



## God's Promises to Israel Have Not Failed Romans 9:1-13

### Introduction

In his letter to the Romans, Paul has written about the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel; that sinners are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul has explained the many benefits of justification and given firm assurance that God's plan of salvation surely leads all believers to glory because there is absolutely nothing which can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus!

However, in Romans 1:16-17, Paul wrote that salvation is *for the Jew first*, and in the first century, as today, most Jews rejected the gospel and were not believers in Christ. Paul recognized all too clearly that, as a whole, Israel had rejected Christ. If God is really faithful, what about Israel? If God's plan from the beginning led to Christ, why did the privileged Israelites (Jews) who received God's promises through His Law and the Prophets reject Christ? Had God's word to Israel failed?

In Romans 9-11, Paul addresses the Jewish problem and explains that God's promises to Israel have not failed. God has the sovereign right to *have mercy on whomever I will have mercy* (Romans 9:15). The Jews' boasting in their position as children of Abraham was empty and futile. It is not the *children of the flesh* who are the *children of God* (Romans 9:8). *Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham* (Galatians 3:7) and *he is a Jew who is one inwardly* (Romans 2:29). This is ultimately explained by God's sovereign choice. Paul shows from Scripture that God, in working out His purpose, distinguished between Abraham's descendants. He chose Isaac and not Ishmael. He chose Jacob and not Esau. This gives a picture of how God works. It explains why, in Paul's day, as at the present time, only a small number of Jews have believed. It is *that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls* (Romans 9:11).

### Outline of Romans 9:1-13

- I. Paul's Sorrow Over His Unbelieving Brethren - Romans 9:1-5
- II. God's Sovereign Purpose According to Election - Romans 9:6-13

### I. Paul's Sorrow Over His Unbelieving Brethren - Romans 9:1-5

Paul is going to make a statement that is very important to him. To stress his sincerity, he uses strong words which are as solemn as an oath.

#### A. Paul's oath - Romans 9:1

He stresses that he is telling *the truth in Christ*, he is *not lying*, and his conscience is testifying with him *in the Holy Spirit*. With these words, Paul holds himself accountable. His words flow from his union with Christ. His conscience is ruled by the Holy Spirit. He is sincere and totally honest in what he is about to say. Furthermore, in the Greek, the word *truth* is the first word in the sentence, and this gives it an even stronger emphasis.

#### B. Paul's great sorrow and continual grief - Romans 9:2

The truth which Paul expresses is the enormity of the sorrow and grief in his heart. He does not specifically state the reason for the sorrow and grief, but he really doesn't need to. We can understand from the remainder of the passage that his distress is over Israel's unbelief.

#### C. Paul's wish - Romans 9:3

Paul's burden is for his fellow Jews, *my countrymen according to the flesh*, whom he affectionately calls *my brethren*. Paul would gladly take their place so they could be saved. When he writes, *For I could wish that I myself were accursed*, he expresses a hypothetical situation. If it were possible, and if it would really bring his fellow Jews to salvation, he would be willing to be accursed for them. *Accursed* is the Greek "anathema" which means "to be eternally separated from Christ and devoted to destruction." Paul surely realized that he could never accomplish the change he suggested, but it was his way of expressing his love and devotion for his people.

#### D. Israel's blessings - Romans 9:4-5

Paul lists the many privileges which God had bestowed upon His chosen people, Israel. They had every spiritual

advantage! They had a great heritage! "Israel was the fountainhead of world salvation. Salvation is of God, but it comes through Israel." (The Gospel of God, Romans, R.C. Sproul).

### 1. *Israelites* - 9:4

The Book of Genesis relates God's choosing and covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-6, 17:1-11). The covenant was renewed with Abraham's son, Isaac (Genesis 26:3), and later with his grandson, Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel (Genesis 32:26-29 and 35:9-12). The very name *Israelites* speaks of the special position of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel). They were God's chosen people.

### 2. *To whom pertain the adoption* - 9:4

*Adoption* refers to God's gracious choice of Israel to be His people, an elect nation through which "He would bring salvation to the world" (Romans, Volume 3, James Montgomery Boice). *For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth* (Deuteronomy 14:2). See also Exodus 4:22, Jeremiah 31:0, and Hosea 11:1.

This is not the same as the New Testament *adoption as sons* (Romans 8:15). John Murray explains, "Israel under the Old Testament were indeed children of God but they were children under age" (The Epistle to the Romans). As Paul says in Galatians 3:23-26, Israel was kept *in custody* (NASB) or under guardianship of the law. The law was their tutor to bring them to Christ so they could be justified by faith and receive the full blessing as sons.

