for only God’s love acts in a manner that finds solution in the curse of his Son on the cross. This, then, makes sense of the imperfect tense in Paul’s prayer “on behalf” of Israel—God’s heart is expressed, a past-continuous aspect, as Paul offers a sincere substitutionary petition¹⁷—and it makes

15. Driver, *Exodus*, 356. It is interesting that Scott Hafemann’s analysis of 2 Corinthians 3 and the Exodus 32 background suggests that after God judges Israel, Moses can appeal for God’s mercy based on a faithful “remnant” embodied in himself; *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 102.

16. The term “curse” (ἀνάθεμα) in the LXX translates in the Hebrew as כִּרְמָה and refers to devoted things set apart for destruction—see Josh. 6:17-18; 7:1, 11-13; 22:20; 1 Chron. 2:7. The argument can be made for ἀνάθεμα to signify excommunication. For discussion, see Dunn, *Romans*, 524, and Jewett, *Romans*, 561, but the stronger reference to eternal damnation makes better contextual sense. For different views, see Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 458; and Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 557.

clear the paradox of Paul speaking “*in Christ*” and desiring “*to be cursed from Christ*”—for only the Father is capable of such love.¹⁸

Interestingly, when Paul laments for his “brothers according to the flesh,” 9:3, he moves the focus of his letter to his “nonbelieving” Jewish brothers. The other times Paul uses the term “brothers” he refers to believers, but here he does not identify himself with “spiritual” brothers but with his brothers according to “physical” descent.¹⁹ Having just explained how God sent his Son in the likeness of human nature “according to the flesh” (in contrast to life by the Spirit in faith, 8:3–13), Paul now communicates what will happen to “Israel according to the flesh.” Paul does not use “according to the flesh” in a negative connotation here; rather, his intercessory prayer shows reverence for God’s elective purposes in choosing Israel (see 1:3 and 4:2).²⁰ Furthermore, Paul’s use of the personal pronouns

17. For the view of ὑπὲρ (“on behalf of”) as substitution; see Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 258; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 559; Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 347. Paul’s perspective has been brought into God’s heart for Israel. The other possible nuance is the more general sense of “for the sake of” or “benefit”; BADG, s.v., ὑπὲρ. In this manner, Paul believes his people stand in a position of eternal judgment to which Paul himself is willing to enter; see Abasciano, *Paul’s Use*, 101; Schreiner, *Romans*, 481; and Wagner, *Harolds*, 106. Paul “appears to have developed his stance mainly from a fresh encounter with Scripture in light of his experience with Christ.” Abasciano, *Paul’s Use*, 215.
18. The Father is capable of being one with his Son yet desires to offer his Son as a curse for many (see Rom. 5:8 and 15).
19. Of the twelve uses of the plural noun for ἀδελφός in Romans, three occur in chapters 9–11 (see 9:3, 10:11 and 25).
20. The uniqueness of Paul’s use of “according to the flesh” along with the context in which he uses the phrase in Romans and his other letters suggests that the phrase is part of a logical sequence with theological significance. This means the phrase “according to the flesh,” 9:3, is thematic within the letter. Paul contrasts “brothers according to the flesh” with the “Messiah according to the flesh” to make a distinction between physical Israel and Israel by faith. In the New Testament, only Paul uses the phrase “according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα in Rom. 1:3; 4:1; 8:4f, 12f; 9:3, 5; 1 Cor. 1:26; 10:18; 2 Cor. 1:17; 5:16; 10:2f; 11:18; Gal. 4:23, 29; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22. There is one exception, John 8:15 where the evangelist records Jesus’ words when speaking to the Pharisees concerning not judging “according to the flesh”—κατὰ τὴν σάρκα—but the noun is articular). Paul emphasizes the physical descent at the beginning of his letter—Christ descending from David “according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3)—and physical descent when referring to Abraham the forefather “according to the flesh” (Rom. 4:2). In both of these instances “according to the flesh” shows reverence for God’s decision in election and for his promise fulfilled. And these instances are followed by an emphasis of “faith” through spiritual

and relational terms—“I,” “my” brothers, and “my” race—combine to intensify anticipation for Israel’s outcome.

Thus, Paul’s experience—the revelation of God’s person and character—carries the force of his argument. Paul identifies with Moses as he prays to God concerning rebellious Israel, not because of a need for typological support or rhetorical skill²¹ but because his experience brings him to an understanding in which he relates to others to whom God has revealed himself. In this prophetic sense, Paul identifies with his race.

