

Israel's Unbelief and the Promises of God

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 9:6-13

Preached on: Sunday, March 18, 2012

It is my great joy to minister the Word of God to you again this Lord's Day morning.

Will you take your Bibles and turn to Paul's epistle to the Romans chapter nine? This morning we will examine the issue of Israel's unbelief and the promises of God. Let me read this text to you. Romans chapter nine beginning with verse six.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is a word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."¹

We have before us an amazing passage of Scripture that reveals to us the great mysteries of predestination. It reveals to us God's sovereign purposes in salvation and how he accomplishes these things. Frankly, you will very seldom hear this text preached because it is so highly offensive to man's rabid determination to somehow control his own destiny. Moreover, it does not fit with the way man has crated God in man's image. And I confess that these mysteries are depths of divine wisdom that far exceed my ability to measure, but by God's grace I will do my best to rightly divide it for you.

Paul arrived in Rome about three years after the deaconess Phoebe had delivered this letter to the churches in Rome. And though he was repeatedly scorned and abused, he was unfaltering in his love towards his Jewish kinsmen. He was absolutely untiring in his persistence to preach to them the gospel of God, a lesson, by the way, that we would all do well to learn, especially with respect to God's beloved enemies, the Jews.

But for the first century Jew and countless millions since that day the gospel of God was terribly offensive. For centuries the Jews had mistakenly believed that because they were the descendants of Abraham, because they were constantly living according to the law, they mistakenly believed that somehow their Ritualism and their Legalism insured their salvation, that it was guaranteed. They were convinced that because they were the descendants of Abraham and because of their strict adherence to the law and rabbinical traditions they were in. So the gospel was terribly offensive to them. In fact, to them it

¹ Romans 9:6-13.

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was a blasphemous heresy that contradicted the Old Testament. They even argued that since most individual Jews and Israel as a nation had rejected Jesus as Messiah, he was therefore a false Messiah worthy of their rejection. Certainly he couldn't have fooled all of us. And to say that somehow that Paul... that because we rejected what you say to be God's Son and unless we repent and believe God is going to reject us, well, that is just foolishness. We are sons of Abraham. For us that would impugn the character of God. How could God possibly go back on his Word? Abraham is our father. Therefore we are righteous. That was the idea. And to say that our unbelief in Jesus means that we as Israelites are not of God is blasphemy. We are sons of the covenant. We are keepers of the law.

And yet for the first eight chapters of this epistle this famous rabbi now a follower of Christ, a scholar of Jerusalem, that once killed Christians says to his Jewish kinsmen, "No, my friends, that is not the case. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone." But their response was that you are a traitor.

Now in Romans chapter nine Paul begins in the first five verses by expressing, first of all, his deep burden for his unbelieving kinsmen and, secondly, he expresses Israel's unchanging advantages as God's chosen people. He affirms his own Jewishness, even though now he is a believer and he expresses how together they are according to chapter nine and verse four Israelites in whom belongs the adoption, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh.

So obviously God still maintains his covenant relationship with them. And we know that with great exuberance later on in chapter 11 verse 26 he will describe the climactic expectations of Israel's nation conversion when the deliverer will come from Zion and he will argue that not all Israelites are heirs of God's promise, that salvation is only granted on an individual basis, that there is nowhere in Scripture where God saves all Israelites as a nation simply on the basis of their ethnicity. So this was a hard pill for them to swallow.

So now in chapter nine Paul is going to focus his efforts on harmonizing the Old Testament with the new, proving that what the Jews perceived to be a blasphemous doctrine was, in fact, taught in the Old Testament. God is not contradicting himself. God is not finished with his covenant people. Instead, God through the gospel is demonstrating the absolute perfections of his person and his purpose in redemption, proving that he is consistent in all that he does.

We are going to see in Romans nine that Israel's unbelief is, indeed, consistent with God's promises to Israel. That is what we will look at today. In the days to come we will see that Israel's unbelief is also consistent with God's perfect character, his prophetic Word and his planned redemption.

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So with that by way of introduction let's look at the issue of Israel's unbelief and the promises of God. And I have divided this section of Scripture into three very simple basic categories. We are going to see the proposition, the proof and the principle. Now one more thing.

Some might be saying, "Pastor, what on earth does all of this Jewish stuff have to do with us today?"

