

Week Six

Conversations with God

ROMANS 9–11

READ

Authors often refer to the arc of their stories. Problems created in opening chapters are played out through the chapters that follow and are then typically resolved in the final chapters of the book. Interestingly, Scripture has an arc. The problems created in Genesis are fully resolved in Revelation. The journey between them takes thousands of years, but is a powerful story of love and redemption.

As mentioned previously, much of Scripture's story chronicles the Jewish nation, Israel. It is in Romans, though, where we gain increased clarity that the arc of Scripture is not just about one nation but all humanity. This broader view of Scripture makes sense for many reasons, not the least of which is that the problems created in Genesis were not limited to one people group but pervasive to all people. It would be anticlimactic if the arc of Scripture offered resolution for one group rather than a pervasive solution made available to all humanity.

With that said, a question remains: What about Israel? Paul makes such a strong case that the unfolding story of Scripture reveals good news for Gentiles, that the natural question to follow is to wonder about God's unique relationship to the Jewish nation. Clearly, God had a special purpose in mind for the people of Israel. It was to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, that God said, *"I will make you into a great nation...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"* (Genesis 12:2-3, TNIV). Has God now forgotten the Jewish nation? Was God's work with them ineffective? It is these very questions Paul now addresses in Romans 9 through 11, and in so doing, speaks powerfully to God's sovereignty and the majesty of his plan.

As you read Romans 9–11, a challenge will be given that grows through the chapters. It is a challenge against arrogance. Oddly, and we see this today, faith can become arrogant. A person decides to follow Christ and feels quite good about this decision. *"Why don't others see what I see?"* is the all-too-common perception. This perception creates an arrogance unbecoming of true faith when fully understood. Not only is the very nature of faith incompatible with arrogance, but it is in these chapters where we discover that our disposition toward faith *"does not...depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy"* (Romans 9:16, TNIV). Paul builds on this thought, and after showing that Gentiles should in no way view themselves as superior to Jews, he makes his challenge clear: *"Do not be arrogant, but tremble"* (Romans 11:20, TNIV).

This challenge against arrogance is especially interesting when one considers not only the arc of Scripture but also the arc of Romans. To this point in Paul's letter he has taken great pains to show that the Gentiles are not below the Jews in regards to their standing with God. *"All have sinned,"* we read previously, *"and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). In these chapters, though, he cautions Gentiles to not err on the other side and falsely think they are above the Jews in their standing with God. He does this by giving a glimpse of the story from God's vantage point, by putting God's active mercy on display.

ROMANS 9–11

As you read these chapters, listen for the arc of Scripture and listen for your own pockets of arrogance. Do you admire your brilliance for discerning the grace of God? Or do you bow humbly and acknowledge God’s undeserved mercy? Such questions often inspire authentic, resonant worship.

MEMORIZE

This week’s memory verses:

1 John 3:2, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But...when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don’t *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.

