

### ***Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (Opening)***

*<sup>15</sup> “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”*

## Introduction

Have you ever tried to explain something to someone, and they just didn't get it?

I've had the pleasure of being a teacher for a few years. It doesn't matter what the subject is, the best feeling in the world is when you explain something to someone and you see that light bulb go on over their head. You can actually see in the expression on their face when they get it.

When I was working on my Master's degree, we had some students in my class who were from Brazil. English was not their primary language (and probably not their second language), but they were studying Computer Science at the Master's degree level in English. All of us in the class who were native English speakers knew they were struggling, and we did everything we could to help them out, but they were still getting poor grades.

I was working with one of the Brazilian students on my Thesis project, along with another native English speaker. We tried everything we could think of to help her understand everything we were working on with our parts of the project, but it just didn't click.

We went off on Christmas break, hoping that everything would be OK, but not feeling very confident about the whole thing. But when we got back after Christmas, everything seemed different. She was even talking more clearly in English. Something finally clicked, and she just understood. In her words, she woke up one morning and realized that she had dreamt in English. That was the switch turning on.

This is the kind of epiphany that Paul wished for, for the Jews of his day. He wanted them to understand Christ the way he did, but they just didn't get it. He wanted them to become Christians, but something was holding them back.

## **Romans 9:1-5**

*<sup>9</sup> I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup> To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

### **Paul's wish**

Romans chapter 9 starts a new line of discussion by Paul in his letter. He's explained God's grace and righteousness, but now he wants to go back and discuss in greater detail and try to explain how God works in "big picture" type situations.

Paul starts out by focusing on his heritage. Paul was proud of being a Jew. In fact, he brags about it, in a way, in a few places, both in his letters and before the crowd in the Temple in the book of Acts.

When Jesus selected Paul on the road to Damascus, He did it for a specific purpose. Acts chapter 9 doesn't say that Jesus told Paul (or Saul, at the time) what the plan was, but He did tell Ananias, when He sent him to heal Paul.

## **Acts 9:10-16**

*<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."*

*<sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about*

*this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”*

Jesus told Ananias that Paul’s destiny was to carry His name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel.

Paul’s primary mission was to the Gentiles, but he had a process; a modus operandi, if you will. Any time Paul went into a new city, he would go to where the Jews were and preach Christ to them there. Usually, that was at the synagogue, but sometime, in a city that didn’t have a quorum of Jewish men, there wasn’t a synagogue to meet in, so they would meet near “living water”, water that is flowing naturally, like a river or stream. This is what happened in Acts 16, when Paul, Silas, and Timothy were in Philippi. But like I said, if there was a synagogue, that’s where Paul would go first to preach.

### ***Acts 17:1-3***

*<sup>1</sup> Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.”*

Paul wanted his fellow Jews to know the truth about Jesus, that He was, in fact, the Messiah, and that they needed to believe and follow Jesus to be saved.

Paul emphasizes three times in the first verse of chapter 9 that what he’s about to write is the truth; he has three witnesses to prove that it’s the truth: himself, his conscience, and the Holy Spirit. That tells me that

what Paul is about to say in verse two is really important. And what does he tell the Christians in Rome? He tells them that he is in anguish over the fact that the Jews have separated themselves from their Messiah.

Throughout the entire Old Testament, there are pointers to Christ. Prophecy that points out that there would be a Messiah. Some of it was understood by the Jews, and some of it wasn't, until Jesus pointed it out to His disciples. Paul understood these prophecies, and felt the pain so deeply because his fellow Israelites refused to believe.

Paul points out that he wished that he could be "accursed and cut off from Christ" for the sake of the other Jews that didn't believe. Of course, there's no way that would be able to happen; that is actually what Jesus did for them, and they didn't accept Him.

Moses offered the same thing to God for the people of Israel back in Exodus 32. Moses had just come down off the mountain the first time with the tablets of the law. If you remember the story from your childhood Sunday school classes, Moses had been up on the mountain so long that the people were getting restless, and begged Aaron to make them a God they could worship. So, Aaron had a golden calf made for them to worship. And that's what they were doing when Moses came down off the mountain.

So, Moses rallied the Levites around him and had them kill the people responsible for the golden calf, except Aaron, of course. That's where we pick up the story in Exodus 32:30-34.

### ***Exodus 32:30-34***

*<sup>30</sup> The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." <sup>31</sup> So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold.*

*<sup>32</sup> But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out*

*of your book that you have written.”<sup>33</sup> But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.<sup>34</sup> But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”*

Moses tells God to curse him instead of the Israelites. God says no, that the people who sin will be cursed. I’m sure Paul would have received the same answer.

### **The Advantages**

Paul lists several advantages that the Jews had over the Gentiles with regard to believing in Christ, but yet still didn’t believe, for the most part.