Israel’s Messiah, 9:4-5

As an Israelite, Paul recounts in a serious tone the blessings of Israel—God’s covenantal gifts:

4 *They are Israelites having*
the sonship, the glory, the covenants,
the law, spiritual service, and the promises.

Paul creates suspense by calling them by the name Yahweh gave to them: “Israelites.”²² The six blessings that Paul lists represent God’s

means. In 9:5, Paul will make the distinction of the Messiah “according to the flesh,” which similarly brings to light the paradox between the mutually exclusive nature of the Messiah from Israel and Israel not accepting him. Interestingly, in Galatians, Paul writes allegorically to refer to the son of the bondwoman “according to the flesh” in contrast to the son of the free woman “according to the promise” and the “Spirit” (Gal. 4:23, 29). Paul uses a similar comparison just before Romans 9 between walking “according to the flesh” and “walking according to the Spirit” (8:4-5, 12-13). Elsewhere Paul uses the term “according to the flesh” generally to mean “earthly” or in a physical sense (1 Cor. 1:26; 2 Cor. 1:17; 10:2-3; 11:18; Eph. 6:5; and Col. 3:22) particularly with reference to Israel “according to the flesh” (1 Cor. 10:18). Interestingly, Paul speaks about the expectation of the Messiah in terms of reconciliation—that we “no longer consider anyone *according to the flesh*, even though we have known the Messiah *according to the flesh*; yet we know him in this way no longer; therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation . . .” (2 Cor. 5:16f).

21. Abasciano suggests that “the totality of his [Paul’s] response was typologically oriented and typologically presented” and that Paul who is distraught turns to Scriptures and “from here fashions his understanding”—a view that minimizes Paul’s experience; *Paul’s Use*, 105.

covenant relationship offered to Israel.²³ The narratives of the Torah give the essential background for the meaning of these gifts, but it seems that Paul intends a broader context beyond a specific period in Israel's history—underscoring God's faithfulness in his relationship with his people and also (based on Paul's level of grief) foreshadowing Israel's failure in their relationship to God.²⁴

All six blessings demonstrate God's divine action and refer to God's unique relationship with his covenant people (and in some ways they may have been selected for their significance with regard to the Messiah²⁵). Each of the nouns are articular, giving them a formal and particular significance, referring to the covenant relationship.²⁶

22. Paul's use of "Israelites" pulls upon the connotation of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Cranfield notes the salvation historical significance of the names "Israel" and "Israelite" in the New Testament (particularly John 1:31; 47-49; 3:10, and 12:13), and recognizes the use of these names in Romans 9-11 in contrast to "Jews" in the other portions of his letter; Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 461 and 526. Outside the New Testament, Josephus in the *Antiquities* uses "Jews" as a contemporary term and "Israelite" as an identification during the Maccabean era and before; see Horst Kuhli, "Ἰσραηλιταί," *EDNT*, 2:205.
23. Paul may have paired these six nouns based on assonance (in Greek, sonship and law end in "-θεσία", glory and service end in "-α", and covenant and promise end in "-αί"). The fact that two of these words, sonship (υἰοθεσία) and law (νομοθεσία), are mentioned only here in the NT and not at all in the Greek Old Testament gives added support for the parallel. The only exceptions in the LXX are in the noncanonical books: 2 Macc. 6:23, 4 Macc. 5:35 and 17:16. It could also be that Paul intended a thematic parallel, too. As God's *adopted children* they received God's *law*; in the Tabernacle, they experienced his presence, his *glory* (e.g., Exod. 16:10; 24:15; 40:34; Lev. 9:23) and with this came the privilege of *priestly service*; and Yahweh initiated *covenants* with them based on his *promises* to their fathers. These early themes of covenant and promise are important to the development of Paul's letter and Romans 9-11 (see Rom. 11:27; Isa. 59:20-21, Isa. 27:9), revealing God's forgiveness for Israel and Paul's explanation of the promise given to Abraham concerning multiplying and land (4:13, 20; 9:8; 15:8). For promises made to the patriarchs elsewhere in Paul's letters, see Gal. 3:14-29; 4:23, 28; and Eph. 2:12, 3:6. For a synoptic view of the rhyming pairs, see Schreiner, *Romans*, 483. Though "sonship" is not explicitly mentioned, this status was conferred upon Israel at the Exodus (Exod. 4:22); Gary Burnett, *Paul and the Salvation of the Individual* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 177.
24. These are rooted in the story of Israel (Gen. 15 and 17; Exod. 2:24, 19:5, 24:1-8; Deut. 29; 2 Kgs. 23:5); Christopher Bryan, *Preface to Romans: Notes on the Epistle in Its Literary and Cultural Setting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 169-70.
25. This is not to say that Romans 9:1-5 concerns the believer. Paul in his other letters references the Messiah in light of these topics (e.g., Jesus is the fulfillment of "sonship," Rom. 1:4; "glory," 2 Cor. 4:4-6; the covenants, Eph. 2:12; "law-giving," Rom. 10:5f; "service" with respect to the Passover, 1 Cor. 5:7; and the promises, Gal. 3:16).

