



The

# ENJOY THE BIBLE

Quarterly

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Fourth Quarter 2000

## Questions and Answers

Our annual issue devoted to Questions and Answers. The following selections have been edited either to conserve space, ensure clarity, and/or remove any personal information.

### ROMANS 9:6-22

*Could you please explain to me the meaning of Romans 9:6-22 in regards to God's Sovereignty and Man's freewill?*

To be perfectly frank, my understanding is that this passage is not strictly dealing with the issue of God's Sovereignty and Man's freewill. In other words, this is not the issue that the passage is focusing upon. Rather it is setting forth corrective and proper doctrine regarding the reason behind why God has suspended His program and dealings with Israel following their stumbling at their Christ, and in doing so has turned to the Gentiles.

God's Sovereignty is indeed set forth by Paul, but in the sense of His sovereign right to suspend Israel's program. Likewise in the passage Paul also does cite the issue of election and the fact that it is based upon the issue of God's calling and not on the basis of one's works. However Paul does this because these two issues are involved in the overall doctrine that he is dealing with. But they are not the overall doctrine, per se.

Again the doctrine Paul is dealing with is the issue of the proper understanding and appreciation we are to have as to why God has suspended His program and dealings with Israel, and in connection with doing so has turned to the Gentiles.

A very simple and brief synopsis of my understanding of the passage goes like this: After setting forth and underscoring in 9:1-5 the reality of the fact that God has not fulfilled His program and purpose with Israel, (and also that Israel's present standing before God is not what it once was), in verse 6 Paul begins to anticipate and deal with a series of common misconceptions (along with questions) that we might have about this. Misconceptions and questions, for example, as to why God has done this, whether it is fair or right for Him to have done so, what has happened to Israel in view of it, and the like.

Now the first misconception we could have is that "the word of God hath taken none effect" in God's dealings with them. And this Paul responds to and deals with in verses 6-13.

As Paul sets forth and shows, though it may seem as though "the word of God hath taken none effect," this is not the case at all. Rather all along in His program with Israel God's word has been doing the very thing that God spoke about to Abraham when He said to him, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Hence God's word has been taking the very effect that God said that He wanted it to take. And as such throughout His time past dealings with His nation it has been calling out of Israel those who will be utilized by Him to fulfill His ultimate plan and purpose with Israel on this earth.

Therefore in view of this it is wrong for us to think that God has done what He has done with Israel following their stumbling at Christ because His word did not take any effect with them. Since this is clearly not the case at all, the explanation for what He has done lies elsewhere.

In verses 14-18 Paul anticipates the next misconception, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" That is, if the reason doesn't lie in God's word taking none effect with Israel, is God then being unrighteous in what He has done with Israel? But again, as Paul sets forth, that is not the case at all either.

Notwithstanding His covenanted program with Israel, God has the right to be merciful and gracious and compassionate to whomsoever He will, including Gentiles. And He can do this even in spite of Israel. That God has reserved Himself the right to do something like this is made evident by what He said to Moses back in Exodus 33.

But not only this, as God also demonstrated with Pharaoh when He was in the process of bringing Israel out of Egypt, He also has reserved to Himself the right to delay fulfilling His declared purpose with Israel in order to accomplish another purpose that He has. This is something that He did when He hardened Pharaoh and through doing so did not immediately bring Israel out of Egypt.

Hence God is not being unrighteous at all in what He has done with Israel. In fact the proper understanding and appreciation that we are to have for what He has done with

## From EBM To You

Dear Friends of EBM,

A couple of new projects are nearing completion. *The Enjoy The Bible Lending Library* is in the final stages of development. In the last Quarterly we told you of our desire to establish this additional means of making our materials available, especially for ones who are not able to purchase them. There is a lot involved in working out the logistics of a lending library so that it runs smoothly and efficiently. We hope to have everything up and running shortly. If you are interested in our Lending Library, let us know and we will send you some information as soon as it is ready.

