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The Eight Blessings Given to the People of Israel

A brief Biblical reflection on Romans 9:4-5

By Alex Jacob



Adoption as Sons



Divine Glory



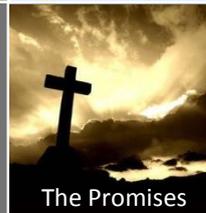
The Covenants



The Law



Temple Worship



The Promises



The Patriarchs



Humanity of Jesus

The Text.ⁱ

Romans 9:4-5.

...Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Thiers are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. (*NIV*)

...They were made God's children, the *Sh'kkinah* has been with them, the covenants are theirs, likewise the giving of the Torah, the Temple service and the promises; the Patriarchs are theirs; and from them, as far as his physical descent is concerned, came the Messiah, who is over all. Praised be *ADONAI* for ever! Amen. (*CJB*)

...to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. (*NKJV*)

...whose are the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the Law-giving, and the service, and the promises; whose are the fathers; and of whom is the Christ according to flesh. He being God over all, blessed forever, Amen. (*Jay P Green- Literal translation- The Interlinear Greek New Testament*)

They're my family. I grew up with them. They had everything going for them--family, glory, covenants, revelation, worship, promises, to say nothing of being the race that produced the Messiah, the Christ, who is God over everything, always. Oh yes! (*The Message*)

They are the people of Israel, God's chosen children. They have seen the glory of God, and they have the agreements that God made between himself and his people. God gave them the law of Moses and the right way of worship and his promises. They are the descendents of our great ancestors, and they are the earthly family into which Christ was born, who is God over all. Praise him forever! Amen. (*NCV*)

...They were made God's special children and as such they know God's glory, the covenants, the gift of Torah, the worship of God and the promises; the fathers of the faith are theirs as well, and from them came, in terms of human ancestry, the Messiah, who is God- forever to be praised. Amen. (*My own translation*)

1) Introduction

In 2006, I wrote an Olive Press Paper with the title, *Romans 9:1-5 – Exploring a key Biblical text*. The main focus of that paper was to give a general introduction to the immediate context of Romans 9:1-5 and then to explore the wider context of Romans 9-11. Also, there was a detailed discussion within the paper about the appropriate translation/interpretation of the praise doxology (Romans 9:5) and the wider Christological debate which relates to it. I do not wish to repeat the teaching from the 2006 paper, but rather, I want to focus in this new paper on the ‘eight blessings/privileges’ listed in Romans 9:4-5. These blessings were only mentioned very briefly in my 2006 paper.

2) Preparing The Ground, How To Read A Biblical Text

I have sought your face with all my heart. (Psalm 119:58)

In terms of understanding and applying any Biblical text in a spiritually reflective and faithful way, I believe that there are certain steps which need to be taken by the reader/hearer. My starting point is based on the belief that the meaning of any Biblical text is not hidden away in some obscure secret zone, which results in a text only being understandable by (or revealed to) a select few, who have special interpretive skills or who are part of an elect group.ⁱⁱ I believe that God, in His revelation through Scripture, desires to make the Scriptures clear (the perspicacity of Scripture) and the truths they contain consistent to any sincere reader/hearer of the text through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Equally, God does not make the truths of His Word known to the casual observer, or the proud self-centred student, but God does make His Word known to the humble sincere seeker. Therefore, the first step in gaining a true understanding of any Biblical text is to examine our life and our motivation for gaining understanding and to try and develop a sincere heartfelt desire to gain Godly understanding.

***“May my cry come before You O Lord; give me understanding according to Your word.”
(Psalm 119:169)***

The second step is to set time and space aside to read the text carefully and prayerfully. As we mull the text over in our minds, we ask for God’s help in engaging with and understanding the text. A prayer along the lines of the following can be helpful; “Lord help me to understand Your Word, set me free from a false worldview or rash insights but rather renew my mind and deepen my capacity to receive Your truth by the gentle work of Your Holy Spirit.”

