

**II. VINDICATION—THE WISDOM OF GOD REVEALED (9–11)**

Romans 9–11 is a sustained argument dealing with the place of the race of Israel in God's redemptive purposes. God had disclosed Himself to the Jews. Paul concluded in Chapter 8 that nothing can separate the elect from the love of God (8:28–39). "The adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises" all belong to Israel (9:4–5). So why did Israel seemingly miss out on God's salvation? Why had most of the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah? Were God's promises temporary? Did His promises to Israel fail? If God's promises aren't reliable for Israel, are they reliable for us?

With such questions looming in the background, Paul feels the need to address Israel's standing in relation to the promises of God and to vindicate God's righteousness.

Chapter 9 admits to the fact that the Jewish nation had not received the blessings that God had promised, but shows that the Word of God has not failed (9:6).

Chapter 10 places the blame upon Israel for its failure to receive the blessings.

Chapter 11 tells us that Israel's rejection is only temporary, but has resulted in blessing to the world, for the Gentiles can now receive the gospel.

**Paul's love for Israel (9:1–5)**

***9:1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,***

***9:2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.***

***9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,***

Chapter 9 begins with Paul telling of his love for the people of Israel and his desire to see them saved. Even though Paul was "an apostle to the Gentiles" (11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7), this in no way meant that his love for his nation and people had stopped. Lest someone question Paul's heart, Paul stresses the sincerity of his love by saying, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying!" He then declares, "my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart" (9:1, 2).

Paul has a deep, deep sorrow for Israel's rejection of the promises of God through Christ. He even says in verse 3 that he was willing to be accursed for the sake of his people. The word translated as "accursed" is literally, *anathema*. It refers to something delivered over to God, either as a consecrated gift or offering (Lk. 21:5). It could also mean something or someone delivered over to divine wrath and eternal condemnation (1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22; Gal. 1:8–9). In short, Paul is saying he is willing to forfeit his salvation and to be consigned to eternal wrath and perdition in exchange for the salvation of Israel. Although it is difficult to believe that Paul really meant that he would choose separation from Christ for any reason, his words express the strongest desire for his nation's salvation. They are an extraordinary expression of love. To a degree, parents may feel like this in respect to their children; Paul felt this way toward a whole race of people.

**9:4 who 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,  
9:5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (ESV)**

Paul's anguish was not only because the perishing Jews are his brethren in the flesh (9:3), but also because they are God's chosen people with all the blessings and privileges associated with their position:

1. They have been given "the adoption of sons" and were, therefore, heirs of the promises of God.

Believers in Jesus Christ are called "sons of God" (υἱοὶ θεοῦ, Rom 8:14, 19), God's children (τέκνα, Rom 8:16, 17, 21), and adopted (υἱοθεσία, Rom 8:15, 23); however, Carson is most likely correct when he says that Paul is not using the same expression in Romans 9 with the same meaning, but is talking about the adoption of Israel as the son of God. This terminology starts in Exodus 4:22–23 where God tells Pharaoh through Moses, "Israel is My son, My firstborn . . . Let My son go that he may serve Me." From that point on Israel becomes the son of God; Israel had received the original status as the elect people of God. To be the son meant to reflect the character of one's father; As God's son, Israel's calling was to display the character of God (for the concept of sonship see my notes on Romans 1:1–7).

2. Although believers are assured of future glory (δόξα, Rom 8:17, 18, 21), the Jews as a nation received glory. They had been chosen from among all the inhabitants of the earth to reflect the glory of God; they were to shine among the nations and produce fruit for God. But they also had the glory of God dwelling among them, leading them in the wilderness, hovering over the tabernacle, and filling the temple. No other nation had such privileges.

3. They benefited from the blessings associated with the covenants established with Abraham, Moses, and others. These were massive covenants with promises of land, a future coming king, and forgiveness of sin. Even the promise of the New Covenant was given to them. God did not make covenants with any other nation, only Israel.

4. They were also the recipients of the Law that revealed the nature of God and how a relationship with Him could be maintained.

5. They had the temple ritual (all the things that went on in the temple). God accepted no other sacrifice given by any other people at any time in history; there was only the sacrifice that mattered to God—the sacrifice in the temple offered by the priest as God Himself prescribed.

6. They had the promises given to the patriarchs. In the mind of a Jewish person reading them, this would be enough to fill a catalogue, as the Jews were given promises of territory, health, fruitfulness of the womb and the land. They were given theological promises, promises of security, covenantal promises, and the promise of a Messiah.

