

21. ROMANS SERIES: God's Plan of Salvation - Part 1

Romans 9:1-13

In the previous eight chapters Paul has been concerned to show both the universal need of salvation (1:1-3:20) and how that salvation is achieved in its fullness through the Lord Jesus Christ (3:21-8:39).

In Romans 9:1-11:36 Paul moves on from the individual perspective in salvation to God's universal plan of salvation, which is in fact behind the individual plan. Paul shows how this plan is worked out, both in the history of the Jews and in the history of the Gentiles. In this he shows just who the true Israel of God really is.

Please Read Romans 9:1-13

Verses 1,2: Paul opens this section with an affirmation of the truthfulness of what he is about to say (cf 2 Cor 11:31; 12:6; Gal 1:20; 1 Tim 2:7). He is concerned to show that he speaks the truth in a manner consistent with his union with Christ. His conscience approves that what he says is true and not a lie, being under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Why say all these things? Having already said a lot (he will also say a lot more) about the spiritual condition of the Jews (2:5, 17-24; 9:31,32; 10:2,3,16,21; 11:7-10), he feels he should acknowledge his genuine love and concern for his own people. Paul was not indifferent to the state of his own countrymen, despite what he has already said of them (2:5,17-24; etc). The Jews unbelief and rejection of Christ, was for him a source of constant sorrow and grief, bearing heavily upon his heart. In spite of all their spiritual advantages and privileges (9:4,5), they were largely without hope, being in a state of rebellion against God. Undoubtedly, Paul has no joy in declaring the lost estate of the majority of his own countrymen.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: What does Paul mean in Romans 9:3?

Verse 3: The use of the word *'for'* indicates that Paul is going to give an explanation of his sorrow and grief mentioned in the previous verse. For the sake of his countrymen, if it were possible, Paul could see himself seriously entertaining the thought of being anathema from Christ (if it were possible, which it clearly isn't - Rom 8:31-39) if it meant the salvation of them (the Jews). This statement comes from a man who has just spoken of the triumphant hope to which he holds (8:38,39). Knowing that he can personally do little to save his fellow countrymen appears only to increase his grief. To be anathema from Christ means to be cut off, to be separated from Christ in order to be destroyed (cf Acts 23:14; 1 Cor 12:3; 16:22; Gal 1:8,9). This clearly shows Paul's great and genuine love for the Jewish people.

QUESTIONS: What is your attitude toward the lost? What does Paul's attitude teach us about this?

Verses 4,5: These two verses highlight Paul's grief, for they show the multitude of advantages and privileges that the Jews had shown indifference toward and demonstrate the obviously hopeless state that they must therefore be in. These very things that were to be spiritual pointers to Christ for his countrymen would prove their un-doing, for instead of trusting Christ (whom they rejected and killed), they trusted the advantages and privileges.

What were these advantages and privileges that the Jewish nation had? His brethren according to the flesh:

- **were Israelites:** that is the descendants of Jacob (Israel - Gen 32:22-28) and were therefore a nation separated unto God (Num 23:9), and therefore given special advantages and privileges that the rest of the world did not receive.

- **were God's children:** that is they possessed the external sonship of God's peculiar favour (Ex 4:22; 19:5; Deut 14:1; Is 43:20; 51:1; Jer 31:9; Hos 1:10,11). They were chosen to be God's very own, a privilege that they repeatedly rejected through their rebellion.

- **were in the presence of the Glory:** that is the Shekinah Glory of God (Ex 14:20; 24:17; 40:34-37; Lev 16:2; 1 Kin 8:10ff; 2 Chron 7:1,2), indicating the Presence of God with His people. Israel was granted a visible manifestation of the presence of God, a special privilege to this people alone.

- **entered into the covenants:** that is the affirmation and re-affirmation of God's covenant with His people (Gen 15:1ff; 17:7; 22:15ff; 26:1ff; 28:10ff; Ex 2:24; 6:4,5; 24:8; Deut 5:1ff; 8:18; Josh 24:1ff; 2 Sam 23:5; Jer 31:31). Over and over again the covenant was re-issued to the Jews, yet again and again they rejected the promises that God directed toward them.

- **possessed the Law:** that is the Mosaic Law (2:17; 5:20; Ex 20:1ff). This was the divine pointer to Christ, for it showed a person's sin, not so that person would forever despair, but to drive them to God for grace and mercy.

- **possessed the service of God:** that is the God-given method for divine worship (Leviticus), especially associated with the tabernacle and the temple. These were the very types and shadows that graphically illustrated the way a person was to be saved in the future Messiah.

- **possessed the promises:** that is especially the Messianic promises as given throughout the Old Testament (Gen 17:7; 18:10,14; Is 55:3; Acts 13:23,32-34; 26:6; Rom 4:13-21; 9:9; Gal 3:16,21). All the promises of the Scriptures regarding salvation and future blessing point to Christ.

- **were descended from the fathers:** that is Abraham (4:1-3,16-23; 9:7; 11:1), Isaac (9:7,9,10), Jacob (9:13; 11:26) and his 12 sons especially. This could also include all their godly ancestors (4:6-8) who played important roles in the history of redemption. All these examples demonstrated the way to salvation.

- **from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came:** the greatest of all privileges, that of being the 'human family' from which Jesus came and derived His human nature. He was a Jew (1:3; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Jn 4:2), the Saviour of the world came through the nation of the Jews. This Jesus the Messiah is not only human, but also divine, being God Himself, unto whom all praise and worship belongs (1:3ff; Col 1:16; 2:9).