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

The third step is to invest time in studying the text. A good study of a text begins with assessing the grammatical, historical and textual context of a text. A text should be interpreted initially by its most plain meaning. Words should be interpreted consistently in the same context. A word can have a number of meanings, but only one true meaning in each case in terms of the author's intent. Also the first time a word or idea is introduced it will bring with it certain information which should help to guide in regards to the future understanding of other usage (principle of first use) of the word. Equally, a text may have many useful applications, but I think it can only have one central meaning based on the author's intent. In this initial step of study one should also take into account literary genres, symbolism (figurative and non-figurative symbolism) and figures of speech. Also in recognising prophetic texts, one must see that a prophecy can have an immediate historical context, a later historical context, or even yet-to-be fulfilled in a future context. Also prophecies may be conditional or unconditional, specific or general in their application.

From this good beginning within the area of study, it is important to go on to explore historical questions based upon the text. For example, who is the author, when was it written, to whom was it written and for what purpose? In attempting to answer these questions, we need to draw on the insights of various commentators, theologians and scholars. As we weigh up their insights it seems to me that one can place such ideas on a scale which ranges from the impossible, to the possible, on to the probable and ending with the definite. Also we begin to see how a particular idea or theme fits in with other Biblical texts (the principle of correlation) written by the same author and then on to texts from other sources. In this way, I believe one sees how Scripture interprets, clarifies and affirms Scripture. There is an old adage, which I find helpful, namely, "The best commentary on Scripture is Scripture."

***"When you come together, everyone has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church."
(1 Corinthians 14:26)***

The fourth step is to share and discuss the fruits of our study with others. I believe group Bible studies are very important as we learn from and challenge each other's interpretation and understanding. It is often only in a group context that we discover the complexity of a text, or perhaps the different layers of understanding within a text. I think it is especially helpful when such study groups are made up of Christians from different backgrounds, or different Church traditions and who also have a range of life experiences. We learn as we listen and engage with each other. We make space to discern the authenticity of the Holy Spirit's work in and through each other. We also recognise and value those who have particular teaching gifts within the Church and who reflect Christ-like pastoral wisdom.

***"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."
(James 1:22)***

The fifth step is to apply the text to our lives. Study is not meant to be an end in itself, but rather we study in order to revere God, to worship and to serve obediently and effectively. Sometimes the application of a text is very straightforward. It may not be easy to apply, but nevertheless it is clear. At other times with other texts it is not clear how we apply such understanding, but we store away our insight. Maybe in the future the application of that insight may become clear or the understanding from that text may help in interpreting and applying other texts.

“The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10)

The sixth and final step is to reflect upon how we (and others) have applied a textual understanding. Maybe with experience and the promptings of the Spirit, we feel the text has been misunderstood in some way or perhaps misused or even abused. Maybe a new historical, cultural or personal context means that we seek to apply the text in a different way? As we reflect upon these six steps, we also know that we never come to the end of learning from and engaging with a Biblical text. The Lord always has more light to give to us, and to bring to His revealed Word. Therefore, the six steps of interpretation do not take us on a linear journey to a single goal of personal insight, but rather along a deepening circle of lifelong discipleship.

3) The Context Of The Eight Blessings

Paul is motivated by his deep love for Jesus and for his own people, Israel. These two sources of Paul’s love are complimentary and symbiotic. Despite attempts from some Bible commentatorsⁱⁱⁱ to alienate Paul from his Jewish identity and to undermine his love for Israel, it is clear from this text that what Paul states flows from his genuine zeal for God and his ongoing love for and identity with his people, the people of Israel.

Paul identifies, through this personal lament, with the people of Israel in the strongest possible way. I understand that the ‘people of Israel’ here refers to all Jewish people. Both those Jewish people who like Paul, have embraced Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and those of Israel, who are still in unbelief in regards to the person and work of Jesus. Although the immediate context of Paul’s lament (as rightly pointed out by David Stern)^{iv} is the unbelief of Israel, the term Israel is, I believe (in contrast to the view promoted by David Stern) referring not just to Jewish people, who have not (yet) come to trust in Jesus, but to all Jewish people.