### 3. *The glory* - 9:4

This refers to the "Shekinah" glory of God, the symbol of God's presence among Israel. The word "Shekinah," which means "dwelling," is not in the Bible, but is used in later Jewish writings to refer to the visible manifestation of God's glorious presence as on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:16-17), in the tabernacle (40:34-38), and in the Holy Place (Leviticus 16:2). See also Ezekiel 1:28.

### 4. *The covenants* - 9:4

A covenant is a legally binding promise between two parties. God made a covenant with Abraham and his sons (as mentioned previously) in which He promised to bless them and their descendants in return for their faithfulness so they could be a channel of blessing to the rest of the world (Genesis 17:7). Other covenants between God and Israel include the covenant of law at

Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:1-8), the covenant in the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 29), the covenant at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (Joshua 8:30-35), and the covenant with David (2 Samuel 23:5).

### 5. *The giving of the law* - 9:4

The law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai and is recorded in Exodus 19 and 20. The Book of Hebrews also describes the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. The writer pictures the mountain that may not be touched and that *burned with fire, and...blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling."* (Hebrews 12:18-21).

"The heart of the law was the Ten Commandments which is considered to be the foundational legal structure for western civilization" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R.C. Sproul).

### 6. *The service of God* - 9:4

This includes the priestly service and worship connected with the sanctuary as described in Hebrews 9:1-6. It was all designed to show the way for sinful human beings to approach a holy God. It all looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and His propitiating sacrifice.

### 7. *The promises* - 9:4

God made many promises to the Israelites, but Paul probably is referring to the promises concerning the Messiah, since that is what he is leading up to in this list. Such promises were given to Abraham, and later confirmed to his sons. *And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Genesis 12:3). Other Messianic promises include God's promise to David that his kingdom would be *established forever* (2 Samuel 7:12 and 16), and Jeremiah's prophecy: *I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A king shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth* (Jeremiah 23:5).

### 8. *Of whom are the fathers* - 9:5

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the great patriarchs of Israel, but *the fathers* would also include outstanding men throughout the history of God's dealings with His people such as Moses, Joshua, and David.

9. *From whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God* - 9:5

Jesus Christ is the culmination of the historical privileges God had bestowed on Israel. Christ is what all the other blessings on this list pointed to and led up to. Jesus Christ the Lord was a Jew according to human ancestry. But He is also God and He is over everything! Christ is God Himself, come to earth, *taking the form of a bond-servant and coming in the likeness of men....He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross* (Philippians 2:7-8).

## II. God's Sovereign Purpose According to Election - Romans 9:6-13

Paul's long list has shown the many privileges God had bestowed upon His chosen people, Israel. But in spite of their many spiritual blessings, they had, as a whole, been a rebellious and stiff-necked people. They had even rejected their Messiah. Did Israel's unbelief mean that God had broken His word? Had God failed in His purpose? Paul will show that this is definitely not the case! He has already made a similar point in Romans 3:3 where he wrote, *For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?* His answer was, *Certainly not!* In the present passage, Paul will show that God's word has not failed. From the beginning, God's purpose had been according to His sovereign choice and call. Not all had been called to be heirs of the promises.

### A. *They are not all Israel who are of Israel* - Romans 9:6

Paul distinguishes between two different Israels. Those who are "*of Israel*" are the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--ethnic Israel, Israel according to the flesh. But these are not all "*Israel*". Paul has made the distinction previously in Romans 2:28-29: *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly.* He described those who are Jews inwardly in Romans 4:12 as those *who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.* There is an Israel within ethnic Israel which is an Israel of faith.

The Israelites were God's chosen people "but within the elect (chosen) people itself there has been going on throughout its history a divine operation of distinguishing and separating, whereby the Israel within Israel has been differentiated from the rest of the chosen people...if God's purpose of election has, from the very beginning, included a process of distinguishing and separating even within the elected people, then the present unbelief of many Jews is no

proof that purpose has failed, but may be understood rather as part of its working out" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

### B. The example of Isaac - Romans 9:7-9

Paul supports his statement, *They are not all Israel who are of Israel*, by showing the principle at work in the families of Abraham and Isaac.

#### 1. Isaac was the true seed of Abraham - 9:7

Not all of Abraham's children were *children of God* (9:8). God chose the line of promise to be through Isaac. *In Isaac your seed shall be called* (Genesis 21:12).

