

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

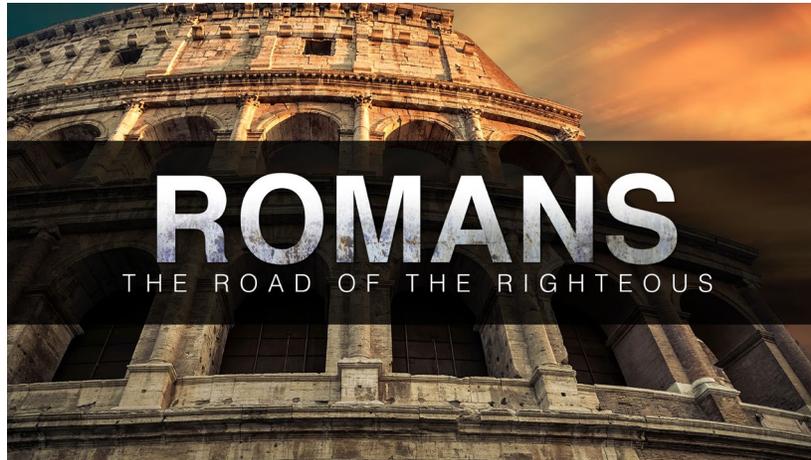
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 9:6-13

Written By

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According to Dr. Harold Hoehner's chronological analysis of the last week of Christ's life, on Monday of March 30, A.D. 33 He experienced the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Thinking Jesus might be the Messiah based on the resurrection of Lazarus, the Jews lined the streets and waved palm branches shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matt. 21:9). Why did they do this? They believed, though erroneously so, Jesus fulfilled the seventh prophetic feast of Israel, the feast of tabernacles as recorded by the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 14:16-19).

What they failed to realize, though, was the Messiah had to first fulfill all the six prior feasts before He established the essence of the Feast of Tabernacles in the messianic kingdom age. Hence, the proper order of fulfillment was about to be realized at the end of that fateful week. Jesus's death and resurrection would set in motion the fulfillment of (1) Passover, (2) the Feast of Unleavened Bread, (3) the Feast of Firstfruits, and (4) Pentecost. The Feasts of Trumpets, or number 5, and the Day of Atonement, or number 6, would be fulfilled at the Second Coming of the Messiah, and then the Feast of Tabernacles would be realized as God came to dwell among and rule over His people (Zech. 12-14; Isa. 2; 9:6-7; Psalm 2, 89). Pragmatically, we would be safe to say the misled Jews of Christ's time wanted a messianic king who by-passed the sacrifice for sins prophesied in places like Isaiah 53. Put differently, they, like so many people today, wanted God on their selfish, limited terms.

So, on Monday the Jews joyously shouted "Hosanna" to Jesus, but at the end of the week, when He didn't fulfill their expectations of the Messiah, they rhythmically chanted, "Crucify Him!" (Mark. 15:14). Their bloodthirsty chant, of course, led to Christ's brutal crucifixion on April 3, 33 A.D. His glorious and historically verified resurrection on Sunday morning, verified He was,

in fact, the God-man Messiah; however, the Jewish nation still stood condemned for working in and through the Romans to murder this man they rejected as their messianic king. From man's limited perspective, has there ever been a greater blunder?

In Romans 9, verses 1 through 5, Paul speaks about how God showered blessings upon the Israelites as a people, even down to giving them the Messiah, as prophesied (v. 5). They, on the contrary, historically opposed God, down to even hatefully rejecting and killing the Messiah when He did, in fact, arrive. Talk about a colossal and sinful mistake and life choice. But, as Paul just articulated in Romans 8:28-30, God employs His providential power to take the tragedies of like and turn them into triumphs. The cross is the greatest illustration of this timeless truth.

However, Jews within the Roman church still struggled with their past opposition to the Messiah. Did their national penchant for opposition to God and His prophets, down to the ruthless rejection of the Messiah, mean it was over for them, even though God has given them many wonderful national promises? I'm sure Paul had struggled with and answered that question many times, which is probably why he stopped in Romans 9:6-33 and drilled down into it in great detail. His argument here is complex and based on a strict Jewish perspective, which might make it a little difficult for Western thinkers; however, it is worth understanding because it teaches us much about the person of God where our sin is concerned.