It is of great importance to note what Paul is speaking of here, for he is grieving for a physical nation that had experienced amazing advantages and privileges, advantages and privileges that the rest of the world had not known. What was the result of these blessings? Rejection, firstly of Christ by the Jews, and then God of the Jews (Mt 23:38,43; 1 Thess 2:16). Certainly, individuals did receive Christ and throughout history more would, but overall the situation was one of rejection.

QUESTIONS: What advantages does the churchgoer have in the area of salvation? How are these advantages?

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: Who are the Israel of God in Romans 9:6?

Verse 6: That Israel has not come to Christ was not because the advantages and privileges failed, or that God could not deliver on His promises. The rejection of the nation of Israel has nothing to do with the failure of God's promises or written Word. In

fact the very promises of God remain intact and unchallenged by the history of the Jewish people.

The word *'for'* indicates that Paul is going to now explain the reason why the promises of God remain intact. The reason Paul gives for the promises remaining intact is that not all the descendents of Jacob (Israel) are the true people of God. Though promises had been given to Israel, they were not to be realised in the physical nation of Israel itself, but only in the true Israel of God (Rom 2:28,29). The nation of Israel is only a picture of the true Israel (a type), for the true descendents of Abraham and Jacob are believers, and not simply their physical descendents. Believers are those who make up the true Israel of God. This therefore clearly implies the existence of a true spiritual Israel (the remnant) within physical Israel and that therefore, the promises of God remain intact.

Verse 7: Natural descent from Abraham does not secure spiritual sonship or citizenship in the Kingdom of God, for Abraham's spiritual children are those that also exercise the same faith as Abraham (Gal 3:7). That it is not by natural descent is seen by the case of Isaac and Ishmael, as quoted from Genesis 21:12,13, for Ishmael (though physically from Abraham) was not chosen but Isaac (a physical descent but also a spiritual descent) to receive the promise of God. The line of covenantal blessing would therefore run through Isaac and not Ishmael. The conclusion therefore is that natural descent doesn't guarantee spiritual sonship. The promise of God has not failed because few of physical Israel has believed, rather the promise is fulfilled in all who do believe.

QUESTIONS: Does physical descent have anything to do with salvation? Why did you answer that way?

Did Ishmael ever have a chance of being a spiritual descendent of Abraham? Explain.

Verse 8: The Scriptural evidence therefore confirms this truth, that God has not bound Himself to select Abraham's physical descendents as heirs of the promise. It is clear from the example given by Paul that Ishmael was rejected by God (or passed over) and Isaac chosen to receive spiritual life and blessing.

Note that Ishmael was born according to fleshly means, but Isaac was born according to promise, thereby indicating the manner in which the true Israel comes into being (4:11ff; Gal 4:22-31). As Isaac was born by a supernatural birth, so the true children of Abraham (Jn 1:13; Rom 4:16; Gal 3:18,22,29) are born by supernatural birth or are born again (See John 3).

Verse 9: The word *'for'* indicates that the thought of verse 8, especially *'the children of promise,'* is about to be further explained in the example of Isaac, that is the promise according to which Isaac was born. Isaac was the child of promise, not merely because God said a child would be born, but because He said *'at this time I will come,'* indicating

that the birth of Isaac would be the result of a divine intervention.

Verse 10: Not only does Isaac prove this spiritual descent, but also there is more evidence to consider with Rebecca and her children, which shows this truth even more clearly. Not all the children of Isaac's would be granted spiritual blessing either, even though they had the same father and mother. Whereas Isaac came by Sarah and Ishmael by Hagar, Jacob and Esau came as twins to the same father and mother. Also note that it was not the firstborn who received the blessing of spiritual life.

Verse 11: Again the word '*for*' indicates a further explication, and in this case as to how verse 10 provides further evidence of spiritual descent. The election of Jacob by God was made prior to birth, thus eliminating any grounds of merit in salvation. The grounds of election is not any human merit whatsoever, but is according to God's sovereign will (Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9). God's sovereign choice is the grounds for inheriting the promise of God and not physical descent or human merit.

This verse clearly eliminates any theory of God looking into the future to choose on the basis of perceived faith or merit. The election of Jacob and the passing by of Esau was not contingent on the choice of either Jacob or Esau after God. It is clear that the reason why Jacob received the blessing and Esau did not was because of God's own sovereign purpose and election. It was because God chose it to be that way, meaning that Jacob would be blessed and Esau would be damned. This whole episode was so planned by God to eliminate all claims to self-salvation (remember what Jacob was like when God revealed Himself to him), so that God's clear purpose in election would be clear to all and that there would be no pretended claims to self glory on the part of man. It is all of grace, by God's sovereign choice and determined purpose.

QUESTIONS: Why Did God choose Jacob for salvation? Give reasons for your answer?

Why was Esau condemned? Please explain why you answered the way you did?

So why does it appear that the promises of God to Israel over the centuries have fallen flat? It is because the vast majority of the Jews were never the actual recipients of God's promises. The promises were in actual fact to the elect alone. The rest God has passed over in His sovereign choice, leaving them to be punished for their sin. The elect are chosen by God's sovereign choice and as an act of sheer mercy alone. The elect are not saved on the basis of merit, for these are no better than those condemned (2:28,29; 11-13; 22-25).

Verse 12: The quote here comes from Genesis 25:23 and refers primarily to the descendents of Jacob and Esau when Edom was in bondage to Israel (2 Sam 8:14; 1 Kings 22:47; 2 Kings 14:7).

Verse 13: This quote comes from Malachi 1:2,3. This again refers primarily to the descendents of Jacob and Esau. The divine purpose according to election determines who are the true Israel of God and therefore saved. Israel is the chosen one and not Esau.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Why does God still judge and condemn when all is according to His purpose? Does this mean that God is unjust?

What does the example of Pharaoh show about God's purpose in election?

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