“Adoption” is rooted in the concept of God’s personal relationship with Israel as his son (e.g, Exod. 4:22–23; Deut. 1:31; 14:1; 32:6; Isa. 63:16; Jer. 3:19f; and 2 Sam. 7:14).²⁷ “Glory” brings to mind God’s manifested presence among his people (e.g., in the cloud, Exod. 13:21; at Mount Sinai, Exod. 19:9f and 24:12f; at the Tabernacle and Temple, Exod. 29:43; 33:7f; 40:34; 1 Kgs. 8:11). “The covenants” refer specifically to God’s covenants made with Abraham and his sons but could have a more general referent.²⁸ The term “law-giving” emphasizes God’s divine action in giving the law. This would also naturally infer the meaning—the law itself.²⁹ But Paul’s particular use of the term “law-giving” seems to stress the blessing bestowed to Israel and distinguish this use from his other uses of the “law”

26. The article before each of the nouns gives either a unique sense (a monadic emphasis) or an individualizing meaning as in “a class by itself” (*par excellence*); for categories, see Wallace, *Gospel of God*, 222–23. But since the gifts refer to God’s covenant relationship with Israel, the antecedents for these articular nouns likely refer to the Old Testament concepts. It is also possible, that the article before each gift expresses a certain formality and tone, similar to the Greeks’ personification of a virtue. For example, the use of the article before glory, ἡ δόξα, is not found in Jewish sources; *TDNT*, s.v., δοξάζω; and Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 295. These qualities are God’s offering of a deeply personal relationship involving commitment and his presence.
27. Adoption (ἡ υἱοθεσία) is only used by Paul in the New Testament and is not found at all in the LXX. For further explanation of Paul’s use of “adoption,” see James Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Yiothesia in the Pauline Corpus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 13–57. For emphasis on 2 Samuel 7:14 as a backdrop for the meaning, see *DPL*, s.v., “adoption.” It is also relevant to point out that the argument that follows concerning “sonship” in 9:8 and 11:30–32 depends on a proper respect for Israel’s sonship in 9:4; see Jewett, *Romans*, 563.
28. The plural use of the term, along with Paul’s emphasis concerning David and Moses elsewhere in his letter, gives reason for a more general sense for the term. Romans 9–11 is foreshadowed in the salutation of the letter in describing God’s son, a descendant of David (1:3); and when discussing the promise to Abraham, Paul quotes David (4:6; see also 11:9). Paul writes in terms of Israel’s history with Moses in mind (5:14) and utilizes Moses’ words for support in the argument following 9:1–5 (see 9:15; 10:5, 19). It is also suggested that the use of the plural is meant to include the New Covenant, but Paul is not celebrating the life of the believer here in 9:1–5 as he did in chapter 8; rather, he grieves for his ethnic people. For a good summary of the arguments for “covenants,” see Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 563f and C. J. Roetzel, “Διαθήκαι in Romans 9,4,” *Bib* 51 (1970): 377–90.
29. Either Paul stresses the active meaning “lawgiving” or the passive “the law given”; Dunn, 527 [AQ: which Dunn?; see also Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 462 and Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 563.

in relationship to “works,” “sin,” or “righteousness.”³⁰ “Service” can specifically refer to the celebration of the Passover.³¹ The general meaning refers to the priestly and Levitical sacrificial worship as directed by Yahweh, giving Israel a unique opportunity among nations to participate in relationship with God.³²

The placement of the sixth blessing on Paul’s list—the “promises”—is in the plural (similar to “covenants” above) and refers to the promises of Abraham and the patriarchs but is not limited to these. Earlier Paul discusses God’s promise to Abraham using the singular “promise” (4:13, 14, 16, 20),³³ but here in 9:4 he uses the plural “promises” which could also be taken in its broader sense, referring to a range of promises in the Old Testament made by God to his people.³⁴ It is also interesting that Paul lists “promises” as the last privilege on the list of six before mentioning “the fathers,” a stylistic and intentional order.

