

The Israel of God: Part 1 – Romans 9

I. INTRODUCTION

A. John 3:36

1. We're going to be dealing with some tough stuff today so I want to begin here.
2. It'll help us keep the proper perspective in our examination of Romans 9.
He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.
3. The difference between salvation & judgment is faith in Christ.
4. But notice what John says - **He who believes in the Son has everlasting life**
Not - He who has everlasting life believes in the Son.
5. John locates salvation *in Jesus*. Faith in Jesus *taps* that salvation.
6. Keep this in mind now as we turn to Romans 9.

B. Romans

1. If, as many believe, ch. 8 is the *Summit Peak* of the Gospel, then chs. 9-11 are a *cliff* they want to stay far away from.
 2. Paul says things here that are difficult to both understand & accept.
 3. Several doctrinal *controversies* find their origin here, specially in ch. 9.
 4. And for that reason, my method today will be *opposite* from what we usually do.
 - a. Normally, we *read* the text, then *explain & apply* it.
 - b. This morning, at a couple points I'll explain, *then* read it. Here's why . . .
 5. What Paul says in chs. 9-11 cannot be taken in *isolation* from what he's already said in Chs. 1-8.
 - a. Yet *some* commentators do precisely that.
 - b. They say chs. 9-11 are a *totally separate unit*; an appendix Paul put in the middle instead of at the end of the letter.
 6. But as we'll see, these chs. flow from what comes before them. This is all interconnected.
 - a. While we have to divide it up into several weeks of study due to time limits,
 - b. Paul presents a *seamless case* that all hangs together.
 7. In ch. 9, Paul focuses on the *sovereignty of God*.
 - a. But if we only consider what he says there *without* factoring in everything else He says about salvation,
 - b. We'll come to a wrong conclusion about WHO & HOW God saves.
 - c. And that is *exactly* what's happened in the often contentious debate between Calvinism & Arminianism over the years.
 8. What Paul says in Romans 9 about the sovereignty of God is crucial, but it's doesn't stand by itself, as the last verses make clear.
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C. Set Up

1. So as we dive, let's *recap* all we've seen so far.
 - a. In Chs. 1-8, Paul's described the Gospel.
 - b. Salvation is by grace thru faith in Christ, not by works.
 - c. Salvation isn't the result of keeping the law of Moses.
 - d. In saying this, Paul's pulled the rug out from under those Jews who thought they were saved *just because* they were descendants of Abraham.
 2. He'd shared this countless times around the Empire & often been accused of being an anti-Semite.
 - a. Which of course is absurd because he was Jewish & proud of his pedigree as he says in Phil.3.
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- b. But he'd been called a *self-loathing Jew* who denied their privileged standing as God's chosen people.
3. In reality, Paul had come to realize the widespread belief that they were saved just because of their descent from Abraham was *bogus*, and *spoke against it*.
4. For this he was called a *blasphemer*, a *hater of the Jews*, & was persecuted mercilessly.
 - a. The Book of Acts tells us of several attempts to kill him, some almost succeeded.
 - b. We'd think this kind of fierce hatred & opposition would move Paul to *despise* his opponents.
 - c. His actual reaction is surprising –

II. TEXT

A. V. 1-5

¹ I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, *the eternally blessed God. Amen.*

1. Paul knows his reaction to those who want to kill him is so unusual he *vouchsafes* his words.
V. 1 = I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit
 2. In other words – “As God is my witness, I swear on my sacred honor!”
 3. Instead of anger & resentment for all the unjust ill-treatment he'd endured, all Paul feels for his fellow Jews is grief & sorrow.
 4. He *yearns* for their salvation so ardently he'd even give up *his* if it would help.
 5. He lists the incredible privileges Israel had received from God, culminating in the Messiah, who he says *is* God there at the end of v. 5. One of the clearest proofs for the deity of Christ in the Bible.
 6. Yet despite these privileges, Israel remained in unbelief.
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7. Paul's love for his enemies & passion to see them saved is a challenge to us all.
 - a. How many of us could say this? →
 - b. That we are so deeply concerned for the lost that if it were possible, we'd trade *our* salvation, *our* eternal life, *our* promise of heaven, so that others could have them?
 - c. This is what *fueled* Paul's sense of *mission*.
 - d. It's what kept him ever willing to move in to some *new* region to preach the Gospel,
 - e. No matter what hardships there might be.
 - f. A man who's willing to give up *his salvation* for others isn't concerned about the perils of this life.
 8. What Paul says here *wasn't* exaggeration. He proved it.
 - a. In the last chs. of Acts we read that even though he'd received ample warning about the trouble that awaited him at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem,
 - b. He went anyway – determined that if even a few came to faith it would be well worth the cost *of his life*.
 9. Moses showed the same kind of passion for Israel in Exodus 32.
 - a. While Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the 10 Commandments, they were dancing round a golden calf in the valley below.
 - b. God told Moses He was going to wipe them out.