Paul said the first advantage they had was the adoption, not the adoption he just finished writing about back in chapter eight, but direct adoption of the entire group of Israelites. When Moses was getting ready to go back to Egypt to demand the release of the Israelites, God explained what he was supposed to do when he was there.

### **Exodus 4:21-23**

*<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.<sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son,<sup>23</sup> and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’ ”*

God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh that Israel was His son. Not in the same way that Jesus is God’s son, but the same way that Christians are children of God, through adoption. God chose Israel to be His son, His chosen people on the earth. He adopted them to represent Him.

The next advantage Paul lists is “the glory”. This glory wasn’t any earthly glory, it wasn’t any earthly praise or honor. Paul is talking about the “Glory of the Lord”.

When God was meeting with Moses on Mount Sinai, you might say that Moses was directly exposed to God’s Glory, and it rubbed off on him.

***Exodus 34:29-31***

*<sup>29</sup> When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. <sup>30</sup> Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup> But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them.*

The fact that Moses face was shining with the Glory of God was so scary for all the Israelites that Moses wore a veil to hide his face so the people wouldn’t be scared of him.

God’s glory also filled the Tabernacle when it was finished, filled the Temple when it was finished, and surrounded the angels when they announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. The Glory of God was shown to the children of Israel, showing His acceptance of them as His children.

The next advantage the Israelites had that Paul talks about is the covenants. These covenants were agreements with God as to how things would go for them. If they followed the Law, God would bless them; if they didn’t, well, things wouldn’t go so well for them. Moses was commanded by God to set the covenant before the people of Israel

before they entered into the Promised Land. This is when Moses told them to choose between life and good, and death and evil.

Once all the people had gathered together, Moses addressed them on behalf of God. He told them that the choice they were being given, the covenant they were entering into, was for all of them standing there, including their servants and everyone else associated with them. But he adds one more piece.

### ***Deuteronomy 29:14-15***

*<sup>14</sup> “It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant,  
<sup>15</sup> but with whoever is standing here with us today before the LORD our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.”*

Moses was telling them that this covenant was binding to all generations of Israel, even if they weren't standing there to accept the covenant.

The next two things that the Israelites had that should have helped them understand about their Messiah were the giving of the Law, and the Temple worship. Paul says the giving of the Law, meaning not God giving the Law to Israel, but the fact that the Israelites were supposed to surround themselves and immerse themselves in the Law. They were supposed to talk about the Law with their families, and even bind it to their foreheads. They were supposed to eat, drink, and sleep the Law that Moses brought to them from God.

On top of that, they had the Temple worship, that glorious bloody spectacle that was to remind them of their sins, and help them to receive God's blessing. There's so much tied up in these two parts of life for Israel, that a single scripture reference just won't explain it all. We could read the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers, but that would take quite a while.

The last two things that Paul talks about that should have made the Messiah obvious to his brothers and sisters in the flesh cover past, present, and future. The first is the “Fathers” or the Patriarchs. The fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were chosen by God and the prophecies given to them should have been solid evidence for the Israelites of God’s promise of the Messiah. But the final thing should have been the most powerful, and was for any of the Jews who actually became Christians, like Paul himself.

The last thing is Christ himself. Many of them were alive during the time that Jesus had His ministry. Many of them saw Him and heard Him teach, but they rejected Him.

All these things, all this evidence, is why Paul felt such anguish and pain at their rejection of Christ. That and the fact that their rejection of Christ was the same as their rejection of the covenant that Moses offered them before entering the Promised Land centuries earlier. They were again offered life and good, death and evil, and they choose poorly.

### Conclusion

Just like some of the other Brazilian students in my class, the Jews of Paul’s day just didn’t get it. They didn’t see the prophecies throughout the Old Testament; they didn’t understand the relevance of everything that pointed to Jesus as being their Messiah.

But unlike my experiences in my Master’s program, the Jews of Paul’s day accused him of blasphemy, and tried many times to kill him, or to have him killed. Paul wrote in Romans 9 that he felt deep pain and anguish that they rejected their Messiah, and wanted so much for them to understand and turn to Him.

Is there someone in your life that you feel that way about? Someone you wish would listen, but the words just seem to bounce off of when

you try to talk to them? Or maybe they even get belligerent or violent when you bring up Christianity.

The best thing we can do in situations like that is keep on living our life for Christ, showing Christ in our actions and words, and keep praying for that person, asking God to soften their hearts so His word will penetrate and make a change.

Maybe you're that person, the one that may not understand about Jesus. The best thing you can do is get with someone here that can share with you about what Jesus is all about, and be open to what God is trying to do in your life.

### ***Acts 4:8-12 (Closing)***

*<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*