Also nearing completion is our *Enjoy The Bible Ministries Gospel Tracts* project. There is always the need for good, sound gospel tracts. And we appreciate the work of other grace folks and ministries that help supply the need. We have likewise wanted to help out in this area, and with our gospel tract project we hope to do so.

*EBM Gospel Tracts* is a set of gospel tracts that is both sound and unique. Sound in the sense that each of the tracts is true and faithful to “the gospel of Christ” to us in this present dispensation, and is also clear and plain regarding the issue of justification in God’s sight being by grace through faith without works. However the set of tracts is also unique in the sense that each one is based exclusively upon the presentation of “the gospel of Christ” set forth to us in

Israel lies in these two very issues: i.e. the issue of His mercy and the issue of His hardening in view of His plan for accomplishing an additional purpose. It is because God wants to show mercy to the Gentiles that He has suspended His program and dealings with Israel. And it is because He has an additional purpose to accomplish in connection with showing mercy to us Gentiles, that He hardened Israel in response to their unbelief regarding Christ.

Now in view of this being the case, in verses 19-29 Paul deals with a further anticipated objection that might arise, which is based upon the amount of time that God is taking in delaying the fulfillment of His program with Israel. And as Paul deals with the objection, he also underscores the fact that Israel’s present unfavorable and dishonorable standing before God will eventually be reversed by Him. When that occurs and at that time God will purge Israel as He has both promised and prophesied about, leaving in that day only the righteous element through which He will fulfill His ultimate plan and purpose with them on this earth.

Again the anticipated objection as set forth in verse 19 is based particularly upon the issue of the amount of time God is taking in both leaving Israel in its present unfavorable and dishonorable standing before Him and in showing mercy to the Gentiles. As the objection states, “Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?” That is, why does God yet, or still, find fault (and not just go ahead and fulfill His covenanted purpose with Israel?) For who has resisted His will (and therefore prevented Him from successfully showing His mercy to the Gentiles, etc.?)

But as Paul declares, no one has the right to dispute with God about what He is doing, or how long He takes in doing it, etc. Howbeit regardless of how long it takes, God will reshape, so to speak, Israel back into the “vessel unto honour” that they used to be. And as Paul also underscores, He will then fulfill all of His promises regarding His work of purging them and leaving a righteous remnant of them through which He will fulfill His plan and purpose with them on this earth.

## ROMANS 4 and GALATIANS 3

*Romans 4 and Galatians 3 make it sound like the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant was in Jesus and those that had the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:13,16). Also, Galatians 3:6-9 makes it sound like the dispensation of Gentile Grace is part of the Abrahamic covenant, especially verses 8 & 9.*

Make sure that you are not confusing God’s dispensationally covenanted purpose with Abraham and his seed, (as set forth for example in Genesis 12:1-3a, which involves the issue of God making of him “a great nation” etc.), with the additional issue of God also establishing Abraham as “the father of all them that believe” when it comes to the issue of justification unto eternal life. These are two different things, as Paul shows.

God said that He would do more than one thing with Abraham when He initially spoke to him. But at that particular time God set forth this information to Abraham in one complete package, so to speak. However as God dealt with him afterwards, He divided that information into its two main components — the dispensationally covenanted purpose involving the “great nation” issue; and the faith-father-example for justification unto eternal life. In fact God not only divided the information into its two main components, but He also dealt with them in their proper order. (That is, justification unto eternal life first, and then the dispensational purpose. Hence Genesis 15:6 first, and then the covenant of circumcision for the dispensational purpose in Genesis 17.)

Now with respect to all of this, the issue that Paul is dealing with in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 is only the issue justification unto eternal life. Note how that Paul points this out in Romans 4:9-12. He makes it clear in these verses that in Romans 4 he is not dealing with what is involved in the circumcision of Abraham, but what God did with him when he was “in uncircumcision.” Paul eventually does deal with the circumcision issue, (that is the dispensational purpose regarding Abraham and his seed), in Romans 9-11. But that’s not the issue in either Romans 4 or Galatians 3. And again, we need to keep these two issues distinct and not confuse them.