30. The term “lawgiving” (ἡνομοθεσία) occurs only here in the New Testament. For nonbiblical references, see 2 Macc. 6:23; 4 Macc. 5:45 and 17:16; Philo, *Abr.* 5; Plutarch, *Moralia* 240B. This use stands in contrast to Paul’s discussion of “law” (νόμος) that permeates each major section of his letter.
31. The noun is only used three times in the Torah (Exod. 12:25-26 and 13:5) and refers to the Passover ceremony. It is interesting that this is an eternal service for Israel, defined again and again for her descendants. Two other uses occur in the LXX—one with the article (ἡ λατρεία) referring to the priestly and Levitical service in the Temple (1 Chron. 28:13) and the other without the article referring to offerings made as a sign of devotion to Yahweh (Josh. 22:27). Paul uses the term “service” (λατρεία) without the article in his practical admonitions to believers (12:1) and adds the description “spiritual” service, which brings together meaning from 3:21-26 and chapters 6-8 with respect to the conformity of believers as the body of Christ and their lifestyle. Of the other relevant uses in the New Testament (John 16:2; Heb. 9:1 and 6), only the author of Hebrews uses “service” with the article (ἡ λατρεία) to refer to the priestly services of worship (9:6).
32. In a broad religious context, the noun “service” (ἡ λατρεία) can generally be defined as “the worship of a deity by performing cultic acts in a religious vocation”; see Jobs, “Distinguishing the Meaning,” 190.
33. Only Paul uses the plural form (αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι) in the New Testament. Of the two other instances—2 Cor. 1:20 and Gal. 3:15—Paul directly references “many promises” in relation to the Messiah (2 Cor. 1:20), but he uses the article with “promises” (αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι) to refer to the promise made to Abraham and to his seed, the Messiah (Gal. 3:15).
34. For the view that “promises” include David, see Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 547; for messianic promises, see Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 178; Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 464; and for Israel, see Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 349.

A block diagram with a literal translation shows the connection between these verses and the relative pronoun “who” (ὧν):³⁵

- 3 For I pray to be cursed from Christ
on behalf of my brothers according to the flesh.
- 4 They are Israelites **who** [have] the sonship, the glory . . . promises
[from] **whom** [are] the fathers
and from **whom** [comes] the Messiah according to the flesh,
- 5 *who is above all God blessed into the ages, Amen.*

Based on repetition, the antecedent for the relative pronoun “whom” (ὧν) may refer to the “Israelites” in verse 4, the Jewish people. But more likely, Paul intends a “stair-step” parallel in which “fathers” becomes the antecedent for the third relative clause (see above), and by following “the fathers” with the third relative clause—“and from whom [comes] the Messiah”—Paul scores a subtle crescendo. This intention is confirmed by the conjunction “and” with the preposition “out of,” showing distinction and significance.³⁶ “Fathers” specifically

35. The antecedent for the relative clause ὧν in the first two clauses refers to the Israelites, but the additional phrase “and from whom” (καὶ ἐξ ὧν) that follows “the fathers” but precedes “the Messiah” gives a subtle connection between the patriarchs and the Messiah as well as referring to the Israelites. In other words, the content which follows will involve the nature of Israel’s relationship to the Messiah and God’s covenant with the patriarchs. It may be that the clause—“and from them comes the Messiah according to the flesh”—along with the doxology (v. 5b) forms a parallel making “the Messiah” a distinct stanza from the blessings of the covenant and the fathers (5:4). Schreiner makes a connection based on order but does not emphasize a grammatical connection; *Romans*, 486. Piper understands the intervening καὶ to the last ὧν as referring to Israelites rather than “fathers”; Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 21. Cranfield sees the three relative clauses as dependent on “my fellow countrymen according to the flesh,” *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 460f; but the meaning is not much different since these are the Israelites.
36. The conjunction “and” (καὶ) with the preposition “from” (ἐξ) distinguishes the third relative pronoun from the first two, and this distinction fits consistently with Paul’s parallel thought. The “from whom Christ” phrase (v. 4) signifies ethnicity and the “out of Israel” phrase (v. 6) suggests that Israel has not acted “out of faith” and has rejected their own Messiah (Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 565; Schreiner, *Romans*, 486; Piper, *Justification of God*, 42; and Abasciano, *Paul’s Use*, 138). “Messiah” as the third term on the list follows “fathers,” which

refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,³⁷ but could include David as well,³⁸ and less probably, the general reference to significant ancestors in Israel's redemptive history.³⁹

