

CLASS 9: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND THE FALL OF ISRAEL (Romans 9)

V. Israel's relation to the church, ch. 9-11

This section of the book is an important link in the chain of Paul's argument. It has been anticipated in chapter 1, but now is called for by the end of chapter 8. If God promises to preserve his elect people, how is it that most of the Jewish nation has departed from God, has rejected Christ, and is lost? Have they been separated from God's love? Paul answers this question magnificently and elegantly in these chapters.

1. God's sovereignty in election, 9:1-21

Paul begins by asserting God's sovereignty to choose whomever he will for salvation. The OT clearly shows that he did not elect all of Abraham's descendants; the line of Ishmael was excluded, likewise that of Esau. God narrowed down the elect ones without regard to their actions, but simply to further his own purpose.

Paul offers the illustration of Pharaoh, whom God raised up, not to save, but to harden his heart and to condemn, showing God's power over him. Pharaoh was created for God's glory.

We cannot escape responsibility by blaming God or complaining. God is the potter, we are the clay; he can do as he wills with us.

Lost brothers

^{9:1} I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 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

Paul's compassion for his brothers:

- Sincere (1)
- Deep and continuous (2)
- Self-sacrificing (3)

Reasons for our compassion

- Fellow humans
- Often friends, family
- God's image – their potential
- Same state as ourselves

Compare compassion of Jeremiah: Jer 4:19; 8:20-22; 9:1; Lam 1:16

Compare weeping of Jesus: John 11:35; Luke 19:41-42 (cf. 23:28); his lament for Jerusalem (Matt 23:37)

Paul's appreciation for his brothers (vv. 4-5):

- Adoption (Ezek 16:1-8)
- Glory (2 Chr 7:1)
- Covenants (Abrahamic covenant, Isaac, Jacob; Deut 4:37; 7:6-8)
- Giving of law (Mosaic covenant; Deut 4:5-13)
- Temple worship (John 4:19-22)
- Promises (Heb 11:13, 17)
- Fathers (Heb 11)
- Messiah (Isa 52:13-15; 53:12; 55:3-5; John 1:14)

Paul's recognition of God's sovereignty (v. 5b):

- God's total sovereignty
- Cf. Acts 2:39 ("you, your children, all afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call")

Tension: God's sovereignty, and our compassion

- Compassion should lead us to witnessing, prayer, Christian life, trusting in the Lord

Children of the promise

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad- in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his

call— ¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Abraham's children:

Promise more important than parentage (vv. 7-9)

Isaac and Ishmael (Gen 17:15-21; 21:9-12 [Gal 4]; 22:2 ["only son"]; 26:2-5)

- Cf. Ishmael in Gen 25:17

V. 8 – Children of promise have claim to the promise

"Stones" – John the Baptist (Matt 3:9); Christ (Luke 19:39-40)

Isaac and Rebecca's children:

Election over effort (vv. 10-13)

Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19-26 [esp. v. 23; cf. v. 28], 33; 27:27-29, 33, 40; 28:3-4, 13-14; 32:28)

- Esau "unholy, profane," Heb 12:16

Cf. Esau – Gen 33:16, 36; Num 20:14-21; Obad 3-4, 11, 18; Mal 1:2-5)

Vv. 11-12:

- Children of promise are those who are elected by God.
- Election is based on God's purposes alone.

Who is "Israel"?

Some excluded from "Israel" (6)

Others included in "Israel" (Cf. Heb 11:39-40 "not without us")

The difference? True faith (Gal 3:6-7, 26-29)

Controversial verse – Gal 6:12-16, "the Israel of God"

God's sovereignty in election

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?

God's justice affirmed (14)

The Scriptural principle (15-16)

V. 15 quotation from Exod 33:19

Exod 32-33 – golden calf and God's plan and Moses' prayers

V. 16 – principle explained

The Scriptural example: Pharaoh (17-18)

Previous quotation – predestination ("determination to save")

Now – preterition ("passing over, neglecting"), or reprobation ("rejection, casting off")

V. 17, quotation of Exod 9:16

Note all these verses for Pharaoh's "hardening": Exod 3:19-20; 4:21; 7:3-5, 13-14, 22-23; 8:15, 32; 9:7, 12, 16, 34-35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4-5, 8, 17-18, [30-31]; praise in Moses' song [15:1-19]

Half the time "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," and half the time "Pharaoh's heart was hardened" or "Pharaoh hardened his heart"

Both true – God determined it, Pharaoh freely carried it out

V. 18 – principle explained

Other passages where people passed over, hardened—vv. 13, 22; 11:7; Matt 11:25; 1 Pet 2:8; Jude 4

The Scriptural argument: God's supreme will (19-21)

Question (19)

Answer (20a, 21) – potter in Jer 18:1-10 [transition to next section]

Quotation (20b) – Isa 29:16 (against Jerusalem), Isa 45:9 (against Babylon, for Cyrus)

2. Israel's fall, and the remnant, 9:22 - 11:10

Most of chapters 9-11 is taken up describing the way God deals with his chosen nation of Israel.

Paul first explains why the nation as a whole has not been faithful to the Lord. The prophets predicted a time when Israel would not be "God's people" (9:22-29). Israel sought to be accepted by God by her own merit, not by simple loyalty to God and faith in him; this is shown by their failure to receive Christ (9:30-33).

God's pottery

²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory- ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" ²⁶ "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" ²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."

Pick up idea from vv. 20-21

Previous section – example of Pharaoh: bless Israel, harm the unbelieving Gentiles

This section – example of pottery: harm Israel, bless the believing Gentiles

God's prerogative (22-24)

Two types of vessels

But not treated as expected (cf. Ps 73)

Purpose of this providence – to show God's wrath, power, glory, and mercy

Gentiles, first mentioned in v. 24, to be discussed later, in ch. 11 (cf. Gal 3)

God's great example – the Captivity and Exile of Israel (25-29)

Especially the Assyrian captivity — history in 2 Kgs 17:1-23

Hosea's prophecy

Prophecy in Hos 1:6, 8-9; 2:9-13; 3:4

Promise in Hos 1:10-11; 2:14, 19-23; 3:5

Quoted in Rom 9:25-26

For Paul quoting Hosea accurately and not spiritualizing, see John A. Battle, Jr., "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:25-26," *Grace Theological Journal* 2:1 (Spring 1981), 115-129.

Isaiah's prophecy

Prophecy in Isa 1:5-9; 7:17-20; 8:4

Promise in Isa 10:5-27, esp. 21-22

Quoted in Rom 9:27-29

The reason for Israel's failure

³⁰ *What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

The way of faith, discovered by the Gentile believers

Rom 9:30; 10:4

God's righteousness (9:30; cf. 3:20-26)

Received by faith (9:30; 10:4; cf. 4:1-5; 3:28)

Obtained by Christ (3:24-26)

Christ fulfilled the law; gives that to us

All who believe receive his righteousness (including Gentiles)

Paul's experience in Antioch – Acts 13:14-15, 38-48

The way of works, persisted in by the Jews

Rom 9:31 – 10:3

Result is failure (9:31; cf. vv. 27-29)

Tremendous effort on the part of the Jews – Maccabees, Masada, Aqiba, European ghettos and pogroms, Holocaust, nation of Israel

Reason for failure – attempt salvation by works, not faith (9:32)

Stumbling stone (33)

A frequent figure for God/Christ (Isa 8 [732 B.C.], Isa 28 [715 B.C.]

- Works: Isa 8:6, 12; 8:15
- Judgment: Isa 8:7-8, 14-15; 28:16-17
- Faith: Isa 8:6, 13, 16-17; 28:16