With respect therefore to the issue of justification unto eternal life, God has established Abraham as the faith-father-example of this. And, (as Paul declares in Romans 4:9-12 in particular), Abraham is the God-ordained example for “all that believe” regardless of whether they are of the circumcision or not. This, therefore, includes us in this present dispensation of God’s grace to us Gentiles. Abraham, therefore, is our example when it comes to the truth of God justifying by grace through faith. And so Paul accordingly sets him forth as such in Romans 4, as he certifies to us the reality of the fact that we truly are justified by God unto eternal life freely by His grace when we simply place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our all-sufficient Savior.

Keep in mind that the dispensation of God’s grace to us Gentiles is not the same thing as the reality of God justifying unto eternal life by grace through faith alone. Or another way of putting it is this: Justification unto eternal life by grace through faith is not the revelation of the mystery that was committed to Paul.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking that justification unto eternal life being by grace through faith is something that is unique to this dispensation, or that it defines this present dispensation. For it isn’t unique to this dispensation at all and it doesn’t define it either. Rather, justification unto eternal life has always only been by God’s grace and it has always only been enacted by God’s Justice in response to faith alone. And Paul makes this abundantly clear especially in Romans 4 with both Abraham and David, as well as with his repeated quoting of Habakkuk 2:4.

Again, justification unto eternal life being by grace through faith is not the defining issue of this present dispensation. Instead this present “dispensation of God’s grace to us Gentiles” is just that; it is a “dispensation.” This means that it is the particular program, (or formulated plan to accomplish a specific end), that God now has in effect. But again, the issue of God justifying unto eternal life by grace through faith alone is not a “dispensation.” It is not a program of God. Instead it is simply the judicial reality of how a person can be saved from the debt and penalty of his sins, be justified in God’s sight, and as such be fit to be utilized by God in the particular program that He has in effect. Therefore the issue of God justifying unto eternal life by His grace through faith is an issue that transcends God’s dispensations or programs, and is an essential part of each of them.

Once again in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 Paul is certifying the reality that we ourselves in this present dispensation are justified unto eternal life by God’s grace through

faith alone. And as such the issue he is focusing upon when it comes to Abraham is the issue in God’s dealings with Abraham that have to do with God having established him “in uncircumcision” as the faith-father-example when it comes to the issue of justification unto eternal life. And this particular issue in God’s dealings with Abraham is separate and distinct from the issue of God’s dispensationally covenanted purpose with him “in circumcision.”

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### JOHN 4 and ACTS 8

*Why does the Lord forbid His 12 apostles to go to the Samaritans in Matthew 10, and yet He Himself deals with them in John 4? And what is going on with the Samaritans in Acts 8?*

Briefly put, the background to the Lord’s actions in John 4 is found primarily in the doctrine of Ezekiel 34 through 37, along with Hosea, Zechariah, and other places.

In these places God describes among other things the reversal of Israel’s second course of punishment spoken about in Leviticus 26. This particular course of punishment and chastening saw the breaking of the pride of Israel’s power by means of the division of the nation into two. The reversal of this situation would come to pass at the end of the fifth and final course of punishment, and with the establishment of the kingdom. And this is one of the things prophesied about, for example, in Ezekiel 34-37. In view of this, the prospect of the joining of “Judah and the children of Israel his companions” together with “Joseph and all the house of Israel his companions” is a part of the good news of the “gospel of the kingdom.” And as such it too needed to be understood and appreciated when the Lord was in Israel. It needed to be acknowledged when the climactic stage in Israel’s program had arrived, and when the “gospel of the kingdom” was being preached.