7. They even had the honor of having Messiah come in the flesh as one of them, living in their midst, bringing them salvation (Ro. 1:16). At the announcement of Jesus' conception to

Mary, the angel said to her, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Lk.1:32–33). John 1:11 says of Jesus, "He came to His own." In Matthew 15:24 when a Canaanite woman asked for help, Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Paul said in Romans 1:16 that the gospel is to the Jew first. In addressing the Jews who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost, Peter said, "Repent and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ . . . for the promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:38, 39).

Although the Jews were exceptionally privileged people, Paul directs his praise to Jesus who is God over all, blessed forever (see note 1 below).

Paul has said everything in verses 1–5 because he doesn't want to come across as callous or unloving when he introduces his main subject in 9:6 ff.

The main content of Romans 9 can be outlined as follows:

- 1) God's word with regard to Israel has not failed — 9:6–13**
- 2) God's justice with regard to Israel has not failed — 9:14–21**
- 3) God's word and justice with regard to Gentiles have not failed — 9:22–33**

#### **1. God's word with regard to Israel has not failed (9:6–13)**

Virtually all misunderstandings of verses 6–13 arise from a failure to see that these verses were written to solve the problem posed by verses 1–5. The question or problem Paul is faced with is this: "If Israel is God's covenant people to whom so many glorious privileges have been given (vv. 4–5), why are so few Israelites saved? Why are so many of them "accursed, separated from Christ?" Has God's word failed? Has God's covenant promise and eternal purpose come to nothing? Has the rejection of Jesus Christ by the majority of Israelites thwarted God's purpose? Have the trustworthiness and finality of God's word been undermined by the unbelief of so many Jews? His response to the question is a resounding No!" (Sam Storms)

**9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;**

Though the Jews possessed all the privileges mentioned in verses 4 and 5, Paul says that Israel's failure to receive salvation in Christ does not mean that the word of God was defective.

The Greek word translated as "failed" speaks of the falling away from a straight course ("*run aground*" NASB Acts 27:17, 26, 29) or the withering of a plant ("its flower *falls off*" NASB Ja. 1:11; I Pet 1:24). In other words, the word of God had not deviated from its course; it had not withered away to nothing or failed to accomplish its purpose. The problem was not with the word of God but with Israel.

The word "Israel" in verse 6 has two different nuances of meaning. In its first occurrence it is referring to those in the nation who are recipients of the promises of God. The second use, "Israel" refers to Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Jacob's name was changed to

Israel in Genesis 32:28. Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons who became the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. Paul's point is that mere physical descent does not make someone a true Israelite. God had made distinctions among the descendants of Jacob; some would receive God's blessings, others would not. Starting with Abraham, verses 7–9 clarify what Paul is saying.

***9:7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named."***

***9:8 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.***

***9:9 For this is a word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."***

There is a sense in which God chose the entire Jewish race, but He never chose the race in such a way that every member of the race would receive eternal life. In other words, Paul's argument is that the promises of God were *not* experienced by all who are physical descendants of Abraham, because from the beginning not all his descendants were chosen to receive them.

Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Although Ishmael was a physical descendant of Abraham through Sarah's handmaid, Hagar (Gen. 16:1–4), he didn't receive the blessings of God. God had elected Isaac and said, "Through Isaac your descendants will be named" (9:7; Gen. 21:12).

In verse 8 Paul states the principle involved: There are many physical descendants of Abraham (children of the flesh), but that alone doesn't mean that they are children of the promise (children of God). That is, claims based on physical descent alone cannot be made since it is clear that the offspring of the patriarchs were assigned different destinies. The promises are only for those whom God had chosen.

Verse 9 quotes the promise made to Sarah in Genesis 18:10. The thought is repeated that God elected who would be heir of the Abrahamic promise; it would be passed to one son, the son of Sarah.

***9:10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;***

***9:11(a) for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad,***

God's sovereign election is illustrated once more. He begins verse 10 by saying, "Not only this;" that is, Ishmael and Isaac aren't the only examples of God choosing one over another—Esau had the same experience as Ishmael. Esau, like Ishmael, was also a physical descendent of Abraham and was the firstborn male in his family. As such, he should have been his father's heir, but God had already chosen his brother, Jacob, and had told Rebekah that the older shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). Furthermore, God had chosen both Isaac and Jacob before they were born.

However, by referring to Esau and Jacob, Paul is making an even more compelling argument to illustrate God's unconditional election (see note 2 below).

First, Jacob and Esau were twins. They were from the same womb so the circumstances of their birth and the differences between them were minimal.

