



# PASSIONFORTRUTH

WHERE NEW LIFE BEGINS

## DECODING ROMANS – CHAPTER 9

### *What is an Israelite Gentile?*

#### PAUL'S UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: DID PAUL SEE JESUS AS GOD? A DEEPER DIVE INTO THE MYSTERY OF ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES

When it comes to the apostle Paul's views on salvation, Israel, and the identity of Jesus, a series of complex theological questions arise. *Did Paul believe Jesus was God?* Were the Gentiles truly the Gentiles in the New Testament, or is there something more mysterious going on beneath the surface? In this article, we'll explore these questions, examining key scriptures that will challenge your understanding. And trust me—if you've never heard this perspective before, it's likely to shake your foundational beliefs. Let's dive in.

#### SALVATION THROUGH ISRAEL: PAUL'S DEEP CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE



At the heart of Paul's theology is an intense desire for the salvation of his own people, the Israelites. Paul expresses a profound longing for his brethren, emphasizing how much he values them and wants them to be saved. He refers to the many blessings Israel received: *adoption, glory, covenants, promises, and the*

*giving of the law*—none of which he sees as curses. These were positive gifts bestowed upon Israel by God.

Interestingly, Paul connects Jesus to God in a striking way. In **Romans 9:5**, he refers to Jesus as "God over all, forever praised." While some debate the nuances of this translation, it's clear that

Paul views Jesus in a way that transcends the human—Jesus is in some sense divine, perhaps not fully understood by the early Christians, but connected to God in a profound manner.

Paul's letters reflect this belief. In Colossians 1:15, he writes, "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,*" and in Philippians 2:6, he declares that Jesus, "*existing in the form of God,*" did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. This suggests that Paul recognized Jesus' divine nature, even if his full understanding was still unfolding.

But is Paul's view of Jesus as God the same as the formal Christian doctrine of the Trinity? That's a question for deeper theological study. However, we can confidently say that Paul didn't see Jesus merely as a man—there's something far more significant in his words.

## WHO ARE THE REAL ISRAELITES?

Now, let's unravel a key theological point: **who is truly Israel?** In Romans 9:6-7, Paul makes a bold statement: "Not all Israel is Israel." This statement has been misinterpreted by many, especially those who advocate for **Replacement Theology**—the belief that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan. According to this view, because the Israelites rejected Jesus, God has rejected them, and the church now holds all the promises made to Israel.

Paul strongly rejects this idea. His argument is simple: **salvation has always been by faith, not by bloodline.** Just because someone is physically descended from Abraham doesn't mean they are part of Israel in the biblical sense.

Paul points to the story of Isaac and Ishmael to drive home this point: God's promises were passed down through Isaac, not Ishmael, even though Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son. The point here is that God's covenant with Israel is not based on ethnicity but on divine choice and faithfulness to the promises.



And it doesn't end there. Paul brings up Jacob and Esau in Romans 9:10-13, showing that God's selection is not based on human merit or works, but on God's sovereign choice. The Hebrew idiom "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" actually means God chose Jacob over Esau—not because of their actions, but because of His purpose. Esau despised his birthright, choosing a bowl of stew over his spiritual inheritance, and thus, God chose Jacob. This is not a statement of hatred but of divine preference, reflecting the significance of the birthright and the responsibility that came with it.

## MERCY, NOT MERIT

A crucial element in Paul's writings is the concept of divine mercy. In Romans 9:14-18, Paul addresses the idea that God's mercy is not given based on human effort or desire but according

to God's will. He uses the example of Pharaoh, who was given numerous opportunities to repent, yet chose to harden his heart against God. In this sense, God didn't "**harden**" Pharaoh's heart randomly; He strengthened what was already there—*Pharaoh's stubbornness*.

Paul argues that God gives mercy to those who are humble and willing to repent. It's not about choosing certain people for salvation while condemning others. Instead, it's about the heart's response to God's grace. God's patience and mercy are extended to all, but not everyone accepts it. The **key** to salvation, Paul insists, is *faith*—faith that leads to actions, and a heart that is willing to be transformed.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE GENTILES AND THE LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Now comes the truly revolutionary part. When we think of Israel and the Gentiles in the New Testament, we often assume they are two separate and distinct groups. But is that really the case?