Hence it is for this reason in particular that the Lord stops where He does as related in John 4, when as it says, “he must needs go through Samaria” on His way to Galilee. (Notice that it is not without significance that the account points out that the Lord “left Judaea” and when in Samaria He comes to a city called Sychar, which is near to the parcel of ground that Jacob “gave to his son Joseph.” The issue of the clear citation regarding Judah and Joseph is not just coincidental.)

Now God’s program with Israel indeed calls for “Judah and the children of Israel his companions” to be dealt with first, just as is set forth in the prophets. This was also set forth by the Lord when He concluded the commencement stage of His ministry and then commissioned His apostles, (e.g. Matthew 10:1-7ff; Acts 1:8). However during the com-

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mencement stage of His ministry the Lord did something that fell within His unique province to do, and that was to confirm the particular promise made unto the fathers concerning the reversal of the division of the nation. And this He did by doing what is related in John 4. This is why He dealt with the Samaritans on this occasion in the commencement stage of His ministry, but when commissioning His apostles regarding their role for the remainder of the program forbid them to deal with Samaria until Jerusalem and Judaea had been dealt with first.

It was not the apostles' role to "confirm the promises made unto the fathers"; that was the Lord's job, so to speak. And the promise regarding what was set forth back in Ezekiel 34-37, for example, He confirmed in John 4 by stopping in Samaria, dealing with the woman at the well and those that came out from Sychar, and having the issue of Him being Christ made manifest to them.

Now concerning the Samaritans of Acts 8 — The issue of God having Philip, and then Peter and John, deal with the Samaritans as recorded in Acts 8 is highly significant. For it pertains to the issue of God making it evident that Israel's program was not continuing on as was expected following the conclusion of the events of Acts 1-7.

Acts 1-7 records things that transpired during the time of the extension of God's mercy and forbearance to Israel following their rejection of Christ and before the scheduled beginning of the Lord's day of purging and avenging wrath. As Psalm 110:1 stated, and as Peter declared in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, with the Lord having ascended back to the Father He would sit at His Father's right hand "until I make thy foes thy footstool." During that time while sitting, God would "give repentance to Israel." And as the record of Acts 1-7 sets forth, this is just what He did.

Now in connection with all of the testifying of the 12 apostles and the abundant signs that they performed, God gave three specific and distinct honest opportunities for Israel's leadership to repent concerning the reality of who Jesus of Nazareth is.

However as the account sets forth, Israel's leaders spurned each of the three opportu-

nities. And as Acts 7 sets forth, having spurned the third and most pointed of the three opportunities, God gave testimony to them through Stephen that the time of mercy and forbearance was over.

As Stephen both saw and announced, the Son of man was no longer sitting at the Father's right hand, but was now "standing." The time therefore had come for His foes to be made His footstool. The time had come for the Lord to begin to administer His day of purging and avenging wrath.

In accordance with the prophetic program and its schedule of events, what was scheduled to take place next was the issue of the Lord speaking unto Israel in His wrath and then beginning to "vex them in His sore displeasure" with the judgments of His day.

However as Acts 8 and following goes on to show, what was prophesied, scheduled, and expected to take place, did not begin to happen. The Lord did not begin to speak unto Israel in His wrath, nor did any of the judgments of His day begin to transpire. Instead completely unexpected things began to happen. Things that were clearly not in accordance with how Israel's program was expected to progress. Things, therefore, which began to indicate first and foremost that God's program with Israel was not continuing on as had been expected. And one of the first indications of this is what Acts 8 records regarding God dealing with the Samaritans.


Since the Samaritans were not scheduled to be dealt with until Jerusalem and all Judaea had been dealt with first, (and the completion of this would not be taking place until some time within the Lord's day), obviously something unusual was happening for God to have Philip preach Christ to "the city of Samaria" as related in Acts 8. That God was doing it could not be denied. But it also could not be denied that God was not doing what had been expected.


