



CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

SERIES V

WISDOM LITERATURE AND NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Lesson 17 Commentary Romans 9 - 16

Lesson 18 Questions Ephesians 1 - 2

JEWES AND CHRISTIANS AFTER CHRIST

Romans 9 – 16

I. THE PLACE OF ISRAEL (Romans 9:1-5)

A. In Paul's Heart (Romans 9:1-5). After reading these triumphant truths about us as Christians, we read of another deeply felt reality in Paul, the ardent, well-educated Jew, whom the Risen Christ swiftly changed into the powerful Apostle of all the inhabitants in the Roman Empire. But Paul's heart ached for his own lost nation:

"There is great sorrow and unremitting agony in my heart" (Romans 9:2). He even tells us: "I would pray that I myself might be accursed, cut off from Christ, if it could benefit my own brothers, my own flesh and blood" (Romans 9:2-3).

Paul lists the wonderful prerogatives that God gave the Jews: adopted as God's children (Deuteronomy 14:1); given their Law by God Himself; God's glorious presence in the Temple; His covenants; His great promises, even of Christ being born from them. They were "children of the promise" of God to Abraham and Sarah, yet the Jews

as a people failed to accept their great gift of God—the Son!

B. In the Old Testament. Not all children of Abraham were the "Chosen Ones." Abraham had other descendants through the slave-girl, and other wives. But it was the personal choice of God (in His design to create a people peculiarly His own) to choose Sarah's son. When that son, Isaac, married Rebecca, who bore him twins, God chose one twin, Jacob, to be the descendant of the promise, the one who would receive "the favor of God" (Romans 9:12). Paul says to anyone who questions this free choice of God among Abraham's descendants, "Doesn't a potter have the right to make from the same lump of clay one vase for a high purpose and one for a lower vessel?" (Romans 9:21).

Jacob's twelve sons became the heads of the twelve tribes of "Israel"—a name God gave Jacob (Genesis 32:23-31). Mary and Joseph belonged to one of these tribes, the tribe of Judah, who settled around Bethlehem. King David had been born here, a simple Bethlehem boy. The line came down eventually to Jesus, whose parents lived in Nazareth in northern Israel. It was the Israelites

(Jews) of Jesus' time who rejected Paul's message about Jesus.

C. In the New Testament. "In order to make known the riches of his glory," wrote Paul (Romans 9:23), and those whom He prepared to share in that glory, God chose not only from the Jews, but from all people; God called all "My people—those who were not loved I will call Beloved" (Romans 9:25). It was Israel's unbelief that won for us—some of the "all people" whom the Bible calls the Gentiles, from the Latin word, "gen" for people,—the "justice" (holiness) of being dwelt in by Christ.

Paul says that we are the "object of mercy, which he prepared for glory." Here, in that short phrase, we learn why God created us, made up for our turning away from Him in sin, and brought us to His purpose: that of our being finally in brilliant, lasting perfection: "in glory."

But the Jews of that time insisted that holiness, "justice"—goodness and glory—came from "works," from what we do, from the LAW, instead of from faith (Romans 9:32). In chapter 10, Paul is still trying to explain this and even to bring them to faith in Christ. He declares: "Faith in the heart leads to 'justification'"—being made "just" by Christ. Confessing Christ—living and witnessing to Him, leads to salvation. All Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) have the same Lord, rich in mercy toward all who call upon Him. However, Paul admits that the word of Christ has been heard but the people of Israel have not believed it. However, we must remember that all the first Christians, from the Apostles and their immediate converts, were Israelites, and for this, they were persecuted by other Jews.

"Just so in the present times, there is a remnant of the Israelites chosen by the grace of God" (Romans 11:5). Note that they were chosen by grace, as the Gentiles were. At this point in his discussion, Paul is able to announce that the Jews will one day accept Christ and "be grafted back into their own tree" (Romans 11:25-26), and their

own deliverer will be one of their race. After saving the number of Gentiles God has called, "then all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). "God has allowed their disobedience that he might have mercy on all—Gentiles as well as Jews." In respect to their early "election," the Jews "are beloved by Him because of the patriarchs" (Romans 11:28).

II. THE JEWS IN HISTORY

In Jesus' and Paul's time, the Roman empire ruled the known world. Jewish nationalism continued after Paul and Jesus. In a war in 66-67 A.D. the Romans destroyed the temple, never to stand again, and scattered the Jews to an insignificant remnant in Palestine. Those who were Covenantors all perished at Qumran, a cave which has been discovered in our times, where the Isaiah Scroll was found. Only the Pharisees survived all this persecution.