#### 2. Isaac was the child of promise - 9:8-9

In Galatians Paul wrote, *For it is written that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise* (4:22-23). God chose the line of promise to be through Isaac, not Ishmael. The promises did not belong to Abraham's children by physical descent, but by the designation of God. Ishmael was a child born *according to the flesh* (Genesis 16). Isaac was the child of the promise as Paul quotes in 9:9, *At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son* (Genesis 18:10,14 with its fulfillment in Genesis 21:1-2). At the time the promise was made, Ishmael had already been born so the promise had no reference to him. Isaac was the *seed* who would be the heir of the promises made to Abraham. See Genesis 17:21.

### C. The example of Jacob and Esau - Romans 9:10-13 and Genesis 25:21-26

These verses further support and finalize Paul's thesis that God's covenant promises were not passed to Abraham's children by natural descent. When he writes *And not only this...* (9:10) it is like saying "here is an even better example." Some would easily understand God's choice of Isaac because Ishmael was merely the son of Sarah's maid, Hagar, and not equal to Isaac anyway. But Jacob and Esau had the same mother and father. Their father was the child of promise, and they were twins. Furthermore, God chose the younger (9:12), contrary to the established Jewish rights of inheritance.

#### 1. God chose Jacob before the twins were born - 9:10-12 and Genesis 25:23

When God designated Jacob, the twins were still in Rebecca's womb. Neither had done any good or evil. There had been no opportunity because they had not yet been born. God's purpose was not based on foreseen actions or foreseen faith, on any good they had actually

done or might potentially do, or on any evil they had actually done or might potentially do. God's choice was simply by His sovereign good pleasure! "The divine distinguishing between Jacob and Esau preceded their birth, so that God's electing purpose might be fulfilled in its complete independence of human merit and dependence on God alone" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

2. *That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls* - 9:11-12

This statement clearly answers the stated objection in Romans 9:6. The word of God does not fail! This is because God's working throughout history has always been so that His purpose *might stand*, and God's working has always been *according to election...not of works, but of Him who calls*. Abraham is an example of this: God called Abraham to leave Haran and go to the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:1-3). Isaac is an example of this: *In Isaac your seed shall be called* (Romans 9:7). Jacob is an example of this: *not of works but of Him who calls* (9:11). God elects. He affects His election through His call. It is His free and sovereign choice and act.

3. *Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated* - 9:13

When God says, *Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated*, He expresses His displeasure toward Esau. Not only was Esau excluded from the love given to Jacob, but he was the object of divine displeasure. The statement is meant to confirm what has been brought out in previous verses: that God's purpose is according to election by His sovereign will and not by any inherent or potential differences in Jacob's or Esau's character or actions.

Some have tried to explain away God's having hated Esau by saying that it merely means He loved Esau less than Jacob. However, God's hating must not be understood in the sense of human emotional hatred. John Murray explains God's hate this way, "In God's hate there is no malice, malignancy, vindictiveness, unholy rancor or bitterness. The kind of hate thus characterized is condemned in Scripture and it would be blasphemy to predicate the same of God. But there is a hate in us that is the expression of holy jealousy for God's honor and of love to Him...this hate is the reflection in us of God's jealousy for His own honor. We must therefore, recognize that there is in God a holy hate that cannot be defined in terms of not loving or loving less." However, Murray also clarifies this statement by saying that "The hate of verse 13 belongs to the transcendent realm of God's sovereignty for which there is no human analogy. The purpose of appeal to holy hate in us is merely for the purpose of showing

that even in us men (and women) there is a hate that is entirely distinct from malicious and vindictive hatred. It is in this direction that we are to construe God's hate" (The Epistle to the Romans).

NOTE: Some commentators take this entire passage to refer to the election of the nation of Israel rather than individuals. But Paul's whole argument is concerned with the choosing of individuals within the nation, showing how God has dealt in Jewish history with individuals. Paul presupposes the election of Israel as a nation by his list of Jewish privileges in Romans 9:4-5. His concern is to show that although privileged, Israel has rejected her Messiah. There are and always will be individuals within ethnic Israel who are called to be the Israel of faith within that nation. He is showing that *They are not all Israel who are of Israel* (Romans 9:6). Paul is teaching God's discriminating, differentiating election of individuals within elect Israel. (More information on this subject may be found in The Epistle to the Romans, Volume II, John Murray, pages 12-24.

#### D. Closing review of the passage

In Romans 8, Paul wrote of the interconnected doctrines (what we called "the golden chain of five links") in God's purpose for believers which include foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. "Those five terms describe the very essence of salvation, and the significant thing is that God is the author of each one. It is He who foreknows, He who predestines, He who calls, He who justifies, and He who glorifies. The only thing Paul is adding in Romans 9 is that this is entirely apart from any supposed right of birth or good works. It is due entirely to the will and mercy of the sovereign God...Because election means that salvation is of God, it is His idea and His work, and therefore it is as solid as God Himself" (Romans, Volume 3, James Montgomery Boice).

