

p 59 WEEK 8: GOD'S PROMISES TO ISRAEL

Romans 9:1–33

The Place of the Passage

Paul begins his letter to the Romans with a revelation of how the righteousness of God is revealed against the sins of Jews and Gentiles alike. One's ethnic status has no bearing on one's level of sinfulness (Romans 1–3). He then transitions to talk about the triumph of grace over sin that is needed by, and available to, both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 4–5). Paul then explains how this saving grace changes us, by the Spirit, in a way the law cannot (Romans 6–8). In Romans 9 he returns to the question of Jew and Gentile again. If God chose Israel to be his special people, how can those who are not part of Israel share in the promises God made to Israel? This is the question that will engage Paul in Romans 9–11.

The Big Picture

Paul draws on the Old Testament narrative to show that God sovereignly chooses, by his own good pleasure and ultimately for his own glory, those who will believe in him.

p 60 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Romans 9. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2172–2174; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. God's Sovereign Choice (9:1–29)

Paul is about to share some hard truths. Note first his tone and disposition in Romans 9:1–3. How would you describe it? What impact ought this tone have on our reading of the hard things ahead, or how this passage is preached or taught?

Why does Paul anticipate the inquiry about God's word failing (Romans 9:6)? Why might someone, especially a Jew, ask this?

According to Romans 9:8, how is it that one becomes a child of God?

p 61 If God is love (1 John 4:8), what might it mean that God “hated” Esau (9:13)?

According to Romans 9:17, what is God’s purpose in his sovereign acting? What are some other biblical examples of this?

What is the common thread that Paul sees between the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Pharaoh?

2. Israel’s Unbelief (9:30–33)

Do Jews and Gentiles attain righteousness in different ways? Explain your answer.

p 62 What are the “points of stumbling” over the issue of righteousness for us today? In other words, what objections or aversions do we all naturally have that make salvation by faith hard to understand?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

SOVEREIGN MERCY. Romans 9:16 is unassailable encouragement: “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” When God sets his merciful designs on a person, he *will* capture them in his grace. This is a blow to human pride, yet it is also profound encouragement for those who feel weak and defeated by life, or even by their own sin. Look to Christ. Trust God. He is mighty to save. There is no separating us from his love (Rom. 8:38–39).

UPSIDE-DOWN APPROVAL. The gospel disrupts all our intuitive expectations about how God’s favor is secured. Paul tells us in the last four verses of Romans 9 that so many Jews have stumbled because they sought to be right with God based on their own performance—“as if it were based on works” (9:32). Not only many Jews then but many of us today live in accord with our natural instincts, which insist on securing God’s approval through some degree of self-generated moral contribution. The gospel confounds this natural reflex with the startling declaration that we are put right with God not by anything we bring to the table, but only and ever through “a righteousness that is by faith” (9:30).

Whole-Bible Connections

SUBSTITUTION. In Romans 9:3 Paul feels such love for his Jewish brothers and brokenness over their unbelief that he wishes he could be “accursed and [p 63](#) cut off” for their sake if it would cause their salvation. This substitutionary wish is an echo of Moses’ all the way back in Exodus 32:30–32 after the golden calf fiasco. Moses is so grieved by his people’s sin and their feared destruction that he offers to be blotted out in their place if God would spare them. It is an impossible offer, but his cry is answered in Christ, who did substitute himself for God’s sinful people, becoming the curse for us (Gal. 3:13). Jesus is the true and final substitute.

A PEOPLE. What is God doing in history? Making a name for himself by gathering a people to himself. Paul makes this reality a major theme of his letter to the Romans, wanting his recipients to know that God has neither abandoned his promises to the Jews nor neglected the needs of the godless Gentiles; instead, he is assembling for himself a people out of every tongue, tribe, and nation (Rev. 5:9–10). And to make his case to the Jewish readers, he reminds them that this has been God’s plan all along, throughout all the Scriptures (Rom. 9:24–29).

Theological Soundings

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH. The teaching of Romans 9:6–8 (and the verses following) is complex. Throughout Romans, Paul wants to make it clear that God’s promises to Israel are irrevocable and certain. At the same time, he is opening up the understanding of those promises, explaining how they have been filled out in Christ and his gospel mission. This is not the same thing as saying that Christ’s work is innovative, only that it was not entirely expected. Throughout the Gospels we see the followers of Jesus surprised by many of the things he did, leading up to and including his crucifixion. Yet at the same time we can see these things predicted in the Old Testament. So the clues were there all along, but the expectations did not match. We do not always see the things in the room clearly until the light is turned on. This is what the New Testament is—a light turned on by which to see everything, including the landscape of the Old Testament. Christ is himself the key that makes sense of all that God has been doing down through history. So when Paul gets to Romans 9:6–8, he wants us to know that God has not failed in his promises to Israel; it’s just that “Israel” isn’t limited to ethnic Israel. “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (9:6). The children of the promise are descendants of Abraham. This is good tidings of great joy for all people—God keeps his promises to his people (Israel), and this includes non-Jews.

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IN SALVATION. Romans 9:11–18 develops a difficult yet profoundly comforting teaching: salvation is authored by God’s sovereign grace, not by human free choice. Indeed, left to human free will, no one would ever choose God, for we are all desperately wicked and spiritually “dead” (Eph. 2:5). [p 64](#) Paul teaches that those who trust in Jesus were predestined to do so in the wisdom of God’s electing purposes, having been wooed in the course of their lives with invincible love. Anticipating our natural response of ascribing injustice to God’s utter sovereignty, he then reminds us in a gentle rebuke that God is God. Because he is perfectly holy, whatever he does is the right thing to do, even if we do not understand or approve of it. We must let him be God. If we dictate to God what he must be like, then we are not in fact worshiping God—we are worshiping an idol, for it is a god of our own making. Moreover, the

ultimate purpose in God's sovereignty over salvation is the magnification of his own glory (Rom. 9:17). When we insist on salvation by our own initiative, we proclaim our own glory, making God's saving purposes all about us, as if we were in charge of him at this point. Nevertheless, God's glory and our good are wonderfully bound together: "he exalts himself to show mercy to you" (Isa. 30:18).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Romans 9 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

p 65 3. Theological Soundings

4. Romans 9:1–33

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Romans. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you.