The term ‘people of Israel’ or ‘Israelite’ is used by Paul as a self-defining term for all Jewish people. Please note that Paul does not say that “they were Israelites” but “who are Israelites.” The tense is important as Paul uses the name Israel (literally meaning “he who strives with God”), which was first given to Jacob by God (Genesis 32:29), as his preferred contemporary term for Jewish people. The term also connotes the special position with

regard to God's election of the Jewish people. Therefore, I believe Paul deliberately uses the term 'Israel/Israelite' in Romans 9-11, rather than the term 'Jew' (which Paul frequently used earlier in Romans 1-8). This is because the term 'people of Israel/ Israelite' is a religiously important and an honorific title in the context of the history of (and the future outworking of) salvation. This outworking of this 'history of salvation' is the prime theme of Romans 9-11. While in Romans 1-8, Paul was mainly looking at Jewish people from the perspective of their engagement with the wider non-Jewish (Gentile) world, hence the use of the term 'Jew', which appears to be, for Paul, the more appropriate term with regard to the specific context.

Paul's love and loyalty to Israel leads him to declare his willingness, if this were possible,^v to be cut off from the Messiah, if in some way this would help his people. This willingness has strong echoes with Moses (Exodus 32:30-3), and on a different level, with the reconciling ministry of Jesus, who was in Paul's own words cut off and cursed (becoming sin) through his atoning sacrificial death on behalf of all people (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The structure of verses 4 and 5 is somewhat awkwardly structured in terms of the arrangement in most English translations,^{vi} for the term 'people of Israel/Israelites', which marks the start of verse 4, appears to stand separately from the following eight blessings referring to Israel's special position as the people of God. One could argue that the term 'people of Israel' should be the first item in the list of nine blessings, rather than seeing the eight blessings as referring back to the separate term 'people of Israel'. However, regardless of the precise structural arrangements of the verses, what remains clear is what Paul sees as the eight blessings/privileges which belong to (or flow from) the people of Israel which are far-ranging and encompassing the core components of salvation history. Or as Karl Barth stated,

These privileges include everything on which the faith of the Church is based, from which it draws sustenance.^{vii}

It is possible that Paul, in outlining these blessings / privileges in Romans 9:4-5, is seeking to add to the blessing belonging to Israel, which he has already mentioned in Romans 3:2. In addition to this, I suggest Paul is also drawing from and reflecting on the rabbinical midrash^{viii} of Genesis 1:4. This midrash states that there were six blessings contemplated by God before the creation of the earth, namely; the gift of Torah (Proverbs 8:22), the Throne of God (Psalm 93:2), the Patriarchs (Hosea 9:10), Israel (Psalm 74:2), the Temple (Jeremiah 17:12) and the Messiah (Micah 5:2). This midrash clearly has strong echoes with Paul's list of the eight blessings which he outlines here in Romans 9.

Blessing One: The Adoption as Sons

The use of the term translated 'adoption' is unusual, for it appears nowhere else in the Septuagint (or as far as I am aware, in any rabbinical writings of around the same period). I understand that this term highlights the emphasis on the election of Israel. I think Paul wants to show that election is to do with God's choice, hence the focus on adoptive rather than 'natural' sonship. This sense of choice is developed further in Romans with the teaching about the promise of election being through the line of Isaac (Romans 9:6-10) and not Ishmael.^{ix} The line of Isaac in this context is linked to a spiritual promise rather than a 'natural' inheritance. Also with the focus on the line of Isaac, there is for Paul, some degree of a redefining of Israel taking place, hence; "...for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Romans 9:6).

This adoptive focus however does not contradict the explicit statements in key texts such as, Exodus 4:22, Isaiah 43:6 and Hosea 1:10 in which the emphasis appears to be on Israel's 'natural sonship' and physical ancestry (Romans 1:3). The key is that in all contexts, for Israel, the continuing reality of being God's children and knowing the Fatherly care of God is consistently the outworking of God's grace.

