

ROMANS 9:1-11:36 | GOD'S WORK FULFILLED THROUGH ISRAEL

Supplemental Resource: Romans Graphically Presented, pg. 38

ROMANS 9:1-10:21 | PAUL'S PRAYER & GOD'S PLAN FOR ISRAEL IN THE DISPENSATIONAL CHANGE & BEYOND

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ROMANS 9:6-29 | GOD'S SOVEREIGN SELECTION OF ISRAEL

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VERSE 6 - BLACK

This verse states Paul's premise for verses 6-29 concerning God's selection of Israel, but not all Israelites. He begins by defending God's word, which would be attacked if some of the descendants of Israel are ultimately excluded from the promised kingdom and fail to share in the delivery of the covenant promises.

Paul's statement in Romans 9:6 is supported by other passages in the Bible that distinguish between the descendants of Abraham and "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). For example, in John 8:39-40, Jesus tells some Jews that they are not Abraham's children, despite being physically descended from him. Furthermore, in Numbers 16, Korah and his company, who were "of Abraham," were destroyed by God rather than taken into the promised land. Even the disobedient generation of the wilderness experience never received the fruition of God's promises. The teaching is clear: God's word to Abraham is valid even if there are generations of Israel who do not experience the blessings of Israel.

VERSE 7 - BLACK

Paul continues his explanation by writing that **the seed of Abraham** may not be considered Abraham's **children**. God has selected only the descendants of Isaac to be considered **the seed** (as a casual reading of Gen. 17:19-21 and 21:12 would confirm).

The Greek word translated as "seed" in Romans 9:7 is "σπέρμα" (sperma). It is interesting that Paul seems to purposely create a contrast between the physical and the spiritual, using very physical words like "sperma" to contrast with a very spiritual concept. Paul emphasizes that not all of Abraham's physical descendants are considered to be his true children in the eyes of God, but only those who are chosen by God.

This lays the groundwork for Paul's discussion on God's sovereign choice of election, a topic which has been controversial and divisive since at least the days of John Calvin. As we proceed through the text, we will address the way this section has been used to promote "Calvinism" as a soteriological framework. For now, it is enough to say that Paul's argument only addresses the fact that some of Abraham's descendants are not recipients of God's promises to Abraham's seed.

VERSE 8 - BLACK

Verse 8 is often used by theologians as a proof-text to support their views on election and predestination. They assume that "the children of promise" in this verse refer to the church today, which they believe has been brought into Israel or replaces Israel. However, this interpretation is not supported by the immediate or wider context of the passage, and it ignores the specific historical and covenantal promises given to Israel. If the church has been brought into the Abrahamic or covenantal promises to Israel, then other passages must be used to support it, for this one does not. The same can be said for those who believe the church has replaced Israel.

In context, verse 8 means that Ishmael, though of the seed of Abraham, was not the child of promise. This interpretation is supported by the immediate and wider context of the passage, as well as the specific historical and covenantal promises given to Israel. While God's sovereignty and election are involved, selection to salvation or damnation by God is not in view in this verse.

Furthermore, verse 8 does not state that a Jew must be faithful to be considered one of the children of promise. While this verse may be laying the foundation for a larger claim, at this point, Paul has only stated and defended that the seed of Abraham has a specific meaning and that Isaac was the child of promise.

Therefore, using this verse to develop a doctrine of Calvinism or argue that faithful works are necessary contingents to being a true believer is taking the verse out of context. The Calvinistic interpretation of this verse is based on that perspective's interpretation of the following verses. However, the following verses must be interpreted in light of their introductory verses, and not vice-versa.

VERSE 9 - BLACK

Paul appeals to the Old Testament in verse 9, quoting from Genesis 18:10 and 21:2. He emphasizes that God's word is true and that Isaac was the child of promise. Paul uses the word of God in a very literal way; if the child did not come through Sarah, then it is not the promised child. This reinforces his argument that God's promises to Abraham's seed are not fulfilled through all of his physical descendants, but only through those whom God has chosen to be the recipients of His promises, namely the child of Sarah. It is clear that this is a choice based on God's sovereign will and carried out in His power, a fact emphasized by Sarah's age.