The whole of Israel's history is known and their faith was kept through their Traditions as a believing community. This same historical development happened in early Christianity; truths were preserved by being taught, by being lived. The sources of our Catholic faith are "Sacred Tradition," and the "Sacred Scriptures."

As the Jews were dispersed throughout the civilized Europe and into its colonies, the Jews were always shunned and often condemned because their ancestors crucified their own Savior. Christians just didn't have the open-mindedness that Christians of today have; the situation was often a terrible scandal. Jewish history is scarcely known to us; their "ghettos" in Europe were carefully kept as ghettos. Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" about the Jew Shylock is a dramatic, painful evidence on medieval Jews and Christians.

Yet, nothing in history can equal the shocking persecution of Adolph Hitler and Nazi Germany—their aim was to exterminate the Jews entirely. It was one of several evils that predominated in

that government. It took a terrible world war to defeat that mad plan.

Modern Israel resulted from a united effort of the Allies to give the Jews a homeland, the land of their ancestors. That has produced Jewish migration, and its own country, but also many problems, especially with the people whom they ousted, called the Palestinians, from a name given to that area, a name from an Arabian tongue.

St. Paul ends his discussion of Israel's Fall and the Gentiles' faith in Christ, with an exclamation: "How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33). This whole history, he explains, is "Just as you were once disobedient to God" (to the Gentiles) "and now have received mercy through their disobedience, so they have become disobedient—since God wished to show you mercy—that they too may receive mercy. (For Israel's fall is temporary and partial.) God has imprisoned all in disobedience that he might have mercy on all" (Romans 11:32).

There are histories, however, of individual Jews who have become Christians. All of us know some, probably. There is a Catholic priest in a Texas diocese who was born a Jew and was brought up as one. There is a born Jew from Chicago who is now a priest in our own area. One thing we can be sure of—God still loves His people, His first choice to know Him as God, and will bring about something "beautiful for God" in their future. "And then all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!" (Romans 11:33).

For from Him
And through Him
And for Him
are all things.
To Him be glory forever.

Amen. (Romans 11:36)

III. THE LIFE OF CHRISTIANS (Romans 12-16)

As the Jews who rejected Christ went on down the centuries, unable to carry out the temple worship of animal sacrifices, Apostles like Paul taught them and new Christians the value of sacrifice to God. Paul begins chapter 12 on Christian life with a wonderful change from the Old Law of God's people:

"I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God
To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,
Holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.
Do not conform yourself to this age,
But be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
That you can tell what is the will of God,
What is good and pleasing and perfect"
(Romans 12:1-2).

As we prepare for the third millenium, we view our world and its needs in the light of God, we have the power to truly give God living sacrifices, that can draw from Him who so loves, to respond to our right reactions, graces for this age. Paul also gives an important suggestion for our age and any age: "Do not conform yourself to this age; be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may then know and embrace what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2). This is a plan for success as Christians.

The heart of the matter is that phrase turned into a question: Do I conform myself to our age, to our American excesses and materialism? Have we begun the road down a different way? "I urge you... to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice... your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Again, Paul reminds his new Christians and us of nearly two thousand years since, that we "though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another" (Romans 12:5). Look over the gifts Paul sees among his Chris-

tians, and see which one there, or which other is one that you have. The real need we have, is to remember and to live out, that what we have in any way is due to a gift from a God who has made all that exists outside Himself. Are you using, for example, “your authority, with care” your “works of mercy, cheerfully”? How are we using our gifts?

The next section is an instruction on Christian strong points (“virtue” in Latin comes from “vir” a man, a human being—strong and good). When we see the point after point that Paul writes to the Church then and now, to go after all of that at one time would be impossible, but we could take a Lent or a period of time, and strengthen ourselves in each one! We could also use these chapters (12-15) as a Lenten on-going meditation of how we are living according to this excellent description by Paul of a Christian’s life.

There are some treasures used in the liturgy in chapter 13: “Love can cause no harm to the neighbor, and so love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10). “Stop sleeping and wake up... equip ourselves for the light...” (Romans 13:11-14) is read out as an epistle at Mass at one time. Wise, wise teaching on charity toward the scrupulous shows the kindness, the forbearance of Paul, which we need at times (Romans 14:1-23). Chapter 15 continues the great kindness Paul teaches toward the worries of “the weaker ones” (Romans 15:1). A little “tidbit” occurs in “Blessed are those whose principles do not condemn their practice” (Romans 14:23).