I think it is also helpful here to see that the term 'sonship/adoption' within Scripture is used in three main ways. Firstly, it refers to the blessing of Israel. This is the starting point of the long history of Israel as God's people and this is why, for Paul, it heads the list of the eight blessings. Secondly, the same term is used four times by Paul elsewhere in the New Testament^x to refer primarily to Gentile inclusion within God's people and salvation purposes. The idea and practice of adoption was well known in the classical Roman world. Within this context adoptive sons received the full rights and privileges (including inheritance rights) of natural sons. However, Paul is at pains to stress those Gentile believers should not think that their adoption has nullified or undermined the original adoption of the people of Israel as God's children. Thirdly, the term is used to refer to Jesus, Who is God's only Son through His eternal nature/deity.

Blessing Two: The Divine Glory

This refers to the glorious presence of God (the *Sh'kkinah*) being with the people of Israel. TC Vriezen^{xi} calls it, "*the visible aspect of the invisible God*". The prime Scriptural context for this (as was the case with the first blessing of adoption / sonship) is the Exodus event. Here, Scripture tells of the fire and the smoke symbolising God's presence with His people during the Exodus journey. Later this same presence of God dwells in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:36-38) and fills the Temple (2 Chronicles 7:1) and is encountered by the prophets (1 Kings 19:9-18, Ezekiel 1:28). Throughout Scripture there is the wonderful declaration of God's

presence, His imminence, His closeness with His people, yet never is there any sense of the loss of God's transcendence and His divine 'otherness'. This is a very important balance in our Biblical understanding of God's nature (and character) namely to celebrate His closeness, yet to also revere His divine 'otherness.' The errors of seeing God as a remote, impersonal and removed creative force^{xii} on the one side, or as an implicit part of the created order on the other (as is the case in aspects of pantheism or polytheism) are clearly ruled out by the revelation of God within Scripture.

It is this very presence of God (His glory) which is the key to true spiritual life. For example, Moses is assured in his ministry by the Lord's promise that; *"My presence will go with you..."* (Exodus 33:14). Equally, the same promise is given to the Prophets throughout Israel's history. For example, Haggai is assured of God's ongoing presence / glory with His people as he seeks to build the new Temple (Haggai 2). For believers in Jesus, we also know of the prayer made by Jesus for His disciples, *"Father, I want those you have given to me to be with you where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world."* (John 17:24).

For Paul reflecting on the divine glory, which has connections with the transfiguration of the Lord (see, for example, Mark 9:2-10) during His earthly ministry and the subsequent glory of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:7- 4:6). In all of this, the reality for God's people throughout history is that a relationship with God, as His children, is always more than simple obedience to His Torah (although such obedient action is important). It is knowing and moving in the flow of His presence and yielding joyfully to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Also, for Paul, the glory of God is something which provides a connecting thread throughout the letter to Rome. This glory can be lost (Romans 1:23; 3:23) in the individual and corporate 'sea of sin', yet it remains the goal of godly hope and action (Romans 2:7-10). This goal is made achievable in Paul's teaching, through the death and glorious resurrection of Jesus as Lord (Romans 5:2 and 6:4).

Blessing Three: The Covenants

The plural term 'covenants' is also somewhat unusual, with the singular term being much more in use in both the Old and New Testaments. The use of the plural here points to the range of Biblical covenants, which includes the covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:30-36). This New Covenant is given to the house of Israel and the house of Judah and inaugurated in Paul's understanding through the person and work of Jesus.

The point Paul is making here, I suggest, is that the New Covenant is both the fulfilment and continuation of God's purposes. The New Covenant, as with the previous covenants beginning with Abraham, are all made with the people of Israel,^{xiii} yet the New Covenant

extends the covenantal blessing and status to include all believing Gentiles. This extension or enlargement is the climax of the promise made in Abraham, namely “...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:3). The covenantal relationship is fully open to Gentile believers, but Paul never states that this covenant **belongs** to them, instead by God’s grace they have a share in what belongs to Israel. This understanding is developed more fully by Paul in Romans 11:18.

