

## Paul's Desire and Prayer

Written by Josh Winslett

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The 10th chapter of Romans is probably one of the most quoted chapters in the entire Bible. This chapter is often called the fourth step in the “Romans Road to salvation.” This portion of the epistle revolves around Paul's prayer for Israel. Many would interpret his prayer as a deep concern for the eternal well being of physical Israelites. But would Paul, who already declared God's sovereignty in salvation in the previous chapters, begin to contradict his own writings? Who then is Paul praying for? What deliverance is Paul desiring for them to have? What ramifications will ensue if Israel is not saved? These are questions that we hope to answer.

*“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” -Romans 10:1*

## Who is Israel?

This may seem strange to the reader to ask such a question. The reader may ask, *“Isn't the word Israel always in reference to the nation of Israel?”* Just performing a quick search of the word *“Jew*

” shows us that titles usually referencing the physical national of Israel can have different meaning.

### **Romans 2:29**

is a perfect example of this principle. Paul speaks of both physical and spiritual Jews. When identifying who the Bible is referencing it is always needful to consult the context of the surrounding verses.

Paul begins this specific context in **Romans 9:1**. In **Romans 9:3** Paul directs his attention toward his *“kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came* .” Though Paul's statement seems to be all inclusive, he further narrows his desired demographic. Paul begins this narrowing in verse 6. Consider the flow of the text as it describes

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the party for whom Paul was praying.

**Romans 9:6** – *Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:*

**Romans 9:7** – *Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*

**Romans 9:8** – *That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*

**Romans 9:9** – *For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.*

**Romans 9:10** – *And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;*

**Romans 9:11** – *(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)*

**Romans 9:12** – *It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.*

**Romans 9:13** – *As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*

**Romans 9:14** – *What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*

**Romans 9:15** – *For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

**Romans 9:16** – *So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

Paul first starts in verse **6** by stating, “*they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.*” Basically, being a physical Jew does not insure that one is a Spiritual Jew. He then continues through verse

**16**

showing that it is not by a person's physical lineage that makes them a spiritual Israelite, it is by election. The full context leaves no doubt that Paul is not talking about the entire nation of Israel, but instead, he is speaking of those spiritual Israelites among the physical nation of Israel.

Furthermore, the description given of those Israelites in chapters **10** and **11** is far from that of an unregenerate.

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- Chapter **10** verse **2** describes them as having a “*zeal of God.*” The word “*of*” is a genitive showing where something proceeds from. If these people had a zeal of God then that means they had a zeal that proceeded from God. Consider this to be equivalent to the phrase, man of God. If a person is of God then they are from God. I would add that this is different than just having a zeal towards God, like many of the unregenerate wicked Pharisees. They persecuted the disciples, and didn't vitally know God or Christ. Only a person that is born of the Spirit of God has a true spiritual zeal, a zeal of God.

- If I described a person to you who had the word of faith in both their heart and mouth, what would be your first impressions of that person? You would undoubtedly believe them to be God's child. This is the exact description we get in chapter 10 verse 8. Faith is a fruit of God's work of regeneration ( **Galatians 5:22**). The gift of faith is given to all who have been regenerated ( **Ephesians 2:8, Romans 12:3**). If a person has the gift of faith in their heart and mouth then it is certain that God has already done a work on their soul.

- These specific Jews were blinded (**Romans 11:25**). This then implies that they had eyes that could see. The unregenerate do not have to be blinded by God. They are already blinded in their natural depraved state.

- Paul states that all of Israel in context, spiritual Israel, will be saved and have their sins taken away ( **Romans 11:26-27**). Would this description fit that of the unsaved? Certainly not.

- Though they are enemies of the gospel, they are still beloved as touching election (**Romans 11:28**). Paul's definition of election has been consistent throughout this epistle. These Jews for which he was praying were God's children.

Again, who is Israel? From viewing the context, Israel in the verse in question is the children of God among the physical nation of Israel.

## Praying for Salvation?

We have already seen that those for whom Paul prayed were God's elect children. It would therefore be illogical for the salvation under consideration to be the new birth. Furthermore, Paul had previously outlined, in **Romans 8:28-30**, the true Romans Road to salvation. This road exemplifies God's sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners.

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*“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. ” -Romans 8:28-30*

It would be inconsistent for Paul to proclaim God's sovereignty in salvation in chapters **8-9** and then turn around to promote some form of a chance based salvation in chapter

**10**

. Furthermore, Paul often described humans in their natural condition as dead and unable to understand, or respond to the gospel in this depraved state apart from God first acting upon them in regeneration. God is not the author of confusion. If we find contradictions in the Bible, then it is contradictions in our interpretive leans and not God's holy word. Throughout

**Romans 9-11**

Paul references multiple Old Testament passages. Let's take most of the references in chapters **9-11**

, bulk them together by context and topic, and then see what they are referencing. We then can try to understand what Paul was desiring.