- c. But Moses interceded & asked if *he* could absorb God's wrath *instead*.
10. Both Moses & Paul took their *wild stand* because they understood something about the heart of God. They knew He's patient & longsuffering & looks for ANY reason to show mercy.
- They knew God so well, they understood He will go to *wild lengths to forgive* –
 - Even to the point where He would become a man & bear in His own body on the Cross all the punishment for sin.
11. Paul proves in v. 3 here, that as a disciple, he's become very much *like* his Rabbi Jesus.
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12. So – Think now of someone who's made *you* the object of their hatred & scorn.
- Is there anyone, if you could, you'd do in?
 - God wants to change your heart from hatred to a *desperate concern* for that person. →
 - Where their salvation becomes so important to you, every day that goes by without it is a kind of torment to you.
 - If that seems *impossible*, take a look at 10:1 where we find out how Paul kept his heart from becoming *bitter* toward those who wanted to off him.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

B. Vs. 6-9

- Now Paul turns to the heart of his subject = What *about* the Jews?
 - Remember, they thought God had singled them out because they were *better* than everyone else.
 - They thought this *divine selection* assured their salvation.
 - And that their possession of the Law & temple was *proof* of their privileged place.
 - Paul shows them *God's election* is indeed important, but it's not based on what they think it is.
 - It doesn't come from their being Abraham's descendants or from having & keeping the Law.
 - God's election is the result of His grace alone!
- ^{6a} **But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.**
- Some accused Paul of saying if the Gospel is true, then God's promises to Israel *had failed*.
 - He answers in 2 ways –
 - In chs. 9 & 10 he says not all the descendants of Abraham of Jews.
 - Then in ch. 11, he says that *in the end*, every promise God made to the **NATION** of Israel will be fulfilled.
 - The first answer comes next . . .

^{6b} **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."**

- Abraham was called the *friend of God & father of the promise*.
 - But the promise was that *thru Sarah* the son would come.
 - Hagar's son Ishmael & the sons of Abraham's 2nd wife Keturah whom he married *after* Sarah's death, were *not* the ones who received the promise.
 - So, being a *physical descendant* of Abe doesn't guarantee salvation.
 - The crucial issue is faith in the promise of God, which *Isaac* was an example of.

10. Paul adds another layer of proof to this . . .

C. Vs. 10-13

¹⁰ **And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 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), ¹² it was said to her, “*The older shall serve the younger.*” ¹³ As it is written, [Mal. 1] “*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.*”

1. Isaac & Rebekah had twins, Esau & Jacob.
 2. Their stories make it clear that Esau was carnal & worldly, caring *nothing* for the things of God.
 3. Jacob, as nasty as the little bugger was, was all about inheriting the legacy of Abraham’s faith & the promise of God.
 4. Now – God knew ahead of time how these 2 would turn out. So before either had done anything, God *announced* that Jacob would be the recipient of the promise.
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5. Don’t trip at v. 13 where we read, “**Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.**”
 6. This is a classic Hebraic contrast.
 - a. “Hate” here isn’t an absolute; it draws it’s meaning from the contrast with God’s *favor* of Jacob.
 - b. For example, if I have a dollar bill & 2 people in front of me, I can only give it to one.
 - c. By *giving it* to one, the *other* is neglected. By favoring one, the other isn’t.
 - d. That’s the meaning here.
 7. Jesus used the same idiom in Luke 14:26 when He said, “**If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.**”
 - a. Obviously, Jesus doesn’t mean *absolute hatred* is a pre-requisite to following Him.
 - b. That would be contrary to **EVERYTHING** we find in the Scriptures, including what Paul says here is vs. 1-5!
 - c. Hatred here draws its meaning from the contrast in the *kind of devotion* we’re to have.
 - d. Compared to our love for & devotion to Jesus, all other loves must pale.
 8. Read Genesis & you’ll see that God *blessed* Esau & his descendants *abundantly*.
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9. Paul’s point is that *God chooses*. He decides *who* to save.
 10. But be careful because this is *precisely where* people trip.
 - a. They conclude God’s choice, His *election*, is based *solely* on some *unknown criteria* within Himself.
 - b. They call it His “*sovereignty*” & say that its utterly, absolutely free.
 - c. God’s election to salvation, they say, is due *only* to factors within His mysterious, unknowable will *without regard* to those He elects.
 11. Here’s the problem = those who hold that view draw it from what Paul says *only here*, without reference to what we find elsewhere.
 12. But we need to see that Paul is focusing on *only one thing*– God’s sovereignty: That He **DOES** choose. The *why & how* aren’t in view here.
 13. Remember, he’s dealing with Jews who are upset with his message that salvation is by grace through faith, not works & not being related to Abe.
 - a. These guys said God *owed* them salvation because of who they were.
 - b. Paul’s argument is, “Who do you think you are to demand God owes you ANYTHING?”
 - 1) “Who are you to demand an answer from Him or to question His ways?”
 - 2) “**God is sovereign, not you!**”

