

Journey INTO THE Bible

Leader's Guide

The Letter to the Romans: Lesson Four

Romans 9—11

Introduction

Suggestion: While people are gathering, ask them to take a seat at any table and introduce themselves to those they might not know. When you are ready to begin the Bible study, start with an opening prayer. Use either the one below or a prayer of your own choosing.

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, merciful God, for you called Abraham to be the father of a great nation. "To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever" (Romans 9:4–5). You have grafted us, wild olive shoots, onto this sturdy root. Bless all of your people, O God. May we live together in peace, and may we always work together to establish your justice on the earth.

Suggestion: Welcome everyone and make any important announcements, such as location of the restrooms. Remind participants to set cell phones to vibrate or turn them off. Then read "Setting the Stage." You can introduce it as a brief word from the author of this Bible study to set the context for this lesson.

Setting the Stage

Paul's reputation as a tireless apostle to the gentiles who preached a gospel free from the works prescribed by the Law can sometimes blind us to the fact that he was also a faithful Jew. He was proud of his heritage and deeply immersed in the theology and spirituality of the Chosen People. An attentive reading of these three chapters of the Letter to the Romans will allow us to see just how faithful he was and how much he longed for his own people to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

As an evangelist, Paul enjoyed notable success in bringing former pagans to faith in Christ in places like Ephe-

sus, Thessalonica, Philippi, and Corinth. It is for good reason that we call him "the apostle to the gentiles." His efforts among his own people, on the other hand, were considerably less successful. Perhaps some of the anguish he manifests in chapters 9—11 of the Letter to the Romans reflects his own sense of failure.

But here in the Letter to the Romans, as elsewhere in the letters of Paul, human failure will not ultimately frustrate the plan of God. The will of God will always be done. Paul is certain that in God's own time, according to God's own schedule, the children of Abraham and Sarah will come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. As you read through these three chapters, be attentive to the way in which Paul presents this conviction.

Romans 9:1–5

Suggestion: Read Romans 9:1–5 aloud to the group or have someone who feels comfortable reading in public do the first reading. Invite people to read along in their own Bibles. Then invite the group to begin discussing this passage. Allow fifteen to twenty minutes for discussion. If the group finishes the discussion early, you might suggest one or more of the questions below for further discussion.

Think and Talk Questions

1. Why do you think Paul's language is so emotional in this part of the letter?
2. Paul enumerates eight privileges that God has accorded the Chosen People. What are they? Is any one of these privileges more important than the others?
3. What bearing does Paul's position here have on the contemporary dialogue between Jews and Christians?

Break

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Romans 9—11

Text: Roman 11:13–18

Suggestion: Read Romans 11:13–18 aloud to the group or have someone in the group do the reading. Invite people to read along in their own Bibles. Then invite the group to begin discussing this passage. Start with the questions that are posed in “Think about it/Talk about it” in Lesson Four. Allow fifteen to twenty minutes for discussion. If you see that a group has finished its discussion early, you might suggest one or more of the questions below for further discussion.

Think and Talk Questions

1. Why does Paul directly address gentile converts to Christianity in Romans 11:13?
2. Paul likens Israel's acceptance of Jesus to a resurrection from the dead (Romans 11:15). Why does he make this comparison?

Wrapping Up

Suggestion: With about twenty minutes remaining, bring to a close the discussion on the second text. Let the participants know they have fifteen minutes left in this session, and ask if anyone wants to share with the whole group something he or she learned in the course of doing this Bible study. Instruct the participants to be brief, and bring the sharing to a close when time is up.

Closing Prayer

We give you thanks, merciful God, for the depth of your wisdom and knowledge. Your love for humanity is more than we can comprehend, and your plans for your people exceed our puny expectations. Widen our hearts and minds, O God, that our lives might reflect your bounty and generosity. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Suggestion: Remind participants about the next meeting time and place. Encourage everyone to read and work through Lesson Five before they come to the next Bible study session.