**Romans 9:25** – Hos. 2:23

**Romans 9:26** – Hos. 1:10

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God's blessings are sent to the Gentiles. Though Israel is a vast nation, the Gentiles will now be identi

Romans 9:27 – Isa. 10:22

Romans 9:29 – Isa. 1:9

Though Israel is a large nation, only a remainder shall return from captivity. God will destroy most of Is

Romans 9:33 – Isa. 8:14, 28:16:

A stumbling stone, Christ, was before them, and all those who believed on him would not be disgraced

Romans 10:5 – Lev. 18:5

There is only bondage to the law, under the law.

Romans 10:6-7 – Deu. 30:12,13

Romans 10:8 – Deu. 30:14

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Israel should no longer look for the Messiah to come. Faith directs us to no longer look, but instead, to

Romans 10:11 – Isa. 28:16

Romans 10:13 – Joel 2:32

All who believed on Jesus would not be disgraced. All, Jew or Gentile, that called upon the Lord would

Romans 10:15 – Isa. 52:7

Those that published this news of salvation are blessed.

Romans 10:16 – Isa. 53:1

Romans 10:18 – Ps. 19:4

The Jews, in spite of Christ's miracles, were confounded by his comeliness. Therefore all of Israel did

Romans 10:19 – Deu. 32:21

Romans 10:20 – Isa. 65:1

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Romans 10:21 – Isa. 65:2

Israel provoked God by disobedience. God provoked Israel to jealousy by the Gentiles. The Gentiles v

Romans 11:2 – Ps. 94:14

Romans 11:3-4 – 1 Kings 19:10-18

God has not completely destroyed the nation of Israel. Paul gives the example of Elijah being reminded

Romans 11:8 – Isa. 29:10

Romans 11:9 – Ps. 69:22,23

God had blinded all but the remainder. What was meant as the greatest blessing, the coming of the M

Romans 11:26 – Isa. 59:20,21

Romans 11:27 – Isa. 27:9

In spite of the physical nation of Israel being cut off, God does in fact save all of spiritual Israel. God d

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There are Two central points to all of these Old Testament references.

1. The nation of Israel in general would be cut off due to disobedience, and rejection of the Messiah.
2. The gentiles, who were once ignorant of the true God of Israel, would now have the blessings that were formerly possessed by Israel.

How does this then apply to Paul's prayer in **Romans 10:1**? Because of the disobedience and rejection of the Messiah, God pronounced judgment upon the nation of Israel. This judgment involved more than just the loss of knowledge and temporal blessings as his physical nation. This judgment would end with the final destruction of Israel, and siege of Jerusalem, in 70AD under the Roman army. What would you do if you knew that your home country would be destroyed in less than 15 years? If you knew that your culture and very way of life would be destroyed? If you knew that most of your family wouldn't survive? I trust that you would pray for them. This is the burden that Paul had. He was very well aware of God's coming judgment. He was well aware that Jerusalem would be destroyed, in what Christ would call a “*great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be*.” (

**Matthew 24:21**

) Paul's prayer was that the children of God among national Israel would be delivered, or saved, from the coming destruction of their nation.

## Objections Answered

There could be objections raised by citing such passages as Romans 9:33; 10:9,10,11, and 13. Let's now consider these verses in light of the context.

**Romans 9:33** – *As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*

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**Romans 10:9** – *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

**Romans 10:10** – *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

**Romans 10:11** – *For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*

**Romans 10:13** – *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

### Glaring Emphasis

All of these verses speak concerning being saved by the confession of, belief in, and the calling on of Jesus Christ. But again, what is the salvation under consideration? These verses, specifically **Romans 10:13**, are the hallmark of alter call and duty faith preaching. Interestingly enough,

**Joel 2:32**, what **Romans 10:13** is quoting, is only found one other time in the New Testament. If this is the hallmark of the gospel message then why isn't it used more frequent than that. The Bible uses

*predestinate*

and

*predestinated*

twice each. It uses some variation of the word

*elect*

22 times in reference to God's children. This is also true for words like

*chosen*

,

*adopted*

, etc. God's sovereignty is often called subsidiary, and only for advanced believers. I would like the reader to consider this point. Where is the biblical emphasis in the Bible as it relates to salvation, God or man? The answer is unequivocally,

**God**

. This is not to say that confession and repentance are not important. Both bring great peace to the Child of God and are the greatest evidence of the prior work of God in regeneration. Yes, if something is in God's word then it is certainly important, regardless of times used or recited. But the point is still glaring.