It is important to note a subtle connection with this lament and Paul's foreshadowing words at the beginning of his letter in the salutation, 1:1-7. The phrase "concerning his son, *the one born of David according to the flesh*" (. . . ἐκ σπέρματος δαυιδ κατὰ σάρκα; 1:3) prepares the listener for a discussion on the topic of the Davidic Messiah.⁴⁰ Only in 9:5 does Paul mention again a direct reference to the Messiah who descends from the patriarchs (ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς κατὰ σάρκα), which he elaborates on in more detail (9:6f). Paul, in essence, underscores the incarnation—he lists six privileges that God gives to Israel (9:4-5a) and then mentions that the "Messiah according to the flesh" is a descendant of the "fathers."⁴¹

may show that the Messiah represents the fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers; see Schreiner, *Romans*, 486; Piper, *Justification of God*, 21. This also means that the covenant and the benefits of this relationship offered by Yahweh culminate in the Messiah—if there is a progression intended. Due to the fact that the "fathers" were the chief recipients of the promises, a close connection exists; see Ernst Kühl, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1913), 315. Romans 9-11 fits into the Deuteronomic view of Israel's history (Scott, "Restoration," 802f [AQ: not in bib]) in which a sin-judgment-restoration pattern can be detected. It seems, however, that Paul identifies with the Old Testament prophets, such as Moses, Isaiah, and Elijah, not because of a "mediator" role but as one who is brought into Christ's perspective. This has interesting parallels to the intercession and story of Exodus 32-34—Abasciano, *Paul's Use*, 45-146. Abasciano writes, "Paul has taken upon himself the mediatorial, intercessory, and prophetic aura of Moses in a typologically conditional response that conceives of his own ministry as the vehicle through which the election-bestowing 'glory of God in the face of Christ' is brought back to Israel in 'the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Cor 4:4, 6)"; *ibid.*, 143.

37. Abasciano, *Paul's Use*, 137; Schreiner, *Romans*, 486.

38. Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 145-46.

39. Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:6.

40. Interestingly, the topic of "seed" in Romans only occurs in the discussion of Abraham's descendants in 4:13-18 concerning the promise and righteousness, and in the discussion of Abraham concerning the children of promise, 9:7-8, 29 (the occurrence in 11:1 refers to Paul as a natural "descendent" of Abraham).

41. The phrase "according to the flesh" makes the distinction that Israel's connection with the messiah is from natural descent in contrast to a spiritual faith; see BADG, s.v. "σάρξ."

Christ's Divinity

5 *who is above all God blessed into the ages, Amen.*

Paul's grammatical arrangement of phrases becomes important in understanding the brief but well-debated doxology in verse 5, "*who is above all God blessed into the ages, Amen.*"⁴² Some scholars place a punctuation mark after "above all" to make a theological distinction between the Father and the Son: "who is above all, God blessed into the ages. Amen."⁴³ However, grammatically and contextually, it seems that Paul did not intend a comma: "who is above all God blessed into the ages, Amen."⁴⁴ With or without punctuation, an emphasis of the divinity of Christ is intended.⁴⁵ But what is also difficult to comprehend is how Paul writes with confidence and authority as one who is "in" Christ concerning God's plan for Israel and humankind.

In summary, in Romans 9:1-5, Israel has received the benefits of election, yet Israel stands in judgment, giving Paul reason to grieve.

42. This information will make more sense at the end of Paul's argument when he mentions the patriarchs and God's plan for Israel, 11:1-32. The ὁ ὧν phrase refers to Christ rather than God, which is better Greek; see Bryan, *A Preface to Romans*, 170-71. Witherington understands the equivalent in Philippians 2:5-11 in naming Christ as "Lord," which is also equivalent to the confession of the divine name in the LXX (see Rom. 10:9 and 10:13; Joel 3:5 LXX); Witherington, *Romans*, 251-52.