Secondly, they had the same parents. Ishmael and Isaac did not. In fact, some Jews would automatically question the legitimacy of Ishmael to receive the promises of Abraham since Hagar, Ishmael's mother, wasn't even a Jew. But that was not the case with Esau and Jacob. No one could offer a similar reason why one would be chosen over the other.

Then in 9:11(a) he makes this unconditionality of election crystal clear in that Paul says that God decided the destiny of these two sons before they had done anything good or bad, implying "that it was God's will alone, and not natural capacity, religious devotion, or even faith that determined their respective destinies" (Moo, 578). God's choice of Jacob over Esau was not determined by anything that Jacob or Esau had done; it was rooted in God alone and not in man. This is why we speak of the biblical doctrine of unconditional election<sup>2</sup>.

Why did God decide on Jacob over Esau prior to his birth? Paul says it is. . .

***9:11(b) in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls,  
9:12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger."  
9:13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."***

In other words, God chooses people before their birth to demonstrate that His plan for the nation of Israel has come about by a series of sovereign acts that He has made. God's plan is not dependent upon the choices of sinful man. He did not make His decision based on character, obedience, or innate goodness. God selected individuals precisely so election would stand; that is, God chose people so we would see that salvation is by grace not by works (11:6). "Here, more clearly than ever, Paul makes it plain that God's election—God's free and unconditional choosing of the children of promise—is what guarantees that the word of God does not, and never can, fail." (Piper, Ro. 9:6–12).

Verse 13 is a restatement of verse 12b and shows that Esau and Jacob's destinies were not just seen in advance but were caused by God (Moo, 584; see note 3 below).

The phrase, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" is a Hebraism that expresses the absolute preference of one over the other. For example, in Genesis 29:33 Leah says that she was hated by her husband, while in the preceding verse the parallel idea is expressed by saying, "Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah" (Gen. 29:30). Jesus likewise said that to come to Him we must hate our father and mother (Luke 14:26 cf. Matt. 10:37) which of course has a similar meaning, namely, that He should be treated with absolute preference, more devotion, and greater favor than even our own parents.

The aspect of God's love spoken of here is clearly distinguishing. A. W. Pink writes, "There was no more reason in Jacob why he should be the object of Divine love, than there was in Esau. They both had the same parents, and were born at the same time, being twins: yet God loved the one and hated the other! Why? Because it pleased Him to do so" (93).

“Although there is surely a sense in which God loves the non-elect, He does not love them redemptively. If He did, they would certainly be redeemed. God loves them, but not savingly, else they would certainly be saved. All this is but to say that God's eternal, electing love is not universal but particular.” (Sam Storms; The Love of God, [enjoyinggodministries.com/](http://enjoyinggodministries.com/))

In sum, no one should think that God's word had failed because every Israelite was not receiving the blessings of the New Covenant through Christ. Throughout Israel's history there is a pattern of God selecting some to receive the promises and passing over others. Not all of Abraham's descendants were heirs of the covenant, only those who were descendants of Isaac. But it wasn't even all of Isaac's descendants; only those born from one of Isaac's wives (Rebekah) and only those descended from *one* of Rebekah's sons (Jacob) would be heirs. *God* chose who the heir would be and He did it in such a way that shows His absolute freedom and power in election. Only those whom God had chosen would have the privilege of receiving the promised blessings. Paul applies this principle to all of history, even to his own day: even though many Israelites were cut off from salvation in Christ, God had not broken His promises for He had never said that every Israelite would receive His blessings.

Paul will continue to emphasize God's selection of individuals in the verses that follow even applying God's selection to individual salvation.

**NOTE 1:** Romans 9:5—Christ Who is God Over All, blessed forever  
(from Hodge's Systematic Theology, I)

In Chapter 9:5, Christ is expressly declared to be “over all, God blessed forever.” The text here is beyond dispute. The only method to avoid the force of the passage is by changing the punctuation. Erasmus, who has been followed by many modern interpreters, placed a full stop after *κατὰ σάρκα* [according to the flesh], or after *πάντων* [all]. In the former case the passage would read, “Of whom is Christ concerning the flesh. The God who is over all be blessed forever;” in the latter, “Of whom Christ came concerning the flesh, who is above all,” i.e., higher than the patriarchs. It is frankly admitted by the advocates of these interpretations that the reason for adopting them is to avoid making the Apostle assert that Christ is God over all. As they do not admit that doctrine, they are unwilling to admit that the Apostle teaches it. It was universally referred to Christ in the ancient Church, by all the Reformers, by all the older theologians, and by almost all of the modern interpreters who believe in the divinity of Christ. This uniformity of assent is itself a decisive proof that the common interpretation is the natural one. We are bound to take every passage of Scripture in its obvious and natural sense, unless the plainer declarations of the Word of God show that a less obvious meaning must be the true one. That the common interpretation of this passage is correct is plain, —