### Peter's Admonition

The other time that **Joel 2:32** is used is in **Acts 2:21**. The apostle Peter quotes this same passage on the day of Pentecost. Peter was calling on his Jewish audience to repent and save

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themselves from that untoward generation. This exhortation is certainly true throughout all ages, but it had greater weight and importance to the immediate hearers. This apocalyptic type preaching was inconspicuously absent from evangelistic efforts to the Gentiles. The message changed from “

*save yourselves*” to “*you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent*.” (

**Acts 2:40**

and

**Acts 13:26**

) Why does this happen? Why is there a sudden shift in the message of Christ? Certainly all messages revolved solely around Christ, but why the change from apocalyptic to comfort? This shift is due to the audience present. The Jews had just crucified the Messiah. God sent prophets, types, shadows, and servants, but the Jews still rejected the Messiah. (

**Luke 20:10-16**

) Their entire way of life would be destroyed because of this rejection. Yet the “*casting away of them be the reconciling of the world*.” (

**Romans 11:15**

) Though the Jews were being broken off and cast away, the Gentiles would benefit from their fall. The message was destruction to the Jews, but peace to the Gentiles. This is why Christ sent Paul to “

*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me*.” (

**Acts 26:18**

) Paul was not their Savior, Christ was their Savior. But Paul was sent to the people who feared God and worked righteousness (

**Acts 10:35**

,  
**13:26**

), to deliver them from the darkness of paganism. The Gentiles were in darkness under the power of Satan, Paul would deliver them from them from these bonds by preaching the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Something that was previously not attainable by Gentiles. The powerful knowledge of salvation was “

*to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*.” (

**Romans 1:16**

)

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One may ask, how are they saving themselves from “*this untoward generation?*” Repenting and being baptized in

**Acts 2:38**

represented more than just a one time outward expression of faith, as it should for us also. This is also true for calling and believing on Christ. These expressions of faith represent a changed lifestyle revolving around Christ and his teachings. The destruction of Jerusalem was also taught by Christ in many passages. One of the many places that Christ warned about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was in

**Matthew 24**

. Christ's discourse does end in chapter

**25**

with the end of the world and general judgment, but most of the warnings given in chapter

**24**

are there for the immediate hearers. I say most, and not all, because there are parts in

**Matthew 24**

that deal with his second coming. Even most apocalyptic scenes in scripture are a microcosm of end times. But most of these admonitions were given for the benefit of the immediate hearers.

How then were the Jews in

**Acts 2**

to save themselves from that untoward generation? He warned against the coming of false prophets and those claiming to be Christ (

**Matthew 24:4-5**

). He warned them to endure in this teachings (

**Matthew 24:13**

). He warned to flee and never look back (

**Matthew 24:17-18**

). He gave cautions concerning traveling hindrances (

**Matthew 24:19-21**

). Certainly some of these admonitions can be applied to disciples in 2015 as we await Satan being loosed, scoffers coming, a falling away, a departing from the faith, and the man of sin being revealed. But again, it is easy to see how these admonitions were for the immediate hearers and how they could escape Titus and the Roman army. Truly, there was a deliverance from that untoward generation.

### Consider the Reference

This interpretation of **Acts 2:21** and **Romans 10:13** also fits the context of the text that both are quoting, **Joel 2:32**.

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Consider this excerpt from John Gill's commentary on **Joel 2:32**, "*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered, Or "saved", as in Ac 2:21; from those miseries and calamities before described, from the impending ruin and destruction of the city; and so it was, that those that believed in Christ, that were in the city, had an intimation of it beforehand, and removed from thence to a place called Pella<sup>1</sup>, and so escaped being involved in the common calamity: though this also may be understood of a spiritual deliverance and salvation by Christ, from sin, Satan, and the world, and from the second death, and wrath to come, and out of the hands of every enemy; which such share in who call on the name of the Lord, pray to him for grace and mercy, life and salvation, through Christ; that have a spiritual knowledge of God in Christ, real and sincere desires after him, and trust and confidence in him, which this phrase supposes; and which also includes the whole worship of God, internal and external, performed in a spiritual and evangelical manner; see Ro 10:13;*"

Most, when reading the word saved, will immediately interpret it as referring to regeneration, without even considering the context. In both instances where **Joel 2:32** is cross referenced by Peter and Paul, it is being used to address Jews and judgment that was specific for Israel. It would not make any logical sense then to have the original context changed from that of **Joel 2:32**

. The literal, and macro, fulfillment dictates the interpretation. Joel was a prophet that was sent to Israel to warn of God's coming judgment. He would warn of future devastation. He would reference "

*the day of the Lord*

" 4 times in his prophecies. This day was a day of visitation and punishment. Again, Israel was being warned of a coming judgment and anyone who followed the teaching of the Lord could avoid this devastation.