Blessing Four: The Receiving of the Law

I think there are two elements within this fourth blessing. Firstly, the receiving of the law, which I understand refers primarily to the law given in the context of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai. While some interpreters point to the law in the context of the law of the Spirit (Romans 8:2), or the general action of giving laws for social governance, the focus here is the Law of Moses. It is clear from this blessing that, for Paul, the Law of Moses (*Torah*) is divinely given and contains God’s good purposes for all Israel. There is no sense within this context of any negative view of Torah, but rather the Torah is a gift from God which Gentile believers can also enjoy and share in. This view therefore should help us in our interpretation of Romans 10:4 and I suggest it does indeed help us in seeing the term ‘end’ (*telos*) not as an end, in terms of a termination or cessation, but rather in the sense of achieving a goal or a purpose.^{xiv} The correct attitude towards and use (or abuse) of Torah for believers today (especially Jewish believers in Jesus, but also in some contexts for Gentile Believers as well) is of course a major issue in terms of the relationship between the emerging Messianic Jewish movement and the wider Church community.^{xv}

Secondly, there is the very act of the giving and receiving of the Torah. This act is seen by Paul as the formative act within the Exodus, which shaped the destiny of the people of Israel. Here in this momentous act, God met with Moses and gave the Torah in a way which meant the Eternal and the Divine entered into the temporal and human. Such an act points to another future momentous act, namely the incarnation of the Messiah, where, “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*” (John 1:14).

Blessing Five: “The Temple Worship”

Here, I suggest that Paul is referring primarily to the Temple services and sacrifices; however I think it is legitimate to widen the meaning to include the wider expressions of Jewish religious life, such as the keeping of the Sabbath, prayer, the daily reading of Scripture and the reciting of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4) etc. All of these religious actions are rooted in genuine worship of the one true God. Also the Temple worship, for Paul, points to the

necessity and the sufficiency of the once-and-for-all offering of the Messiah Himself (Hebrews 9 and Romans 5).

Blessing Six: “The Promises”

The promises are those relating to the big picture of God’s purposes of salvation and the ultimate victory of His Kingdom through the Messiah. However, I think they also have for Paul, a more immediate context, namely the promises given to Abraham (Genesis 12:7, 13:14, 17:4-8 and 22:16-18), which are then repeated to Isaac, Jacob and the sons of Jacob.

It is important to explore here the argument outlined by Paul in Galatians 3 and 4 (and perhaps to a lesser extent in Romans 4:13-22), in which the law is viewed in a negative context of slavery to sin and of a fallen Jerusalem. This view of the law is then contrasted with a positive view of the promises, which seem to belong to a true freedom of the Spirit and a future heavenly renewed Jerusalem. However, it is important as always in interpreting Scripture to see the context. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is not criticising the law in itself, but rather the misuse of the law (by some zealous Judaisers) to undermine primarily for Gentiles, faith and trust in the person and work of Jesus.

In Romans 9, both the law and the promises are celebrated as belonging together within the overall blessings belonging to Israel. Yet these blessings are also for the wider Gentile world. James Dunn, in his commentary^{xvi} on Romans 9-16, sums this point up with great clarity, he states,

The Gentile believer can no more claim a monopoly on the promises of God so to exclude the Jew, no more than he can regard the law as an exclusively Jewish, old-covenant procession. The promises are still for unbelieving Israel to claim, just as the requirements of the law are still there for all believers to fulfil as they walk according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4).

Blessing Seven: “The Patriarchs”

The promises (blessing six) are not given in isolation, but are rooted in people, namely the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the sons of Jacob). For God has chosen to make Himself and His ways known through relationships with people. God is not primarily known in the Bible by an action, attribute or place, but rather by relationship. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the people of Israel.

The Patriarchs, beginning with Father Abraham, are the founders of the nation of Israel and, in this sense are understood in an exclusive Jewish sense. Yet Paul is also keen to declare that Abraham is also the Father of all who believe (Romans 4:11 and Galatians 3:7). Once

again, within these blessings of Israel, we see a widening of the original context of the blessing. The original recipient of the blessing, the people of Israel, is affirmed and celebrated by Paul, yet also a new context is beginning to be revealed, namely the community of those (both Jews and Gentiles) who are called out of the world and into a faith relationship with Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of all.