In **Romans 9:24-26**, Paul writes that God has called not only the Jews but also the Gentiles. And then he references a passage from Hosea that is incredibly significant. This prophecy, which originally referred to the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim), is applied by Paul to the Gentiles. In Hosea, God declares, "*I will call them my people who were not my people.*" This is a reference to the ten northern tribes of Israel, who were divorced from God after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE and became known as the "**lost tribes.**"

But here's the kicker—Paul is applying this prophecy to the Gentiles. Why? Because, according to Paul, the Gentiles, like the lost tribes of Israel, were separated from God, yet through faith in Christ, they are now being called back into God's family. This was a radical idea in Paul's time, and it challenges the traditional Christian understanding of Gentiles as outsiders. In Paul's view, many of the Gentiles were actually part of the lost tribes of Israel, and their inclusion in the covenant was a fulfillment of God's promise to bring back the scattered Israelites.

## THE INVITATION TO FAITH

Paul's teachings about Israel, the Gentiles, and salvation challenge us to think beyond traditional theological categories. The idea that the Gentiles are part of the "**lost tribes**" of Israel is a mystery that Paul reveals through his deep understanding of scripture and history. But the overarching message of Paul's letters remains clear: salvation comes through faith, not through ethnic identity, works, or lineage. It's about trusting in God's mercy, responding to His calling, and humbling ourselves before Him.

As Paul's words echo through the ages, they invite us all—Jew and Gentile alike—into the promise of salvation. But the question remains: are we willing to respond to the call? Are we ready to walk in faith and receive God's mercy?

## THE NORTHERN KINGDOM'S RETURN: A RESTORATION THROUGH FAITH AND COVENANT

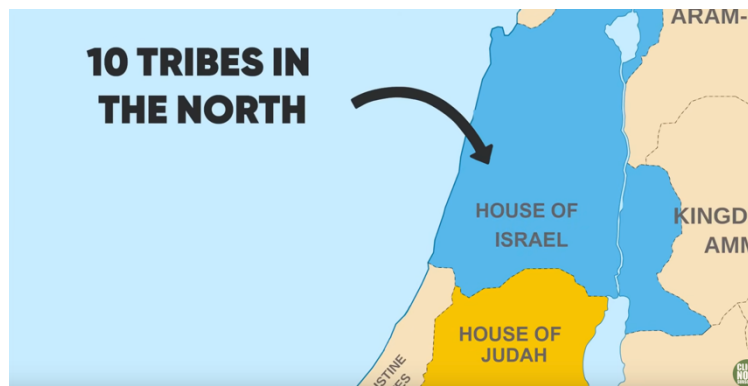
The story of Israel is a story of restoration and covenant, one that is deeply rooted in the concept of faith and divine mercy. In the scriptures, we find that Israel, particularly the northern ten tribes, was divorced by God due to their unfaithfulness. These tribes were scattered among the Gentiles, and their return was seemingly impossible according to the law. But, through the sacrifice of the Messiah, their return was made possible. This concept becomes the foundation of understanding the gospel's message and why Paul, in his letters, speaks to both the Jews and Gentiles with the same urgency.

The concept of Israel's divorce and the prophecy of their return is grounded in the Torah. While the Torah clearly stated that once Israel was divorced, they could not return, there was a provision for reconciliation through a new covenant—a covenant that would be sealed by the death of the Messiah. The Messiah's sacrifice would break the law of adultery that had separated Israel from God, providing a way for the scattered northern tribes to return to the covenant, as foretold by the prophets.

In the book of Amos, chapter 9, verse 9, we find God speaking of His plan for the restoration of Israel: *"For look, I will command and I will sift the house of Israel among the Gentiles."* This is a direct reference to the northern tribes being scattered among the Gentiles, yet God promises to sift them out and bring them back. So, when we see in the New Testament that Paul is ministering to Gentiles, it's important to understand that these Gentiles are not just non-Jews, but rather, they are often Israelites from the northern tribes who had been divorced, scattered, and assimilated into Gentile culture.