To (hopefully) help keep you from getting lost in the forest of Paul's intricate argument in this chapter, permit me to explain his main thesis and how he develops his thesis. One, Paul's main point in this chapter is to answer one burning question: *Has Israel's rampant, illogical unbelief toward the outright work of God served to nullify God's promises to them?* From our Gentilic perspective we could principalize this by stating it differently: *Does our sin abrogate and terminate the promises of God?* Keep in mind that all through this chapter Paul will prove how nothing can thwart the promises of God because they are founded upon His powerful providential character. This is his main thrust in verses 6 through 13.

In verses 14 through 23, Paul, as a wise teacher, stops to answer some questions all Jews would ask concerning the providential actions of God. Is God unrighteous if He providentially chooses some to carry out the fulfillment of His promises (Rom. 9:14-18)? And if God is providentially executing His plan, then how can He fairly judge people who disobey Him (Rom. 9:19-23)? Finally, he addressed the question regarding God calling Gentiles to Himself. Was this foretold in the OT, and if so, what does this mean in relation to His promises to Israel (Rom. 9:23-29). Does this mean God has moved on from Israel because of their prior sinful disposition toward God?

With this argument flow in mind, let's return to the main theme on Paul's mind. In verses one through five, he has stated a theological dilemma. Israel did, in fact, as a nation, experience many wonderful promises from God's good hand, however, it appears post-cross that their unbelief and spiritual intransigence has served to cancel those divine promises. Is this true? This is, of course, the main motif of verses six through thirteen. Let's restate it one more time:

Question: Does Israel's Spiritual Failure And Rejection of The Messiah Nullify God's National Promises (Rom. 9:6-13)?

Answer: No, Because God Sovereignly Chose Israel.

Paul develops his answer to this opening query in the most intricate fashion. First, he substantiates his answer and argument with this first supportive premise:

God's choice was not based on heredity (Rom. 9:6-9). Watch closely how Paul develops this point. He's absolutely masterful . . . and heady.

⁶ But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."⁸ 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. ⁹ For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."

The negative (Οὐχ) is strategically placed at the head of the sentence for the sake of emphasis. Paul uses it to underscore his point that there is no way God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament have failed in relation to their national sinful disposition toward God. The verb "*has failed*," *ekreptoken* (ἐκπέτωκεν), is, according to Friberg's Greek Lexicon, a nautical term denoting a ship going off course.¹ So, it's as if Paul said, "It is impossible to conclude from Israel's disobedience to God that God's promises to them have gone off course, causing them to crash on the rocks." The Psalmist was right.

⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. (Ps. 145).

God couldn't have been clear when He articulated these profound, moving words through the pen of Isaiah:

¹⁵ "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. ¹⁶ Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me (Isa. 49).

Prior to their fall to the Babylonians because of their sin, God comforted the people by letting them know that no matter how bad the days became He would never ultimately forget them. How could He because they were His chosen people. He chose them, not they, Him.

With the last clause of verse 6, Paul states an astonishing truth about God's people, Israel.

For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel (Rom. 9:6).

From the very formation of the nation, God's elective sifting process played out in a profound fashion. Paul's point with this statement is this: God never created a chosen nation from all of the natural descendants. On the contrary, heredity was not the primary factor. God's sovereign choice/selection was central at all times. Paul supplies two examples to illustrate and validate this conclusion.

¹Friberg, Greek Lexicon, **ἐκπίπτω** laor. ἐξέπεσα; 2aor. ἐξέπεσον; pf. ἐκπέτωκα; basically *fall out of or down from*; (1) literally; (a) of withered blossoms *fall off* (JA 1.11); (b) of fetters *fall off* (AC 12.7); (c) as a nautical technical term, of ships *drift off course, be driven onto rocks, run aground* (AC 27.17); (2) figuratively; (a) of the loss of favor or grace *lose, no longer experience* (GA 5.4); (b) of the nonfulfillment of a divine promise *fail, lose effect* (RO 9.6)

⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."⁸ 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.⁹ For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON (Rom. 9).