## Paul Plays as a Devil's Advocate

The main theme of **Romans 9-10** is often lost by most. Paul had a specific agenda in mind while writing these chapters that led up to chapter 11. Elder

Michael Gowens writes, "

*The entire epistle of the Romans is written in a "dialectical" literary style. Dialectic is the practice of debating oneself, a popular device among authors. If a writer wanted to expose the fallacy of a certain position, for example, he might pretend to hold a debate between two contrary*

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*positions. He would first advance the contrary position and then offer counter arguments to disprove each point. That Paul employs the device of dialectal rhetoric in Ro 10 is clear from his use of the phrase "But I say" in Ro 10:18 and Ro 10:19 (see the same formula in Ro 6:1,15; 7:13; 8:31-39; 9:14,19; 11:1).*

In other words, Paul was acting as a devil's advocate to further prove that God was just in his condemnation of Israel. In reference to Romans 10:14 and whether or not there is no salvation in heaven where there are no preachers to preach, Elder R.H. Pittman wrote, "*No. Paul was defending the preaching of the gospel, to the Gentiles. And remember, there is a gospel faith - a belief of gospel truths, separate and distinct from the faith of God's elect.*"

" Paul is using, what I call, the vortex effect. He is taking a wide variety of Old Testament verses, and then bringing them to a central axis to prove one main point. Before discussing the cutting off of Israel in chapter

**11**

, Paul ends chapter

**10**

by vindicating God for judging Israel. Though Paul desired for his kinsmen not to be destroyed, he knew that this was a just end to their perpetual disobedience. The argument given in verses

**14**

and

**15**

of chapter

**10**

would then be the contrary view of Paul, and not a promotion of duty faith. It would be someone giving excuse for Israel's unbelief and future destruction. Paul's answer? "

*But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.*

" (

**Romans 10:18**

)

Let's set up the argument in easy to understand bullet points.

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**Romans 10:1** – Paul's desire and prayer.

**Romans 10:2-3** – Israel's sad condition.

**Romans 10:4** – Sad condition is lifted through belief in the Messiah.

**Romans 10:5** – Bondage of the law.

**Romans 10:6-8** – Israel should no longer look for the Messiah to come. Faith directs us to no longer look, but instead, to rest on him who has already come. Looking for the Messiah to come is equivalent to asking Jesus to completely repeat all of his earthly ministry and finished atonement work. Furthermore, the ability to recognize Christ is in them and before them.

**Romans 10:9-13** – Those that confess and believe, Jew or Greek, will not be ashamed, but instead will be saved.

Beginning of dialectical writing style.

**Romans 10:14-15** – The proverbial detractor of Paul would claim that the Jews just do not know and are not deserving of condemnation. They claim that preachers should be sent so that they could know.

**Romans 10:16** – Paul answers. They have heard and DIDN'T obey.

Romans 10:17 – The detractor's argument again continues. But faith comes by hearing, and hearing through preachers. We must then send preachers to all of Israel.

**Romans 10:18** – Paul answers. They have ALL heard.

**Romans 10:19** – Paul answers. Israel did know.

**Romans 10:20** – Paul answers. Because of the Jews disobedience, the kingdom is given to the Gentiles.

**Romans 10:21** – Paul answers with final vindication. God was long-suffering with Israel's disobedience. They are without excuse.

What is the theme of these chapters? God is just. As Paul proved, God is certainly just in destroying Israel. No matter how often man may question God in unbelief of his truth, God always rises justified.

*“For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged .” -Romans 3:3-4*

### Final thoughts

Paul found comfort in knowing that there would be a remainder that survived the coming desolation. But he still suffered great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart. His heart, though knowing God is just, was mixed with compassion toward his kinsmen. It is very easy to let bitterness destroy our joy as we view the current trends of carnal Christians. Christians who either are wrapped up into false doctrine, or just don't care. We should avoid this hardness of heart, and adopt this Pauline primitive attitude.

Finally, God is long-suffering but no child of God, or country, is exempt from his chastisement. Paul would later write, "*Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee* ." (**Romans 11:20-21**) This warning echos through human history. For almost 2000 years the nation of Israel has been cut off and "*trodden down by the Gentiles* ." (

#### **Luke 21:24**

) As church history has progressed, where there was once churches, there are not. Where the truth was once proclaimed, it is silent. Dear reader, God will always have a witness on this earth, but it is not guaranteed to any location. Take heed to this example. For the sake of your kinsmen and future generations, take heed.

Let's now all stand in awe of God's mercy and say with Paul, "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* " **-Romans 11:33**