Blessing Eight: “The Human Ancestry of Christ”

This final blessing has a different tone to the previous seven, in as much as the original/initial blessing of the Messiah is not given solely to Israel (as in the case in the previous seven blessings) but rather the gift flows from within Israel (Romans 1:3) and then out to the whole world. The gift of the Messiah is like a stone being powerfully dropped into a specific place in a pool (the place of Israel), yet the ripples from that stone expand outward reaching to the farthest edges of the pool. The Messiah of Israel is declared to all, in every place, as the Lord and Saviour. Paul develops this conviction in teaching that, *“Everyone, who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* (Romans 10:13). This conviction leads Paul to be continually looking outwards in his missionary planning, hence in his letter to the Romans he shares his intent to use Rome (and the support of the believers there) as a major catalyst for new mission work in Spain (Romans 15:24).

Paul, in concluding the list of blessings with the gift of the Messiah, is seeking to show to his fellow Israelites that the great blessings which are given to Israel have now reached, in the blessing of the Messiah, the point of great climax. The Messiah is greater than the other blessings / privileges, He is the greatest gift of Israel and gives to them the greatest dignity and honour. Paul is declaring to his Jewish community, that in whatever way his fellow Jews value and are seeking to live out the goodness of God, through being part of God’s family, from obeying Torah and sharing faithfully in the temple worship etc, they must not miss out on the greatest gift of all, namely receiving the Messiah.

For Paul, Israel must heed, accept and rejoice in the Messiah, yet this conviction is faced with the ongoing rejection / unbelief of many of his fellow Israelites. This reality which breaks Paul’s heart (9:2) is then worked through theologically in the next segments of Romans. For example, does this rejection/unbelief mean that God’s word has failed? (9:6), or perhaps does it mean that in some way God is unjust? (9:14). Also, how does this present unbelief affect the remnant of Israel who do believe (11:1-10), along with those Gentiles who have come to faith (11:11-24)? Finally, how will this all be resolved in the future purposes of God (11:25-36)?

4) Conclusion

As I reflect upon this list of blessings / privileges given to Israel, I am led to make four initial concluding points.

- 1) Paul, in listing these blessings, is showing the continuity between the blessing of Israel and the purposes of the Church community. I think it is here in Romans 9:4-5 that we see Paul's emphasis on this continuity in the most stark and focused way. James Dunn sums up this view eloquently, by stating,
His gospel is the good news of Israel's heritage and Israel's covenanted blessings. To break the link between old and new covenant is not to liberate his gospel but to destroy it, for his gospel is nothing if it is not the continuation and fulfilment of all that God intended for and through his chosen people.^{xvii}
 - 2) This continuity must be worked out in ways that shows both a loving concern for Israel and honours the Gospel. This point is made powerfully by Robert Jewett,^{xviii} who states,
The continuity between Christian believers and the ancestral faith of Israel has not been destroyed, even despite Israel's current resistance for which Paul mourns. Therefore to lack sympathy for Israel's situation is to jeopardise this redemptive legacy, which could potentially unite the human race (15:9-13).
- If we get this "working out" wrong, if we lose sight of the 'Biblical balance' we will probably end up with two false extremes. One extreme is to make an under-emphasis on the importance of Israel within God's purposes today. This can lead to and fuel misplaced theologies such as Replacement Theology. Such theology undermines God's faithfulness and marginalises Jewish Believers in Jesus and even, at times, gives room for anti-Semitism to take root within the Church. Equally, on the other extreme we can over emphasise or 'romanticise' the importance of Israel and undermine the Gospel. This can lead to and fuel misplaced theologies such as Two-Covenant Theology and aspects of dispensationalist thought. Such theologies undermine the urgency of sharing the Gospel with Jewish people and can distort the 'unity within diversity' (Ephesians 2:14) of Jew and Gentile within God's gracious plans.
- 3) In seeing God's blessing on Israel, those of us seeking to share the Gospel within a Jewish context and with Jewish people, must realise our need for humility. Despite an ongoing rabbinical redefining of Israel (which has taken place ever since the time of Paul) which is based in part on the Jewish "no" to Jesus, there still remains within Jewish religious life the blessing of God. We are engaging, in part, with holy

traditions and entering into holy ground and reading holy texts. Our words must therefore be carefully chosen, our footsteps light and our attitudes gentle, as we lovingly seek to declare the full counsel of God.