Now the reality of there being a number of unusual happenings occurring at this time is just what Acts 8, 9, 10 and following relate. And this, once again, is all designed to testify to the fact that God's program with Israel was not proceeding on as expected. Something was afoot.

## From EBM To You

(continued)

Romans 1:18-3:26. We will keep you posted as this project nears completion.

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Simply put, God for some reason began operating differently at the very time when the final installment in Israel's program was expected to begin. What He was doing and why He was doing it was not immediately made known. But that He was doing something unexpected was readily apparent, with the issue of the Samaritans being dealt with before their time being one of the first clear indicators of this.

Of course we now understand and appreciate what God was doing. God revealed exactly what He was doing and why He was doing it to Paul, the brand new apostle that He raised up at that time as recorded in Acts 9. And as we now know through Paul's epistles, Israel's program did not continue on as expected because God temporarily suspended it. And in connection with doing so, He brought in this present unprophesied dispensation of His grace for us Gentiles. A new dispensation for the creation of a "new creature," the church the body of Christ, for the purpose of fulfilling "the mystery of Christ" which God had kept hid in Himself since before the foundation of the world.

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#### ROMANS 16:7

*What does Paul mean by "in Christ before me" in Romans 16:7?*

What Paul says here can easily seem puzzling if we think the expression "in Christ" has to mean, or can only refer to, being in the "new creature," the church the body of Christ. But that is not what the expression has to mean. In fact, the expressions "in Christ" and "in the Lord/LORD" are used in God's program with Israel.

For example, in Isaiah 45:24-25 the expression "in the LORD" is used in connection with prophetically describing what redeemed Israelites will one day say regarding being justified in God's sight.

<sup>24</sup> Surely, shall *one* say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: *even* to him shall *men* come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.

<sup>25</sup> In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory. (Isaiah 45:24-25)

Notice also how that Peter ends his first epistle to the remnant of Israel saying,

<sup>14</sup> Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace *be* with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen. (I Peter 5:14)

Peter, therefore, recognizes that the members of the remnant of Israel are "in Christ Jesus."

These are just two examples, but they show that the expressions "in Christ" and "in the Lord" can be used in a way that does not refer to being in the body of Christ in this dispensation. In truth, the expression has a much more fundamental meaning, and one that is applicable to both of God's programs.

Simply put, the expression "in Christ" first and foremost refers to the issue of no longer being "in Adam." It refers to the new position and identity one has before God having become a beneficiary of Christ's redemptive work. And as such it is used in both of God's programs.

"In Adam" is the position and identity before God that all men have by nature, including the natural seed of Abraham. And as such all men by nature are unrighteous sinners and unholy in God's sight. They are under the debt and penalty of their sins and have as their lot the prospect of coming under the judgment of God for their sins. What men need is a change of identity.

And again this is something people need regardless of whether they are in Israel's program or in this present dispensation of God's grace. They need to be no longer identified with Adam, but rather they need to be identified with one who is perfectly righteous and perfectly holy in God's sight. And this of course is not only exactly what Christ is, but He is also the only one with whom such a righteous and holy identification can be had. And thanks be to God that just such an identification can be had; that men can actually have a change of identity and go from being

"in Adam" to being "in Christ." Redemption is what provides for just such a legal change of status or identity.

Briefly put, the one who functions as the Redeemer legally assumes the identity of the one he is redeeming in order to pay the price to release him from his helpless predicament. Upon successfully paying the price to release him from his debt, the one redeemed is then able to legally have applied to him the benefits and even the identity of his Redeemer.

And so when one becomes a beneficiary of Christ's redemptive work on the cross, he by being made the righteousness of God "in Christ" is justified unto eternal life and changes his identity from being a condemned sinner "in Adam" to being an at-one with God justified saint "in Christ."

Again, it is this most basic meaning to the expression "in Christ" that I am persuaded Paul has in mind in Romans 16:7 regarding Andronicus and Junia. — K. R. Blades

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# “rightly dividing the word of truth” II Timothy 2:15

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