My friend, may I say with love and humility that such an attitude betrays both ignorance and arrogance. It betrays an attitude that says, "You know, there are just certain passages of God's revelation to us that are frankly irrelevant and therefore boring, that God, frankly, is out of touch with where we are really living today as people and so therefore some of the things that he has put in his Word really has no bearing on how we live and so I think I will just skip over this passage of Scripture."

Well, my friend, if you do that, you do it at your own peril. Like all that God has revealed to us, these eternal truths are of enormous importance, not only when it comes to the evangelization of the Jews—and you remember Paul has said that the gospel was to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. But also here this text we understand better how God saves us, why we are saved. This gives us insight into why we believe in Christ and accept the gift of salvation. This text explains God's preparation in us for the work of salvation that is based solely in the perfect character and eternal plan of God.

And, by the way, there is a test that proves whether or not you have rightly divided this text and the test is simply this. If it leads people to say that somehow God is not fair, if it leads people to say that if all of this is true, then God is unjust, as Paul addresses in verse 14, then you know you have rightly divided this text.

So please, dear Christians, reject the modern virtue of theological ignorance and arrogance that results in Christians being as shallow as lukewarm water on a plate. Instead, let's look at these great texts and see what God has for us. Don't fall into the trap of our day of somehow dumbing down the Word of God with little sermon-ettes for Christian-ettes that banishes countless millions to islands of spiritual infancy. But, rather, let's be diligent, as Paul said, to present ourselves approved to God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth.

It is interesting. He went on to say:

"But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene."²

My how true that is.

² 2 Timothy 2:16-17.

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Now some more context for you historically. Let me give you an example of Jewish thinking. When Jesus condemned the Jews in John chapter eight they were obviously horribly offended. And in verse 33 they said to him:

““We are Abraham’s offspring.””³

In other words, how can you tell us these things?

But Jesus went on in verse 39 and said:

If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.⁴

And then in verse 44.

““You are of your father the devil.””⁵

Obviously Jesus knew nothing of the seeker sensitive movement in that day. He is saying, “Yes, you are the natural descendants of Abraham, but because of your unbelief, not all of you are spiritual descendants.”

The father of all unbelievers, of course, is the devil. So he is saying that just because you are Abraham’s physical descendants, does not mean that you are also his spiritual descendants. Big difference.

Obviously they understood nothing of the spiritual heritage that was associated with God’s covenant to Abraham, that because of the Lord Jesus Christ who was also a Jew, the whole world would be blessed, ultimately through Abraham. And, in fact, Jesus went on to say in John eight and verse 58:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”⁶

Oh, my, this was exceedingly offensive to the Jews, because they understood the phrase, “I am,” was the root meaning of Yahweh, Jehovah God. This was blasphemy. Jesus was telling them that before Abraham was born I am. In other words, I existed as God. And what was their reaction? In verse 59 we read:

³ John 8:33.

⁴ John 8:39-41.

⁵ John 8:44.

⁶ John 8:58.

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“Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.”⁷

So that is the Jewish mindset of that day and, frankly, many to this day. But we must also remember that Paul has just said something very fascinating in Romans 8:28. And I am sure some of the Jews that were listening to this letter being read were standing around the edge with their arms folded listening to this and thinking, oh, my, these people are way off, because Paul has said:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”⁸

To which the Jews would say, “Well, wait a minute. Not so according to your gospel. You say that since we rejected Jesus as Messiah we have rejected God and now he has rejected us. So he is certainly not causing all things to work together for our God, now is he? Because if we as the sons of Abraham are now under divine condemnation as you say we are, then either God’s purpose has changed or it can be thwarted by man. You have just said in verse four that we are Israelites to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, yet your same Jesus has told us that he wrath of God abides upon us if we do not repent and believe in him.”

To which Paul replied—and now we come to verse six of Romans nine.

“But it is not as though the word of God has failed.”⁹

Grammatically this is in the perfect tense, very important. He is saying, “But it is not as though the Word of God has failed in the past or is now failing.” He wants them to understand the integrity of the Word of God both past and present. And Paul will respond to them by explaining that it is not the Word of God that this failed nor have his eternal purposes been frustrated in the slightest in anyway.

Now, as a footnote, as we read in verse four and other passages that follow, God has sovereignly bestowed a special calling and covenants and blessings and protection upon Israel as a nation. And Paul reminds them in Romans 11:29 that the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. That would include, of course, the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12 where God says that out of Abraham would come a seed, obviously referring to Christ. There would also be a land given to them, a specific territory that would be set apart by God for his people, a place where he would one day dwell with them in holy and intimate union. He also promised that they would become a nation where Abraham’s godly reputation and his legacy would be displayed materially and spiritually and even

⁷ John 8:59.