43. For representative views, see Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 456-70; Sanday and Headlam, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 233-38; and Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 520. Primary support includes the parallel of Ephesians 4:6; the lack of a parallel of "blessed" with respect to Christ (2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31; and Eph. 1:3); no reference of θεός as ὁ Χριστός, and Paul ends this lament with praise to God, 11:32-36, not to Christ. For a summary of the different views, see Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 548-49.

44. The primary reason includes that doxologies begin with the word "blessed" and are not found in the middle of the sentence. The clause, "the one who is above all . . .," parallels the preceding clause, "the one who according to the flesh . . .," and the phrase "the one who is . . ." always refers to the preceding noun (for use in Romans, see 1:25 and 11:36; for use in other Pauline letters, see 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; and 2 Tim. 4:18; also see, Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 3:18).

45. The implication is that Christ shares the divine nature of the Father but the passage does not say Christ is God in "an exhaustive sense"; Schreiner, *Romans*, 486-89. The neuter article in this sentence instead of the masculine greatly emphasizes the limitation, Cranfield 2:464; also, Dunn, *Romans*, 2:538.

The present tense of the verb “to be,” 9:4, shows that Paul sees these blessings as present,⁴⁶ and he refers to his ethnic brothers who have not believed in Jesus the Messiah—evidenced by his choice of the term “Israelites” and his mentioning of “the fathers.” The contrast between Paul’s grief in responding to the separation of nonbelieving Israel, 9:1-5, and the intimacy of the believer in Christ, 5:12-8:39, creates suspense—“How will this tension be resolved *in relation to God’s character*?”

What follows in the body of the lament, 9:6—11:32, is Paul’s defense of the character of God in response to a topic he introduced earlier in his letter. In 3:1-8, after defining a “Jew” as one who is circumcised of the heart by the Spirit, Paul asks, “What advantage is there in being Jewish?” (3:1).⁴⁷ Paul emphasizes that in every way there is an advantage to being a Jew, for the Jews were entrusted with the words of God. Logically, this raises two issues concerning God’s character—his faithfulness and his righteousness, 3:3-5 (For why did God’s choice fail?). In Romans 9:6-11:32, Paul responds (1) by explaining that God is faithful in his promise to the patriarchs and (2) by demonstrating that God is righteous, though Israel remains

46. See Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 460; Dunn, *Romans*, 526; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 545; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 561; Schreiner, *Romans*, 485. Paul’s list of privileges does not necessarily accent Israel’s participation but that which God offered to them. Just like the faith of the patriarchs does not save current unbelieving Israel, neither do the benefits offered. Israel, both present and past, have rejected the Messiah, the faith of their fathers, and relationship offered to them. In this sense, these privileges are covenantal—to be accepted or rejected. It seems that the Israel that rejected God in the wilderness before Moses, the Israel that rejected the words of the prophets are still at a place of non-belief. Paul later identifies himself as an Israelite (11:1f) with Elijah—he is not saying that all Israelites are under eternal judgment but he is generally responding to the theological issue of God’s faithfulness and how God’s selected people could fail. The initial discussion begins with deep compassion. Paul will also argue later that the “word” that was near the Israelites is the “word” that Paul preaches, 11:5-17. In this sense the “faith” aspect in God’s promises, particularly as it points to the Messiah, is what makes the privileges relevant. So Paul’s list applies to ethnic Israel in the sense that God has not withdrawn his covenant, but the covenant has always involved faith. In this way, these privileges are part of historical Israel, Israel in Paul’s day, and Israel in the present.

47. The word “Jewish” is a paraphrase of the word “Jew” so as not to confuse Paul’s definition with the ethnic referent.

unfaithful. But before analyzing Paul's in-depth answer in the chapters that follow, it is appropriate to show first that "intercession" is a consistent theme in Romans 9–11, and in the rest of the letter.