1. Because Christ is the subject of discourse; God is not mentioned in the context. The Apostle is mentioning the distinguishing blessings of the Jewish nation. To them were given the law, the glory, the covenant, and the promises, and above all, from them “as concerning the flesh (i.e., as far as his humanity is concerned), Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever.” Here everything is natural and to the point. It shows how preeminent was the distinction of the Jews that from them the Messiah, God manifest in the flesh, should be born. Compared to this, all the other prerogatives of their nation sink into insignificance.

2. The words κατὰ σάρκα [according to the flesh] demand an antithesis. There would be no reason for saying that Christ, as far as He was a man, was descended from the Jews, if He was not more than man, and if there were not a sense in which He was not descended from them. As in Rom. 1:3, 4, it is said that, κατὰ σάρκα [according to the flesh], He was the Son of David, but, κατὰ πνεῦμα [according to the Spirit], the Son of God. So here it is said, κατὰ σάρκα [according to the flesh], He was descended from the patriarchs, but that in His higher nature He is God over all, blessed forever.

3. The usage of the language demands the common interpretation. In all exclamations and benedictions, in distinction from mere narration, the predicate uniformly stands before the subject, if the copula εἶναι [the word “is”] is omitted. This usage is strictly observed in the Septuagint, in the Apocrypha, and in the New Testament. We, therefore, always read in such doxologies εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεός, [blessed be God] and never ὁ θεὸς εὐλογητός. [God be blessed] In the Hebrew Scriptures, בָּרַךְ [blessed] occurs forty times in doxologies and formulas of praise before the subject. It is always “Blessed be God,” and never “God be blessed.” In the Septuagint, Psalm 68:20 (19), κύριος ὁ θεὸς εὐλογητός [blessed be the LORD God—for example in Psa. 41:13] is the only apparent exception to this rule. And there the Hebrew adheres to the common form, and the Greek version is a rhetorical paraphrase of the original. The Hebrew is simply בָּרַךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ for which the LXX. have, Κύριος ὁ θεὸς εὐλογητός, εὐλογητὸς κύριος. Every consideration, therefore, is in favor of the interpretation which has been accepted by the Church as giving the true meaning of this passage. Christ is God over all, blessed forever.

**NOTE 2.** Unconditional election means that from all eternity God decided to save some members of the human race and to let the rest of the human race perish. Election is unconditional because our individual lives have no bearing on God’s decision to choose whom He will save. God’s choice about who will receive grace and who will not is solely based on His good pleasure. Those that He gives grace, are changed. They desire God, respond in faith, and are saved. Those He does not choose to give grace have no natural desire for God and will suffer the consequences for willful rejection of the Savior.

The opposite of unconditional election is conditional election. This is the idea that God bases His choice about who will be saved upon men’s faith. That is, God foresaw who would believe and then predestined them to be saved based on that knowledge. However, “election cannot mean that God simply recognizes those who believe, for then the word ‘election’ is completely stripped of its meaning, and the notion of God choosing is erased from the word” (Schreiner, Corporate and Individual Election in Romans 9: A Response to Brian Abasciano, 5)

**NOTE 3.** Some have claimed that although “works” are excluded as the basis for election, “faith” is not. They say that God chose Jacob based on His foreknowledge of Jacob’s faith and rejected Esau based on the absence of faith.

Of course, faith is a necessary condition for salvation but not for election. Men must believe to be saved, but God does not call them based on seeing their faith. God calls men to be saved, opens their eyes so that they can respond in faith, justifies them, and will eventually change them into the image of Christ (Ro. 8:28–30). The basis of God’s call has nothing to do with man.

As Storms points out:

First, the whole point of Paul's argument is the contrast between human activity and God's activity and his desire to base election in what God does and not in anything that any human being does. But second, and more important, "if Paul had assumed that faith was the basis for God's election, he would have pointed this out when he raised the question in v. 14 about the fairness of God's election. All he would have needed to say at that point was 'of course God is not unjust in choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau, for His choosing took into account the faith of one and the unbelief of the other.' Paul's silence on this point is telling" (Moo, 583).