Paul first employs the genealogical line of Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation to demonstrate God selective and elective actions to form a people for Himself. Abraham's first natural son was Ishmael, who was conceived through his female Egyptian servant, Hagar (Gen. 16). If Israel's nationality depended upon heredity, then Ishmael's descendants would qualify as God's chosen people, but they did not as God makes perfectly clear in the rest of the Genesis narrative (Gen. 17:1-14; 18:1-15; 21:10 . . . which says God chose Isaac, not Ishmael, as the progenitor of His chosen people). All along, *God sovereignly chose* who would constitute His people, and who would not. Verses 8 through 9 drive this point home:

⁸ 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.⁹ For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON (Rom. 9).

Ishmael, who was of Abraham's flesh, was not the chosen line of God and the Messiah. That special privilege fell upon God's selection of Isaac. God's choice was His choice and it was not grounded solely upon heredity or a bloodline. And the mere fact that Sarah had this promised child in her old age when her husband was a hundred years old (Gen. 21:5) demonstrates the miraculous nature of God's choice. She had nothing to do with it because her aged body was well beyond child-bearing days. God supernaturally and miraculously moved to show His sovereign choice rested firmly upon this little child, and not upon Ishmael, who was fourteen years older.

The point of all of this should not be missed: God's selection of Isaac and not Ishmael shows He sovereignty in action to form His chosen people. And since this winnowing was God's doing, then man's inaction or misdeeds could in no way abrogate God's work to raise up a people for Himself, a people who would become Israel. It was not their doing, but solely God's. Next, Paul moves down the lineage of Abraham to prove that . . .

God's choice was not based on actions (Rom. 9:10-13). Beginning with verse 10, Paul emphatically demonstrates through the two sons of Isaac and Rebekah how God continued to winnow His sovereign choice for who would constitute His chosen people.

¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac;¹¹ for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,¹² it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."¹³ Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

Here, God reveals He sovereignly selected Jacob, not Esau, to be the promised seed of the nation, Israel, and His selection occurred prior to the births of the boys. They, therefore, did nothing, either good or bad, to cause God to select or de-select them. God unconditionally chose the younger of the twins to be the progenitor of His people, and this was unheard of because the firstborn should have been the favored child. Esau's people should have been God's chosen people,

but they were not. This divine standing and favor rested upon Jacob because God chose him outright. He certainly would not have chosen Jacob for his stellar character. His penchant for lying, conniving, and deception would have, from a human perspective, kept him from being this favored child. Yet this is not what happened. God looked upon two sinners and merely chose the culturally “illogical” one to be the favored son of the new nation. He did this to underscore His inviolable, inexorable divine choice to create His chosen people (v. 11).

God’s sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau also revealed that the older, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob. Historically, this is what occurred. Prophets like Amos and Obadiah illustrate that the Edomite’s, who came from Esau, did, in fact, become adversaries of Israel (Amos 1:11-12; Obad. 10). The two nations fought in Rebekah’s womb, and they fought outside the womb as well. Yet, of these two bad boys, God, for whatever divine reasons, selected Jacob to be the father of God’s people, Israel. And we must not overlook two truths which emerge from this: One, God chose who He wanted to choose to be His people. This means those chosen people couldn’t, then, do anything to abrogate God’s divine choice; and, two, God still chose the people despite the sin of their progenitor. If sin could destroy the promises of God, then Jacob’s many sins would have completely obliterated it, but it didn’t. Why? Those promises for Israel rested squarely on God’s shoulders.

This should bring you much comfort as you walk with God, as a sidelight. How often do we behave like Jacob? Too much. However, if we are God’s people, by means of faith in the Messiah, Jesus, then all His promises to us cannot be abrogated and destroyed either by our sinful missteps.

