

God's Sovereign Plans for Israel

Romans 9:6-13

Romans 9:6-13 - *"But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,⁷ nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called."⁸ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.⁹ For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."*

¹⁰ And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac¹¹ (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),¹² it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger."¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Background Notes

When we compare the end of Romans 8 with the beginning of Romans 9, we see quite a contrast in Paul's emotions. Look at the last two verses of Romans 8: *"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Now contrast that with Romans 9:2 *"..I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart."*

Why did Paul descend from a mountain peak of joy at the end of Romans 8 to the valley of sorrow in the beginning of Romans 9? The answer has to do with Paul's concern for his "kinsman according to the flesh" – the Jewish people. If nothing can separate the believer from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, then why do the Jewish people appear to be separated? Aren't they God's "chosen people"? Has God rejected His special people? The answer, of course, is that God didn't reject His people -- they rejected Him! They were a greatly privileged people (v4-5), but when they rejected their Messiah, they cut themselves off from their means of salvation. It was this ignorance and rejection that grieved the heart of Paul.

But now comes the good news! God still has great plans for the nation of Israel. In fact, God's plans and program for Israel, as a nation, have never been off track -- and that's exactly the point that Paul was driving at in Romans 9:6- 13. God has not changed His mind or "gone to Plan B" to come up with a different program for Israel. Even though they turned away from the Lord and rejected their Messiah, God is still working out His sovereign plans concerning the Jewish people and the nation of Israel.

Doctrinal Point

God has not gone back on His word to Israel

Verse 6: *“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel...”* That’s another way of saying that God has not gone back on His word. Although it might seem that God had broken His unconditional promises with Israel and that He had changed His plans in reference to Israel that was not the case. Even though God was opening the door to the Gentiles and the nation of Israel was being set aside from the limelight (temporarily), God had not broken His Word about the Jewish people. Paul made two sub-points to his main point. The first sub-point is:

a. God has not gone back on His word to Israel because God's promises were never made to all the descendants of Abraham.

Verses 6-7: *“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,⁷ nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.”* Remember that Abraham had more than one son. First he had Isaac and Ishmael, and then Abraham had six other sons by Keturah, his second wife (Genesis 25). But the promises of the Abrahamic covenant were made **only** to Abraham’s descendants through **Isaac** -- not through the other sons. That is what verse 6 means: *“For they are not all Israel who are of Israel...”* (By the way, that statement is not to be pulled out of context as I have read in some commentaries; it is the Gentiles who are being mentioned here.)

The point here is that not all of Abraham’s descendants received the covenant promises. Only the descendants of Isaac were in the chosen line. God specifically stated in Genesis 21:12 (which Paul quoted here in verse 7), *“In Isaac your seed shall be called.”* The covenant promises were to be continued through Sarah’s son Isaac, the child of promise. So God has not gone back on His word to Israel, because God’s promises were never made to all the descendants of Abraham.

Furthermore, God has not gone back on His word to Israel because God’s sovereign plans never included all the descendants of Abraham. This fact leads us to sub-point number two:

b. God has not gone back on His word to Israel because His sovereign plans never included all the descendants of Abraham.

Verses 10-13: *“And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac¹¹ (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),¹² it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.”¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”* God not only chose to make His promises with Abraham and His descendants through the line of Isaac, but His sovereign plans didn’t include all the descendants of Isaac, either. Isaac and Rebecca

had two sons – Jacob and Esau, who were twins. You can't get much more equal than that, and yet God chose to have the line of blessing with the promises go through **Jacob** -- and not Esau. God had declared that "the older shall serve the younger" in Genesis 25:12. So even Esau's slight advantage of seniority didn't count as far as God's choice went.

Notice how sovereign God's choice really was. Verse 11: "*for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls...*" This Scripture emphasizes that God's elected purposes have nothing to do with a person's moral choices in life. That was true in reference to God's sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau, and it's true today in God's sovereign choice of individuals for salvation. Now that truth doesn't deny the doctrine of the responsibility of man, as we know from other Scriptures, but it does raise some questions, and Paul anticipated those questions. He will answer them in the rest of Romans 9. But the point he's making here is that God has not gone back on His word, because His sovereign plans for Israel never included all the descendants of Abraham. Verse 13 quotes Malachi 1:2-3: "*I have loved you,*" says the LORD. Yet you say, '*In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?*" says the LORD. "*Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated.....*"

The word "hate" here should not be thought of as personal animosity, or emotional hatred. The idea is that the **contrast** between being the recipient of the covenant promises and not being the recipient of the covenant promises is so great that to best express that sovereign preference the terms "love" and "hate" are used. It reminds us of what the Lord said in John 12:25: "*He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*" The idea there is not personal animosity or emotional hatred -- it's **contrast**.

The main point then of this section of Romans is that God has not gone back on His word to Israel. In view of His promises and in view of His sovereign plans, Paul will go on to show that there is a bright future for the nation of Israel. Remember, God has not gone back on His word to Israel.

Practical Application

Let's not misinterpret God's promises.

We've seen from this section of Romans 9 that Paul answered the questions about God's promises to Israel straight from Scripture. In other words, when the Old Testament Scripture was properly interpreted, there was no problem in seeing that God had not gone back on His word to Israel.

That's a good practical lesson for us, isn't it? Many times Christians think that God is not fulfilling His promises, when in actuality these Christians are trying to claim promises that God didn't make to them! Let's not misinterpret God's promises.

Here's an illustration. Recently I read about a Christian who wouldn't go to the doctor to get a broken bone set because he was claiming the promise of Psalm 34:20, "*He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.*" Can you believe it? That's **bad** interpretation of Scripture! Psalm 34:20 is not a promise that a Christian will never have a broken bone, or that

broken bones can be healed without treatment if you have enough faith. In fact, we know from John 19 that Psalm 34:20 is a Messianic prediction – it's **not** a promise for faith healers! So let's not misinterpret God's promises.

Another quick example: Philippians 4:19 is a great promise to believers **when claimed in context**: "*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" What a promise! But we need to know the context of this verse to apply it properly. The Philippian believers had been giving sacrificially to meet the needs of the apostle Paul and the needs of other believers. In that context Paul gave the promise, "Philippians, you can be sure my God will supply all of your needs."

If you're a stingy Christian and you're unwilling to give sacrificially to the Lord, you can't claim that promise. But if you're a giving Christian -- you're giving sacrificially to the Lord -- you can claim this promise. You can be sure that God won't go back on His Word -- but make sure you know and understand His Word! That's the point. Let's not misinterpret God's promises.