⁸ Romans 8:28.

⁹ Romans 9:6.

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socially and the glory of God's grace would be put on display before the world. There was also a promise of divine blessing and protection on the Israelites. So God's elective purposes in the Old Testament for his covenant people will be fulfilled in the salvation of not only many Jewish people, but also in national and territorial terms during the messianic age. The Jewish rejection of their Messiah did not nullify the unilateral, unconditional, irreversible covenants that God made to Abraham and that God made to David concerning the establishment of an earthly kingdom. It only postponed it.

That day is still coming. There is a glorious future kingdom that will fulfill all of the Abrahamic and Davidic and even the new covenant promises in the Old Testament and all of God's people in the Old Testament and even the Church and those that will be saved during the tribulation will experience the magnificent blessings promised to Israel and to all the saints.

So his unconditional promises of Israel's national restoration stated all through Scripture remains fully in force. The historical theocracy of Israel will be restored one day when the King returns in all of his glory, when he returns upon the earth and inaugurates a perfect theocratic kingdom. In fact, Amos connects the future kingdom to the Davidic dynasty in Amos nine verse 11. He says:

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.”¹⁰

So please understand. Paul is not saying that any of these promises have been abrogated or invalidated in the slightest. But he is saying, in effect, the issue, my Jewish kinsmen, is not the unconditional promises of God to national Israel, it is not the issue of somehow the integrity of his faithfulness, but rather the issue is his unconditional election to save some, but not all Jews from the penalty of sin and ultimately to save some, but not all people even Gentiles. In fact, Israel's unbelief, he is going to tell them, is consistent with God's promises.

So number one, he begins with the proposition at the end of verse six.

“For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.”¹¹

Now I can imagine at that point the Jews are saying, “Whoa, wait a minute. Now you are going to have to explain that one. What do you mean they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel?”

Now Paul has already said something similar to this before in chapter two verse 28. Remember? He said:

¹⁰ Amos 9:11.

¹¹ Romans 9:6.

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For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.¹²

So he is saying not all physical descendants of Abraham are true heirs of God's promise. It is not keeping the letter of the law that saves a man, which obviously no man can do. But it is, rather, the internal regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Salvation has nothing to do with works, nothing to do with externals. It is a result of God's sovereign grace and the Spirit that comes in and performs that work of grace within the heart.

Now, likewise, here in verse six Paul is saying that God's Word has not failed here, not at all. The issue is Jewish unbelief which proves that not all Jews are heirs of God's promise. Again:

“For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.”¹³

That is the proposition. And, secondly, he begins to offer the proof. Notice in verse seven.

...neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is a word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."¹⁴

Now the Jews were all very familiar with this story recorded in Genesis 16. Abraham's wife Sarah was barren as you will recall and she did not believe God's promises to her that she would bear a child to be Abraham's heir. And so she went out on her own, as we often do when we don't believe God, and came up with her own strategy and convinced her husband to go in to her handmaid, her Egyptian maid Hagar to conceive a child. And she did and that child's name was Ishmael. Later on you will recall the story. Sarah became jealous and she insisted that Hagar and her newly weaned son Ishmael be driven out of the household.

But even though Ishmael was Abraham's child, he was not the child of the promise. God made it clear that the line of the covenant would flow through Isaac, not through Ishmael. In Genesis 17 verse 19 he said:

¹² Romans 2:28-29.

¹³ Romans 9:6.

¹⁴ Romans 9:7-9.

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“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.”¹⁵

And then in verse 21:

“My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”¹⁶

This is what proves Paul’s proposition, that he has stated that they are not Israel who are descended from Israel. In other words, there are, quote, children of the flesh, meaning physical descendants of Abraham whom God has not sovereignly chosen to bless and there are children of the promise which would be physical descendants from Abraham that God has chosen to receive to blessing of the covenant promises.

Now back to Paul’s proposition. He is basically saying here that the line of the covenant ran through Isaac, not through Ishmael. Now you may also recall that God did promise Abraham that he would bless Ishmael, that he would become the father of a great nation. You read that in Genesis 17 verse 20. And he did. He became the father of the Arabs. But, again, God’s unconditional covenant promises to Abraham were not given to Ishmael. Nor were they given to Abraham’s other six sons that he had later on after Sarah died through his wife Keturah. They were given to the descendants of Isaac, the child of the promise. Therefore even as not all the physical children of Abraham were heirs of God’s promises physically, likewise, not all of Abraham’s children through Isaac will be God’s people spiritually.