Letter Continuity, Romans 9–11

Paul explicitly and implicitly identifies with Old Testament prophets—Moses, Isaiah, and Elijah—who grieve for Israel.⁴⁸ In the first section of the body of his argument, Paul quotes Exodus 33:19 (Rom. 9:15), a context that is similar to his own. Here, Israel has sinned against God, Moses intercedes for them, and God reveals his Person to Moses. By quoting Exodus, Paul brings to light Moses's personal experience concerning God's compassion and goodness—and not for literary purposes only. Paul also quotes Isaiah (10:22–23; Rom. 9:27) in his argument concerning gentile inclusion and prefixes the quotation with the citation formula: "But Isaiah is crying out in behalf of Israel . . .". The words "crying out on behalf of" (κράζει ὑπέρ) indicate hope and promise as well as judgment.⁴⁹ The Spirit that moves Isaiah also moves Paul.⁵⁰

48. Abasciano explains that Paul acts in the mediatorial, prophetic, and intercessory "aura of Moses" in a typologically conditioned response so that Paul's ministry is seen as a vehicle through which the election—a bestowal of God's glory in the face of Christ—is brought back to Israel in "the gospel of the glory of Christ, the image of God"; *Paul's Use*, 43.

49. Although Isaiah's tone may be considered "accusing"—Sanday and Headlam, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 265; "threatening"—Godet, *Commentary on Romans*, 366; "urgent"—Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 371; or as a regular expression for inspired prophetic utterances—Black, *Romans*, 135; Paul's use of "crying out with" with the preposition "on behalf of" (κράζει ὑπέρ) is a prayer and proclamation—Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 575; a cry of hope rather than a threat—Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 68; as well as an announcement of love as judgment and promise—Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 361. Outside of the common use of κράζω in Hellenistic and Attic Greek, this phrase is distinctively Pauline; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, 231.

50. Paul uses κράζω only two other times in his letters: when the sons of God who are led by the Spirit cry out (κράζομεν) to the Father (Rom. 8:15), and when God sends the Spirit of his Son into the hearts of believers to cry out (κράζον) to the Father (Gal. 4:6).

A few verses following the above Isaiah quotation, 9:27, Paul concludes that Christ Jesus is the “stone” that causes Israel to stumble, 9:33. This is the first mention of Christ, 10:1, since his expression of grief, 9:1-2, and Paul's heart lightens:

Brothers, it pleases my heart to petition God on your behalf for salvation (10:1)

For great is my grief and unceasing is the anguish of my heart

for I could wish to be an anathema from Christ on behalf of my

brothers (9:2-3)

Notice the repeated references to “heart,” “on behalf of,” and “brothers.” It seems that the humbling of Israel brings hope for their repentance. In a more direct expression of God’s heart toward Israel, Paul quotes Isaiah 65:2 (Rom. 10:21) where God extends his hands “all day long” to a disobedient and obstinate people—a compassionate God.⁵¹

Concerning Israel, Paul perceives the merciful nature of God in the Old Testament context and in his present context. In other words, he does not project his subjective feelings on to a text, but simply amplifies the mercy of God in both contexts. In 11:1-5, Paul identifies with Elijah and makes both explicit and implicit statements to reveal God’s heart toward the remnant (see chapter 4 for complete argument):

- a v.1 Did God reject his people?
- b No, I am an Israelite.
- a v.2 Did God reject his people?
- b Elijah interceded against Israel:
- c v.3-4 God leaves a remnant then.

51. The only change in this Old Testament quotation from the LXX is the word order—Paul emphatically moves the phrase “all day long” to the front of the sentence.

c v.5 God calls a remnant now.

The thought structure serves the purpose of reinforcing Paul’s main point that God has called the remnant now, 11:5. The similarities between then and now demonstrate that there is a “remnant.” Logically speaking, the more parallel the factors—Paul, Elijah, Israel then, Israel now—the more true the conclusion:

- a Question
- b Paul--a “remnant” Israelite
- a Question
- b Elijah--a “remnant” Israelite

Paul directly states in 11:2: “*Elijah intercedes against Israel . . .*”⁵² Elijah, pursued and dejected, grieves for himself as he protests against Israel. Amidst this complaining, God personally reveals Himself to Elijah: “*Go stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord for the Lord is about to pass by . . .*” (1 Kings 11:11f). If this parallel is congruous, Paul also speaks the truth against Israel.

In both the context of Romans and 1 Kings, Israel has been judged guilty, God has revealed his Person to the person interceding, and God has reserved a “remnant” by grace. But Paul does not complain as Elijah does. Rather, Paul writes to reveal God’s wise and merciful plan on behalf of Israel: God blesses the gentiles so that “hardened” Israel might become jealous and repent. Furthermore, Paul follows an Old Testament lament pattern when he frames this text with a repetitive question meant to be understood as an objection: “*God does not reject His people.*”⁵³ Thus Paul authenticates his analogy by weaving the two contexts together—then and now—identifying with

52. This insertion of “intercede” (ἐντυγχάνω) is not found in 1 Kings 19:10 and 14 (LXX or MT).

53. Paul alludes to 1 Samuel 12:22 or to Psalm 94, a personal lamentation for deliverance, in which he frames the question as an objection; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 603.