### THE NORTHERN TEN TRIBES STILL EXIST

The Jewish historian Josephus, in the first century, affirms this idea. He tells us that the northern ten tribes were still in existence, living beyond the Euphrates River, far from the land of Israel. He writes, *"Wherefore, there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe, subject to the Romans... while the ten tribes are beyond the Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers."*



These northern tribes, once called Israelites, had assimilated into Greek and Roman culture and were considered as Gentiles. They had lost their identity as Israelites, and yet God's promise of restoration remained. Paul and the apostles knew this and actively sought these "lost sheep" scattered among the Gentiles.

Ezekiel 11:16 also highlights God's intention to restore the northern tribes, saying, *"Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone."* This is a promise of hope for those Israelites who had been

exiled. Their identity as part of Israel had been obscured, but God had not forgotten them. They would be restored through the Messiah.

Matthew 15:24 echoes this same message. Jesus said, *"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* The "lost sheep" are not those who never knew God, but the northern tribes who had been divorced, scattered, and lost to their identity. Yeshua's mission was to seek them out and bring them back into the fold.

## THE LOST SHEEP

This concept of the "lost sheep" is critical to understanding why Paul's ministry was so successful. As Paul traveled to various cities, he preached to those in the synagogues, many of whom were descendants of the northern tribes. These Israelites, now living as Gentiles, had been cut off from God's covenant due to their ancestors' unfaithfulness. But through faith in the Messiah, they could be grafted back into God's promises, as Paul makes clear in Romans.

In John 7:35, the Pharisees question whether Jesus would go to the dispersion, meaning the scattered Israelites living among the Greeks. The Pharisees were astonished by the thought of Jesus reaching out to these "dogs," these Gentiles, not realizing that they were in fact fellow Israelites who had been lost and divorced. The gospel, however, was for them too, as it was for anyone who would answer the call of faith.

James, in his epistle, makes it clear that his message is directed to the twelve tribes of Israel that are scattered abroad (James 1:1). The twelve tribes are not just the Jews from the southern kingdom of Judah but all of Israel. Many of the Gentiles who came into the faith were descendants of the northern ten tribes, long lost but now being restored through Christ.

Peter also writes in his first epistle, addressing the strangers (or Gentiles) scattered across various regions. This scattering was not accidental; it was the result of God's judgment on Israel's unfaithfulness. Yet, through the gospel, God's people, the elect, would be called back into the covenant through faith. These Gentiles, though not born in Judah, were part of the elect people of God, the descendants of Israel, who had been scattered and lost but were now being brought back through Christ's redemptive work.

Paul's message was revolutionary because it emphasized that the northern tribes, the so-called Gentiles, could return to God's covenant through faith in Christ, regardless of their heritage or past. In Romans 9:30-32, Paul explains that the Gentiles who did not seek righteousness through the law have attained it by faith. But Israel, despite having the law, did not attain righteousness because they sought it by works rather than by faith. They stumbled at the stumbling stone, which was Christ.

## THE STUMBLING STONE

This "stumbling stone" represents the challenge of faith. The Israelites of the first century had relied on their works and traditions, which had become a barrier to recognizing the Messiah. Faith, not works, is what brings righteousness. The story of the rich young ruler in the gospel of



Matthew illustrates this. He claimed to have kept all the commandments, but when asked to sell everything and follow Jesus, he stumbled at the greatest obstacle: faith. His riches had become his stumbling block.

Similarly, for many of us, our own circumstances may challenge our faith. There are times when we feel broken or lost, wondering why God is allowing hardship. I, too, have experienced moments of despair. There was a time when I found myself in prison, falsely accused, with seemingly no way out. Yet, through that trial, I chose to trust God, even when everything seemed hopeless. And through that faith, God orchestrated a miracle, leading to my early release. This experience taught me the power of enduring faith—trusting that even in the darkest times, God has a plan.

Today, we are still being called to answer that same call. God is asking: ***Will you trust me?*** Will you walk by faith, even when the road is rough, and when everything around you seems contrary to what you expect? God has a plan for your life, and though the journey may be tough, He is faithful to bring you through.

In conclusion, the message of Romans 9-11 is not just about ***theology***; it's about the ***restoration*** of God's people. It's about the reconciliation of the northern and southern kingdoms, the return of the scattered Israelites through faith in the Messiah. And it's a reminder that salvation is not about heritage or works, but about faith in God's promises. ***Will you answer the call?***

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