This explains Israel’s unbelief. The Word of God has not failed. No, not at all, nor does his gospel in any way contradict his promises. But, rather, Israel’s unbelief is consistent with what God has said all along. Think of the numerous examples in the Old Testament where Israel has played the harlot and even worshipped the Baals. It is no surprise that most of the Jews would reject Jesus. And their rejection was certainly no proof that somehow he was not the Messiah. Down through history God has judged Israel because of her unbelief. In fact, you can go back to the end of Deuteronomy and you will see where Moses described their disgrace, a disgrace that would be heaped upon them if they rejected God and how God would cause them to be disbursed and wander throughout the nations, cast out even from all nations.

Deuteronomy 28 verse 37 he said:

“And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the people where the LORD will drive you.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Genesis 17:19.

¹⁶ Genesis 17:21.

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 28:37.

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And if we look down through history we see certainly that began with the Assyrians in a big way and then the Babylonians and then the Romans came in. If you continue to look at history you can see how degradation was heaped upon them during the medieval church period in northern Europe. You can see the horrors that they experienced in England and in Spain and in France and in German and in Poland. Yet God has preserved them. Indeed, Psalm 121:4 he says:

“He who keeps Israel Will neither slumber nor sleep.”¹⁸

And to this day we look the tiny nation of Israel surrounded by literally millions of Arab enemies and God continues to preserve them.

In Jeremiah 31 verse 36 God has promised that only if the fixed order of the sun and moon and stars vanish from his sight will the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever. He goes on to say:

“If the heavens above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done,” declares the LORD.”¹⁹

So obviously, to be sure, God’s promises to Israel have not failed. But nowhere in Scripture do we read that sinful man can be reconciled to a holy God simply because he is a descendant of Abraham. Salvation is always by grace alone through faith alone. And I humbly say that to my Jewish friends that are listening to my voice. Paul has already established that by using the example of Abraham you can only be reckoned to God, according to Romans 4, if you believe in him. Abraham, Romans four verse three, believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

In fact, I would submit to you that even before Abraham ever existed, long before the covenant promises, salvation was still by faith alone. The writer of Hebrews makes this clear to us. He gave us an example of the faith that was associated with the sacrifice of Able contrasted with the lack of faith in the sacrifice offered by Cain.

In Hebrews 11:4 we read:

“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous.”²⁰

So Paul proves his proposition.

¹⁸ Psalm 121:4.

¹⁹ Jeremiah 31:37.

²⁰ Hebrews 11:4.

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“For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants.”²¹

But Paul also knew that there would be other antagonists who would argue, “Well, ok. Yes, maybe that is true. That is true of Ishmael, but the reason why is because Ishmael was born from the maid servant Hagar, not from his wife Sarah.”

So, anticipating that objection he says in verse 10:

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."²²

Oh, my. This takes the argument to an even higher level, doesn’t it? Here we have twins. They have the same father and mother. And it is interesting that although Esau was the first twin to be born and by custom he would have normally been the heir of promise, God says, “No, I want the older to serve the younger.”

And here he proves even more strongly that neither national heritage nor human merit has anything whatsoever to do with God choosing one person over another. The destinies of both men in this case were predetermined. On what basis were they determined? Simply because of God’s sovereign good pleasure, utterly independent of anything they had done according to verse 11, good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to his choice might stand, not because of works, but because of him who called.

Now there are many who will argue, well, yes, indeed, works are excluded as a basis of election. But faith is not. They would argue that God chose Jacob on the basis of his foreseen faith. And he rejected Esau because of the absence of faith, that God looked down the corridors of time. He saw who would believe and who wouldn’t and then on that basis he made his choice.

Well, of course, this is back to the issue of divine foreknowledge that we covered at great length in chapter eight verse 29.

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined...”²³

Now there are several problems with this particular view. First of all, the term “foreknew” we have studied in great detail carries with it the idea of fore love and

²¹ Romans 9:6-7.

²² Romans 9:10-12.

²³ Romans 8:29.