Further, this should cause you to look at our current political atmosphere in a new fashion. Our politicians and people are quick to side with Islamic teachers who say that Ishmael is the promised child, not Isaac, and that God is using them to bring His religion and rule to earth. Such is not the case from the Torah, but is a confusion of the sovereign election of God. God chose Isaac over Ishmael, and it is through this son the world is now blessed by the coming of THE son, Jesus, the Christ.

Additionally, we should see in the story of Jacob and Esau a picture of Israel throughout time. Jacob, on the one hand, represents the saved among Israel, while Esau speaks of those who historically turned against God. The tension is still alive and well today, and will not be relieved until the Messiah appears and save those Jews who turn to Him (Zech. 12-13).

Lastly, where God’s sovereign selection is concerned it appears to us as God loving one boy, Jacob, while supposedly hating the other, Esau. Here is how Paul puts it:

¹³ Just as it is written, “JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED” (Rom. 9).

Paul quotes here from the book of Malachi, chapter one, verses two through three. In this context, the two names represent the two nations who were historically at odds with each other. Paul applies it directly to the two sons. One was chosen, and therefore, blessed, while the other was unchosen, and therefore, “hated.” How should we process this characteristic of God? Here is what R. C. Sproul says,

When the Scripture speaks of God’s *hating*, it means that he did not bestow favor upon Esau. God did not give to him grace and the benefits of salvific love. It doesn’t mean that God hates in the sense that human beings hate.

Of course, this raises the question: Is there arbitrariness in God? Is he capricious? Do his choices border on the irrational with no legitimate reason whatsoever? Absolutely not! God never does anything without a reason. It is beyond the character of God to act in a whimsical, capricious manner. God's decisions are always taken in accordance with his character. But the spectre of arbitrariness is here because the Scripture makes it very clear that there is no reason in the elect why God has chosen them. But the fact that there is no reason in them, does not mean that there is no reason at all. God has a reason for doing what he does. But the point is that the reason does not lie within us.²

Sproul is getting at the middle eastern concept of selection. To fail to choose one person over another did not mean you hated them, but that you loved them less. Their lack of choice carried with it the idea of being "hated" in the sense they were not favored in relation to a favored one. Regarding this eye-brow raising statement by Paul, R. Kent Hughes offers this sagacious advice:

This relative use of hate is also found in Luke 14:26 when Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple." Jesus obviously does not mean his followers are to hate their relatives, but that they are to love him so much that love for family appears as hatred in comparison.

God loves sinners. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." "The Lord ... is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). But at the same time, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).

The point Paul is making is, God has not failed because Israel has failed, because true Israel (true believers) have always come to God through his sovereign choice. God could have chosen Esau and rejected Jacob if he wanted. If you know anything about those two scoundrels, the marvel is not in God's rejection of Esau, but in his choice of Jacob. God has not failed!³

I think he is spot on. God selected a man to head up His chosen people we would never dream of selecting. How wise are His ways. How gracious and merciful is He. And if the sins of God's sovereign choice didn't terminate God's use of that young man, then the sin of God's people in rejecting Jesus would in no wise vaporize God's future plans to fulfill all of His wonderful promises to them either.

Two thousand years ago on a Monday thousands of Jews lined the streets of Jerusalem to cheer Jesus on as the messianic king. By Friday they, in unison, chanted and called for His death

² R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 166.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 176.

because He was not the Messiah they wanted. By 3 p.m. He was dead by means of Roman crucifixion.

Did this rejection mean God was through with Israel? Does this mean that God is now only ever going to work in and through the Church? No, and no. Israel's sin did not nullify God's promises to bless and redeem them, and bless the world through them. That is impossible because God's sovereign choice of Israel stands all the tests of time. One day the Church Age shall end and God will save those from His nation who turn to Him as the Messiah.

In the meantime, let us give praise to God who does not permit our sins to hamper His lofty, magnificent plans for us. Throughout history He has purposefully chosen to work in and through highly broken, desperate people to accomplish His will. Now, He chooses broken and desperate people to be His people in this age of grace. In the future, He will choose broken and desperate Jews to pour His blessings upon, just as He promised them. Thank God He is a God of His word.