D. Vs. 14-16

¹⁴ What shall we say then? *Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!* ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, “*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.*” ¹⁶ So then *it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.*

1. Paul deposits an important reminder – **God is perfect!** His ways are above reproach.
2. So He bestows mercy on those it **OUGHT** to be given to, *though we don't see how or why*.
3. When God blesses someone, instead of looking at the one blessed & asking “Why?” we ought to look to God & say, “That’s why!”
4. Because God **IS** perfect, what He **does** is perfect. His *reasons* are perfect.
5. That we don’t understand is only proof we *aren’t*.
6. The problem is never with God – it’s with us when we attempt to put our puny limited perspective on God & judge Him for what He does.

E. Vs. 17-19

¹⁷ For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”¹⁸

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

1. Did God know ahead of time how Pharaoh would respond to Moses’ request to let Israel go?
2. Did God know **how** Pharaoh would react to each of the plagues?
3. Read Exodus & you’ll see that for each of the first plagues there was an opportunity for Pharaoh to repent and come to faith in God.
4. But when each plague was lifted, it says **Pharaoh hardened** his heart against the Lord.
5. It was only after he’d hardened his heart again & again, that we read God **confirmed** his rejection.
6. And even though what Pharaoh did was wrong, God turned it to good by sending the **news** of His glory throughout the ancient world. For generations after, the entire Middle East was abuzz with the story of the power of Israel’s God.
7. The point is this – Pharaoh was free to choose, but God was **freer**.
 - a. When Pharaoh’s choice became settled, God honored his choice & effectively sealed him there.
 - b. But God is never going to be outmaneuvered by evil.
 - c. So without violating Pharaoh’s choice, he turned those choices to good.
8. Psalm 76:10 says that God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?”

9. The fact is, many **DO** resist God’s will. But in His sovereignty He still turns it to good.
 - a. So, if sin becomes an occasion for God’s glory, how can He condemn it?
 - b. Well, just because God is able to bring good out of evil does not excuse it.
10. God made Joseph **ruler** of Egypt & saved countless lives, but that in no way absolved his brothers of their wrong in selling him into slavery.
11. All this simply **affirms the sovereignty** of God while at the same time **acknowledging our freedom** to choose.

F. Vs. 20-24

1. Now Paul cuts to the chase about sovereignty.

²⁰ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?”²¹ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

2. Never forget – God is good, so good that it goes far beyond our ability to comprehend.

Isaiah 55:8-9 • “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

3. We **err** when we question the righteousness, the **rightness** of God.
4. He **cannot** do other than what is best, right, & good.

5. One of the most beloved passages of the Hebrew Bible was Jeremiah where God takes the prophet to the potter's house & has him watch as the potter works.
 - a. He knew exactly what to do with the clay.
 - b. Paul refers to that story here & reminds his readers that God is our Molder & Shaper.
 - c. He has the power to make of us as He wills.
 6. What God in His sovereignty has done is portioned out to each of us a measure of our own sovereignty.
 - a. What that means is → Our choices are real!
 - b. Because of the Fall, we **ALL** start out as lumps of worthless clay.
 - c. If we **respond in faith** to God's gracious offer of eternal life in Christ, He molds us as 8:29 says into a vessel of honor, one that bears the image of Christ.
 - d. If we **reject** Him, then we become vessels of wrath destined for the kiln of eternal death.
 7. But know this, the hands that work the Master's Wheel still bear the print of the nails that once held Him to the cross.
 8. **ALL** God does, He does in love – a love that is so sure & true, it even honors the choice of those who reject Him.
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9. Now → Along with people, God LOVES *justice*. And justice demands sin be punished. So Paul says, **²² What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?**
10. We see things from our narrow little slice of 'now' & our isolated spot on the great timeline of history—& think we know so much.
 11. We say with confident smugness, "Why doesn't God fix everything *right now*? He should! Why—if I were god, I would!"
 12. But what if God's plan is bigger than our puny minds can fathom?
 13. God **IS** going to work everything out!
 - a. The wicked will be judged,
 - b. And the righteous will be rewarded.
 14. That God *delays* judgment reveals His loving patience & long-suffering.
 15. And the longer He waits to bestow rewards, the more the Spirit can work to increase it.
 16. God's timing is perfect! When He wraps things up, no one in all heaven or Earth will say it was either too soon or too late.
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G. Vs. 25-29