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foreordination, a predetermined plan. It does not merely have the idea of knowing something ahead of time. And so that argument would fall on that exegetical concept alone. But, secondly, bear in mind that the thrust of Paul's argument here is to demonstrate that there is absolutely nothing that human beings can do that can influence God's choice. So to somehow insert the idea of foreseen faith would contradict his whole argument here. And, thirdly, if God's election was based upon foreseen faith, then Paul would have answered the anticipated question about the fairness of God's election in verse 14 by saying, "May it never be," and then he would have added something like this.

"God is not unjust because he elected Jacob on the basis of his faith and rejected Esau on the basis of his unbelief, that which he saw in eternity past."

Well, Paul never made such a claim. Instead, as we read, when he anticipates the objection concerning God's fairness in election, he asserts that God may in the pursuit of his eternal purposes and his pursuit to glorify himself, he may soften some hearts and harden the hearts of others with absolutely no regard, he says in verse 16 to the man who wills or the man who runs. In other words, with no regard to man's will or his effort, there is no mention here of forcing faith.

You must understand that God needs absolutely no justification in choosing and calling some men to salvation and not others. So, again, Paul's argument is that God elects those who will become his heirs of promise without any consideration of human merit as in the case of Isaac and Ishmael and in the case of Jacob and Esau. And, of course, this applies to every believer.

Now notice also in verse 12 Paul reminded them of God's promise to Rebekah in Genesis 25 verse 23. He says:

"THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."²⁴

And, indeed, as promised, Esau became subservient to Jacob, both directly as well as indirectly. You will recall that Esau forfeited his birthright to Jacob in Genesis 25 and later Jacob obtained the blessing which his father Isaac wrongfully intended to pronounce upon Esau in Genesis 27. And we have seen this prophecy fulfilled down through history as recorded in Scripture. Jacob's name later was changed to Israel. And through him the Israelites continued to live as the divinely chosen descendants of Abraham and Isaac, the heirs of God's promises physically as a nation.

Although, keep this in mind, only remnant will be elected to be the recipients of God's sovereign grace. Paul reminded the Jews of this in Galatians 3:29. He said:

"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."²⁵

²⁴ Romans 9:12.

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But we know that God passed over Esau. He became the father of the nation of Edom, the bitter enemies of Israel. And, likewise, Esau's descendants served the descendants of Jacob. Esau's descendants, the Edomites, you will recall in biblical history, absolutely hated the Israelites. They became a vile, idolatrous people, bitter enemy of God's chosen people.

You will recall, for example, the stories of the wicked Amalekites that took their name from Amalek, Amalek being the grandson of Esau and how these people would attack the faint and the weary stragglers at the rear of the vast Israeli convoy that was exiting out of Egypt and slaughter them. And in Exodus 17:14 God promised to, quote:

“...utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”²⁶

And it is interesting, 1255 years after the birth of Jacob and Esau, God declared his judgment again upon Esau and his descendants, the Edomites. We read about that in the prophet Amos in Amos chapter one beginning in verse 11.

Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Edom and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because he pursued his brother with the sword, While he stifled his compassion; His anger also tore continually, And he maintained his fury forever. So I will send fire upon Teman, And it will consume the citadels of Bozrah."²⁷

You will remember also the prophecies of Obadiah. They were pronounced primarily upon the Edomites. He pronounced their destruction in verse 10. He says:

“Because of violence to your brother Jacob, You will be covered with shame, And you will be cut off forever.”²⁸

Isn't that an amazing picture of the kind of hostilities that we see between those whom God has chosen by his grace and those that he has passed over? The constant conflict, the constant warring.

Indeed, we see this described in verse 13 where God says:

“Just as it is written, ‘JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.’”²⁹

Paul is quoting here Malachi chapter one beginning in verse one. We read this.

²⁵ Galatians 3:29.

²⁶ Exodus 17:14.

²⁷ Amos 1:11-12.

²⁸ Obadiah 10.

²⁹ Romans 9:13.

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The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How hast Thou loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation, and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."³⁰

What a frightening statement. Here God reminds us that the antithesis of his saving love is his holy hatred.

Now some will argue that the expression "Esau I hated," does not have anything to do with Esau as an individual, but to the race of Edom, that somehow God is saying, "I excluded him from the love that I showed to Israel."