- 4) It is worth noting that Paul concludes his list of eight blessings by offering praise to God. This pattern of a doxology concluding segments of teaching is a recurring theme in Paul's writings^{xix} and I think this should often be our pattern for our teaching and studying together. In Romans 9:4-5, we are presented with God's goodness to Israel, His ongoing faithfulness to Israel and the extension of His faithfulness to all peoples. As we reflect, study and debate these truths, let us also therefore make space to praise. For all true theology and Biblical reflection ends in thankful adoration, quiet contemplation and resounding praise!

ⁱ I will be following the NIV text, but I have also provided seven other translations of the text. These texts I have found helpful while comparing and contrasting differing translations.

ⁱⁱ Such a view would be promoted by certain "Gnostic sects" and by practitioners within parts of the Kabbalistic tradition in regards to Biblical interpretation.

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example, the teaching of Chrysostom who argues that it was Paul's love for Jesus and the desire that Jesus would not be blasphemed by unbelieving Israel, which led Paul to the place of his willing self-sacrifice in Romans.

^{iv} See David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Clarksville, JNTP, 1992 (6th edition), p526.

^v Paul had previously (Romans 8:39) made the explicit statement that nothing can separate the believer from the Lord Jesus.

^{vi} Yet in the Greek text there appears to be a conscious artistic structure (see for example CEB Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol 2, London/New York, T and T Clark, 1974, p460) which sees the text arranged in four clauses [based on the phrase "my kinsmen according to the flesh" (literal translation by Jay P Green) / "my brothers, those of my own race" (NIV) my brothers, my own flesh and blood (CJB)] which sets out six items in two groupings, the first two items in both groups are singular, the third in both groups being in the plural.

^{vii} Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II*, London/New York, T and T Clark, 1970, p203.

^{viii} Babylonian Talmud (London: Soncino Press, 1935) Tractate, Genesis Rabbah.

^{ix} For an exploration of the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael, see my Olive Press Research Paper (this can be downloaded for free from the CMJ website) "*Isaac and Ishmael – Exploring God's Big Mission Plan.*"

^x Romans 8:15, Romans 8:23, Galatians 4:5 and Ephesians 1:5.

^{xi} TC Vriezen, *An outline of Old Testament Theology*, Oxford University Press, 1958, p247.

^{xii} For example, God has been portrayed in some philosophical arguments as a remote 'watch-maker', somewhat removed from sustaining the ongoing work of creation.

^{xiii} In this sense for Paul the people of Israel have 'first claim' on this New Covenant as well as the older Covenants. To the Jew first (Romans 1:16) is rooted in Paul's Biblical theology.

^{xiv} For a fuller discussion on this point see Robert Badenas, *Christ the end of the Law*, JOST Press, 1985.

^{xv} It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore issues around the use of Torah, but for a fuller discussion of this issues, see the following Olive Press Research Papers (both can be downloaded for free from the CMJ website) Adrian Glasspole, *One size does not fit all* (March, 2012) and my paper, *Root and Branch* (May 2007). Also see Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology* (especially chapters 6 and 7), Paternoster Press, 2009.

^{xvi} James Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary – Romans 9-16*, Word Books, 1998, p534.

^{xvii} James Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary – Romans 9-16*, Word Books, 1998, p535.

^{xviii} Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Fortress Press, 2007, p556.

^{xix} See Romans 11:33-36, Ephesians 3:20-21, 2 Corinthians 9:15 etc.

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