Elijah as a “remnant” Israelite, as one who speaks against “hardened” Israel, and as one who has experienced God’s presence. However, where Elijah focuses on his own circumstances, Paul sees God’s compassionate mind at work in both the Old Testament context and his own.

Throughout Romans 9–11, Paul expresses God’s mercy toward a rebellious people, which confirms the overwhelming sense of sadness that Paul feels in response to Israel’s decisions—9:1–5, 9:15, 9:27, 10:1, 10:21, and 11:1–10. This compassionate and sacrificial mindset fits within the continuity of the rest of his letter as well—3:21–26; 5:6–8; 12:1–3, 14–20; and 15:7–8.

Thematic Unity, Romans 1–16

In the first major section of the letter, 1:1—5:11, God is not depicted as an arrogant judge who brings down his gavel against sinful man with satisfaction; instead, he chooses to bring punishment upon his own Son, 3:21–24. In the second major section of the letter, at great cost God offers sonship to those who believe in his Son—and his Spirit and his Son intercede on behalf of his children, 5:12—8:39. The tone of the letter shifts dramatically from bright unity, 8:1–39, to feelings of separation, 9:1–5, a contrast that accents the emotional color of both realities. For example, Paul writes about intimacy, love, and security from the Father to His children in 8:17:

*we received the spirit of adoption
by whom we are crying, Abba Father
the same Spirit is bearing witness with our spirit
that we are children of God*

In contrast, Paul feels separation, loss, and pain, 9:2–3:

*The truth I am speaking in Christ, I am not lying;
 my conscience bears witness to me in the Holy Spirit
 that my grief is great
 and my anguish is unceasing.
 For I pray to be cursed from Christ . . .*

Paul refers to the Father, the Spirit, and Christ in these transitional passages. It is Christ and the Spirit who intercede (8:26-27, 34), and likewise, it is Christ and the Spirit moving upon Paul to grieve on behalf of Israel (9:1-5).

In the final section of the body of his letter, 12:1—15:13, the apostle exhorts the believers in Rome by the *mercies of God* to be humble minded, 12:1.⁵⁴ Paul uses the noun and verb forms of “mercy” more in Romans 9–11 than in any other part of the Pauline Corpus,⁵⁵ so it makes sense that he transitions with the phrase “by the *mercies of God*” from his third main section, 9:1—11:36, into his final section of the body, 12:1—15:13.⁵⁶ Therefore, just as Christ offered himself up as a mercy offering for all men, 1:18—5:11, Christ continues to compassionately intercede for the believer, 5:12—8:39. So also Paul—as one who is brought into the perspective of Christ and willingly grieves on behalf of Israel (9:1—11:36)—commands the church to renew their minds in accordance with the humble,

54. Paul’s use of the phrase “Holy Spirit” in 9:2 and his use of the phrase “mercies of God” in 12:1 serves as a link to the major sections that precede them. The use of “Holy Spirit” in 9:1 reveals a continuous relationship from the end of Paul’s second major section of the body of his letter, 5:13—8:39, to the beginning of his third major section, 9:1—11:36. The only time the “Holy Spirit” is mentioned in Romans 9–11 is in 9:1. Therefore, the absence of the word “Spirit” in 9:2—11:36 and its abundant use in the previous section, 5:13—8:39, indicates that the “Holy Spirit” in 9:1 serves as a transition between the two major sections.

55. See Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 595.

56. The phrase “mercies of God” (τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ), which begins the fourth major section of Paul’s letter, 12:1—15:3, serves as a transition phrase from Romans 9–11 (in the New Testament, the noun οἰκτιρμός is used only here in Romans; and the only use of the verb οἰκτιρῶ is in 9:15. The verb ἔλεέω is not used in 12:1—15:13. The proper noun “Holy Spirit” in a literary sense serves in a similar manner as a transition between 5:12—8:39 and 9:1—11:36.

sacrificial mind of Christ on behalf of each other, 12:1—15:13. Now that the theme of “intercession” has been demonstrated as an important aspect in Paul’s lament for Israel, the focus turns to *God’s character* in his choosing the “younger” son.