#### Applications

1. Paul was willing to sacrifice his salvation so that his fellow Jews might be saved. What sacrifices are you willing to make to spread the gospel to those who are perishing?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a Christian because your parents are Christians, because you go to church, because your spouse is a Christian, or because you are involved in service to others? This passage of Romans makes it clear that God does not choose his people by such means. Will you humble yourself before God and ask for His mercy? Will you repent of your sins and turn to Jesus Christ who alone can bring you to God through His grace? To know more about what it means to be truly saved, please ask your discussion leader for a Disciplers' Confidence Letter.

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## QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

**Day One: Read all notes and references.**

1. What impressed you most about Paul in this lesson?
  
  
  
  
  
2. a. What impressed you most about the privileges of the Jews?
  
  
  
  
  
- b. ♥ (Heart Question) What special privileges has God given you?
  
  
  
  
  
3. What did you learn about God's purpose that was new or interesting to you?

**Day Two: Read Romans 9:14-16 and Exodus 33:13-23.**

4. a. In regard to what Paul has just written in Romans 9:10-13, what question does he ask concerning God's character?
  
  
  
  
- b. What is Paul's emphatic answer to that question?
  
- c. In further explaining his answer, what Old Testament passage does Paul quote? (See references in margin of your Bible.)
  
- d. What attributes of God does this passage stress?
  
  
5. a. What does Paul teach about God's mercy in relation to human desires and efforts? Give verse.
  
  
  
  
- b. ? (Thought Question) Would you rather rely on your own efforts or God's mercy to obtain salvation. Please explain the reason for your answer.
  
  
  
  
6. a. Using Exodus 33:13-23, how did God show His mercy to Moses ?
  
  
  
  
  
- b. How did God promise to show His mercy to Israel?
  
  
  
  
- c. ♥ (Heart Question) In what ways has God shown His mercy to you?

**Day Three: Read Romans 9:17-18 and Exodus 9:13 -17.**

7. Who raised Pharaoh up and for what purpose? Give verse.
8. Give some points from Exodus 15:3-16 and Joshua 2:1 with 8-11 which show how God's purpose through Pharaoh was fulfilled.
9. a. What do you learn about God from Romans 9:18?  
  
b. From Exodus 14:1-9 and 21-29, who received mercy and who was hardened?  
  
c. What phrase do you find repeated three times in Romans 1:24-28 which describes how people are hardened?  
  
d. How is Psalm 81:11-12 a confirmation of this?

**Day Four: Read Romans 9:19-24.**

10. a. What question does Paul raise in verse 19?  
  
b. How does Paul answer the question?
11. a. If we picture mankind as a lump of clay, as Paul does in verse 21, what is the nature of the lump of humanity? See Romans 3:23 and 5:12 to help with your answer.  
  
b. What two kinds of vessels (9:21) does the potter make?  
  
c. What two kinds of people do these vessels represent? For what has each been prepared?  
  
d. Which kind of people has God *endured with much longsuffering*?
12. a. How do these verses illustrate God's dealings with Jacob and Esau (9:11-13)?  
  
b. How do they illustrate God's dealings with Pharaoh and Israel (9:17)?  
  
c. How do they illustrate God's dealings with *us whom He called* (9:24)?

**Day Five: Read Romans 9:24-29.**

13. a. From what two groups of people has God called *vessels of mercy* (9:23)?  
  
b. To which of these groups does Paul appear to be referring in Romans 9:25-26?
14. Read the passage from which Paul has quoted, Hosea 1:1-10 and 2:21-23. Which of the two groups (from question 13. a.) was Hosea speaking about?
15. ? (Thought Question) In light of your answers to the above questions and Paul's statement in 9:24, what point is Paul making by quoting the Hosea passage?
16. a. What did Isaiah have to say concerning Israel?  
  
b. How do these passages show God's mercy upon Israel?

**Day Six: Read Romans 9:30-33 and 1 Peter 2:4-8.**

17. How does Paul contrast the Gentiles and Israel in Romans 9:30-31?
18. a. What is the reason the Gentiles obtained righteousness and Israel did not?  
  
b. If the Gentiles were not even pursuing righteousness, how could they have obtained it? See Acts 15:11 and Ephesians 2:5, 8-9 for help.
19. a. Using both the Romans and 1 Peter passages, who is the *stumbling stone* (9:32)? To whom is He a *stumbling stone* and why?  
  
b. How does Peter describe the worth of the *stumbling stone* in God's sight?  
  
c. How do those who believe esteem Him?
20. What is the promise for those who believe? What does this mean to you?