1. Remember that Paul is dealing here with the question about what the Gospel means for Jews.
 2. His answer is that salvation isn't based on who you're a descendant of.

It's about who you're *trusting* in.
 3. Whether Jew or Gentile, it isn't Abraham that gets you to heaven, it's Jesus Christ.
 4. What surprised Paul was the *resistance* he'd received to this message from the Jews.
 5. After all, it was spelled out in their prophets -
²⁵ As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved."²⁶ "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."
 6. This was obviously a prophecy of the salvation of *Gentiles*.
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7. Then Paul refers to some passages from Isaiah where the prophet said *not all Jews* were the people of God.
- 27** **Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved.”²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.”²⁹ And as Isaiah said before: “Unless the LORD of Sabaoth [hosts] had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah.”**
8. Isaiah made it clear that the *real Israel of God* was not equivalent with the 12 tribes.
 - a. There was an Israel *within* Israel – called here *the remnant*;
 - b. Those who were not only the *physical descendants* of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, but their *spiritual descendants* as well, because they had the *same faith* in God the patriarchs had.
9. The same it true in the church. Not *everyone* who goes to church is saved.
 - a. There are those who go for all kinds of reasons, but faith in Jesus is not one of them.
 - b. There is THE real invisible Church within denominations, movements and church groups, they are the faithful remnant.
10. In v. 29, Paul says it was the presence of *this seed*, this righteous remnant, that kept the rest from judgment & ruin.
11. But in v. 28 he speaks of the day when the remnant *is removed*, then the end comes quickly.
12. Indeed, as we read in 2 Thess 2, it’s when the salt & light of the true Church is removed in the Rapture that evil is let loose on Earth as never before.
13. Then judgment falls, as it did on Sodom & Gomorrah.
14. But before the fire could fall on those wicked cities – righteous Lot had to be removed, just as the Church will be removed before God’s wrath falls.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Vs. 30-33

1. So we end -
- 30** **What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”**
2. This is the *perfect conclusion* to Paul’s expose on God’s sovereign election in the previous verses.
3. As he’s made so clear in chs. 1-8, the righteousness we need is not self-made by keeping the Law.
4. It’s a gift God offers those who receive it by faith in Jesus.
5. But those like the Jews who are devoted to *self-righteousness* stumble at this.
6. They find the Gospel an affront & insult because it says they’re poor lost sinners when all their lives they’ve labored to be good → & convinced themselves they were.
7. It’s difficult receiving God’s forgiveness when you think you don’t need it but *instead* ought to be rewarded for *how good* you are.
8. So while many of the Jews stumbled over the Gospel, the Gentiles who **KNEW** they were lost, heard in it the message of God’s love & forgiveness and responded by the thousands.

B. Election

1. So → what about *election*? Does God elect? Yes, Sure!
2. Who & how He elects is right here in v. 33 →

“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

3. This prophecy of Jesus as Messiah is from Isaiah 28:16. 1 Peter 2:6 quotes it more *fully* –

“Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

4. Jesus is God’s Elect **ONE**. It’s in Jesus that all the plan & promises of God reside.

- a. And just as God demonstrated in Abe, Isaac, Jacob & throughout Israel’s history –
- b. It’s faith in His promise that secures salvation.
- c. Abraham believed God & it as accounted to him for reighteousness.
- d. Jesus is THE ONE all the promises of God looked to.
- e. He is the Elect One.

5. Isaiah 42:1 makes it clearer still

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

6. God elects alright – He elects to accomplish salvation **through His Son**.

- a. All those who put their faith *in* Christ are elect **because He is**.
- b. Are you in Christ? If you are, then you too are elect of God.