But I, frankly, find such an interpretation incapable of adequately explaining, as Paul is trying to do, why not all individual ethnic Israelites are eternally saved if God's Word is true, a condition that evokes such enormous sorrow in his heart. So he speaks to them as individuals. He is not speaking to them merely as a nation. And he tells them that God's promised blessing or it is wholly unrelated to what a man is by birth or merit, that election is entirely unconditional, that it is based solely upon God's uninfluenced, sovereign good pleasure. So I would argue that Paul primarily is talking about individual, not national election.

And then to strengthen his argument he emphasizes that the judgment, the wrath of God that abides upon those whom he passes over is very real. Those who will refuse to believe.

You might recall that Paul spent 67 verses at the beginning of this epistle from verse 18 of chapter one to verse 20 of chapter three, 67 verses explaining the condemnation that makes man the subject of God's just wrath.

And in chapter five verse 10 he says that he is an enemy of God. Jesus has declared that the wrath of God rests upon the sinner, John 3:36. In fact, 14 times in the first 50 psalms alone God reveals that he hates the sinner.

Psalm seven verse 11.

"God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day."³¹

And, frankly, the wrath of God is a reasonable response to those who have offended his holiness. The reason we have such a hard time with that is because we have no

³⁰ Malachi 1:1-3.

³¹ Psalm 7:11.

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conception of how holy God really is. Therefore we do not understand how sinful we really are.

Well, some will argue, well, yes, but Esau had not yet offended God's holiness. So you are saying that God ordained certain people to everlasting punishment, that he just creates them so he can send them to hell.

I hear that argument from time to time. But that is not at all the case. I believe in keeping with the profound creeds of the reformers that God's first decree was, number one, to glorify himself through the creation of the human race and then, secondly, to decree to permit the fall of man into sin and then after he decreed the fall of man that would doom us all because of our sinfulness, he decreed to choose some of that fallen race unto salvation and pass by others and condemn them for their sin.

Thus, God did not create man to somehow simply damn him.

Hendrickson tells us, quote, "Those people who were destined for glory were chosen out of the state of sin and destruction into which they had plunged themselves. And those destined for perdition were, by God's decree, left in that state."

Beloved, nowhere in Scripture do we ever read that sinners were predestined to God's wrath, that they somehow were forced into that fate. But rather we see that their condemnation is always because of their unbelief.

Now having said all of this I must humbly add that there is far more that we do not understand about these great doctrines than what we do understand or even can understand. Certainly it is an inscrutable mystery when we come to God's sovereignty versus man's responsibility and yet in the mind of God they are perfectly harmonized. And simply because we cannot fully explain them, we should not reject them as many tend to do.

So God has made some things very clear. This leads me, finally, to the principle that he gives us. This is what emerges from God's argument or from God's argument through his apostle. First of all, again, keep in mind, he makes the proposition that not all who are of Israel are heirs of God's promise. In other words, not all ethnic Israelites are spiritual Israelites. There is a spiritually elect remnant within that physical nation. And then he goes on to prove that proposition in the stories of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau, that they are children of the flesh versus children of the promise. And then from these amazing truths we find a principle that emerges that applies to all of us, one that explains why we are saved.

Let me put it to you as succinctly as I can. It is simply this. As we look at this text we see that in eternity past God took the initiative in salvation. And solely on the basis of his uninfluenced, sovereign good pleasure, he graciously chose certain ones to be saved.

Israel's Unbelief and the Promises of God

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 9:6-13

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And those whom he chose will certainly be saved when he calls them, those and no others.

This we know, beloved, because its basis is in divine revelation. Because of our infinite minds, God has not revealed any more to us than this. Indeed, the secret things belong to the Lord, Deuteronomy 29:29.

And I would add, in closing, that while it is wrong to go beyond the bounds of Scripture and try to explain the inscrutable mysteries of God, it is equally wrong to disregard them and to distort them and to somehow reshape them so somehow they fit into our understanding of God and our understanding of justice. And certainly it is wholly inappropriate to just avoid passages that we don't like.

May I give you a challenge? Dear friends. Allow these truths to drive you to your face, to cause you to fall before the Lord in humble praise and adoration because of his sovereign grace in your life. May I remind you that all great theology leads to doxology. That is its ultimate purpose. So may all of us as redeemed rejoice in his eternal purposes which cannot fail.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you of these truths. Indeed, will you cause them to move our hearts to praise and to worship? And, Lord, we know that you use your people as instruments of righteousness to bring to salvation those that you have elected by your grace. Lord, may we be faithful to that end? Thank you and we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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