VERSES 10-12 - BLACK

Due to the grammatical structure, verses 10-12 must be considered together. The main thought is interrupted by a theological argument. The main idea of the passage is that, after the conception but prior to the birth of Jacob and Esau God had declared that **The elder shall serve the younger**, a quote from Genesis 25:23.

Verses 10 and 12 contain the core of the sentence. However, the parenthetical clause in verse 11 is the primary theological argument that supports Paul's claim of sovereign election in the children of promise. Paul had already restricted the promise to Abraham, and now he shows that it is limited to the younger of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, Jacob. This was entirely a matter of God's sovereign promise and nothing else. It was a promise, not a result of works, since neither child had been born yet.

It's helpful to remember that Paul's argument is that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (v. 1). He presents this by explaining that Ishmael and Esau are not of the promise. So far, he has not indicated whether or not gentiles are recipients of the Abrahamic promises, and any speculation on this matter by commentators would be premature. His current point is that God's word is reliable, despite the fact that some of the children of Israel are not recipients of the promises.

For those who hold a doctrine of election based on foreknowledge, this verse could be seen as problematic. Such a doctrine suggests that election is necessary due to total depravity, but that God chose those whom he knew would be faithful to be the elect. However, this passage shows that the election of Jacob had nothing to do with his future behavior, but was solely based on the sovereignty of God.

VERSE 13 - BLACK

In verse 13, Paul quotes from Malachi 1:2-3, where God says "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." The use of the word "hated" has been a point of contention and confusion for many readers of the Bible. While many have tried to soften the word, it is so clear both in Hebrew and Greek that even the modern translations (NKJV,

NASB, ESV, NIV) have retained the word **hated**. Many attempts have been made to make the term “hated” a Hebrew idiom that means “loved less” or “rejected,” but the arguments are mostly scholars repeating scholars and not supported by textual proof, whether from the Bible or extra-Biblical sources.

The reason for God’s hatred of Esau is not given, and there is no reason for speculation. In the broader context of Romans 9, Paul’s argument is not centered on whether God loves or hates certain individuals. Rather, his focus is on God’s sovereign choice in the election of Jacob over Esau. Clearly God’s choice in sovereign election is going to be a big part of Paul’s argument when he concludes his point in coming verses.

VERSES 14-15 - BLACK

In Romans 9:14-15, Paul defends God's righteousness in choosing Jacob over Esau, even to the point of hating Esau. In speaking of any potential unrighteousness on God’s part in verse 14, Paul is raising a potential objection to his argument in a form of diatribe (a rhetorical method frequently employed in his letters). He is not acknowledging this as a valid viewpoint, but he is raising this as a hypothetical rebuttal to underscore his point. He acknowledges that some may see God's actions as unrighteous, but he argues that God has the right to be merciful to whom he will be merciful. To further demonstrate God's sovereignty, Paul quotes from Exodus 33:19, where God tells Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." This emphasizes that God's actions are not based on any human merit or work, but on his own sovereign will. Therefore, Paul emphasizes that God's hatred of Esau is not unjust, but is a reflection of God's sovereign choice.

VERSE 16 - BLACK

Paul concludes this section in verse 16 (although he will expand on the concept of election in verses 17-29). He affirms that the illustrations given show that election is not based on human will or effort ("**him that willeth nor him that runneth**"), but on the sovereignty of God.

Paul's use of the present tense reminds us that he is not solely engaged in a theological exercise concerned with the past. Instead, he is arguing that God, in His sovereignty, has chosen not to consider every child of Abraham among the elect children of promise.

In the broad context of Romans (though not found specifically in Romans 9:6-16), one could argue that God initiated a new dispensation in which Gentiles were included in a new plan of individual salvation, outside of the Law and the covenants. During this new plan, He set aside Israel, including both her commonwealth and her covenants, for a time to allow for this new dispensation of grace. Under this premise, the coming generation(s) of Israel would not inherit the Abrahamic promises. This new arrangement is the sovereign decree of God.

Although not addressed in Romans at this point, we later learn that God will someday return to Israel and rescue her out of her temporary blindness, in order to fulfill every promise to the chosen people. This interpretation is consistent with the overarching theme of Romans.