In the Epilogue, Paul apologizes in a way, for his letter to those “fully instructed and capable of correcting each other” but he confidently mentions that “I was given grace to become a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles... so I can be proud in Christ Jesus, what I have done for God... I have fully carried out the preaching of the gospel, especially where it has not been heard” (Romans 15:17-20).

Paul mentions the deaconess Phoebe to whom he recommends a welcome worthy of “God’s holy people,” help her... This fact of deaconess in the early church is much talked of today and in the feminist movement. One thing that history tells us is that in an early document, deaconess was “a keeper of the holy gate.” The word deaconess means “helper,” a broad term.

In the lengthy mention of those to whom he sends greetings is “Rufus and to his mother, a mother to me too!” (Romans 16:13). A footnote mentions that Rufus was possibly the son of Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus carry His cross. The use of a secretary, a practice of Paul, is evident here in that “I, Tertius, who am writing this letter, greet you” (verse 22).

A doxology, a prayer of praise ends this lengthiest letter of Paul; this doxology is a solemn presentation of the major declarations of the letter.

APPLICATION

In this letter are several sections on the LAW, the Israelite people, God’s promises to Abraham, and the situation of the JEWS who rejected Christ. It is almost as if Paul had written it to the Jewish people. There was a colony of Jews in Rome, possibly some influential Jews among the Christians; but Paul aims in this letter to present his theology of salvation through Jesus Christ. Contrary to the earlier importance of keeping the iota of the LAW for every faithful Jew, is the abundant free gift of salvation, not through any deed of ours, but by the abundant gift of grace, a new life that lifted the baptized to a sonship to God. Again and again Paul describes the power, the amazing free gift of freedom from sin, freely given, through the utter love and goodness of the Father, and of His Son, made man for us and our Redeemer by His own Blood. Paul exalts in this wonderful gift—grace—without any effort on our part—sheer love and good will gives it from God. This is what we call “faith.” It is a strong, happy belief of salvation coming from Christ Jesus. It is faith, not the Law,

that saves us: it is belief in Christ and His love for us—a freely given love from the Father through the Son and made present to us in the Holy Spirit. It calls for tender gratitude, strong loyalty and love for the Father, and an overwhelming love for Jesus, showing itself in deeds such as Paul's.

This is what comes across strongly in the letter to the Romans. The great drama of a fiercely loyal Pharisee, bent on killing anyone who denied the LAW, who was suddenly changed by a bolt of lightning into an intrepid apostle of Jesus, traveling across the whole empire, tried by every possible way in his travels, is, when we dwell on it, better than any other drama in existence. It reveals Christ as God's new answer to mankind fallen so low, struggling under the Mosaic Law, augmented

more and more by crippling rules: CHRIST freeing all mankind over the earth and for all ages, from false faith in man-made objects, far below the dignity of human beings in God's image.

We have the triumphs of the past two thousand years of men and women who have lived in heroic deeds and love unto death, to see what kind of lives we ought to live in Christ. We look forward to the end of time for planet earth and its people, for through the loving Redeemer all will be saved, and even the earth shall be renewed—"a new heaven and a new earth!" (Romans 14:11, 2 Peter 3:13).

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 18
Ephesians 1 - 2

Day 1 Read the Notes.

- a. What does Scripture say about the final state of Israel?

- b. Share a thought that enlightened or helped you.

Day 2 Read Ephesians 1:1-23, Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:15.

- a. What stands out for you about our final state in these scriptures?

- b. When and why did God choose us in Jesus?

- c. What plan did God have for Christ's headship?

Day 3 Read Ephesians 2:1-3, John 12:28-32.

- a. Give a cause and a result of "You were dead..."

- b. How do the "Gentiles" of today show "allegiance to the present age"?

c. Read Ephesians 2:4-10. How did you feel as you read these verses?

d. Give two gifts to us of the “extraordinary wealth of God’s favor.”

Day 4 Read Ephesians 2:11-12.

a. What did the prosperous Ephesians lack, in Paul’s judgment?

b. Read verses 13-14. What real result did Jesus’ death bring, according to Paul?

Day 5 Read Ephesians 2:15-18.

a. Give your reaction to these words.

b. In what way do Christians today need 15b-16?

Day 6 Read Ephesians 2:19-22, 3:1-6.

a. Give a result of Christ’s death for both Jews and Gentiles today.

b. What is the situation of the Jews and Gentiles today?

c. Give an effect of this week’s lesson on you. You might quote a special verse...