

Series: The Reign of Grace

Today's Message: Not All Who are Descended from Israel are Israel

Jeff Kennedy / December 4, 2022

Romans 11:33–36 “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ³⁵ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

What if you could know exactly what someone was thinking? Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 2 that the Holy Spirit knows the mind of God and has communicated the mind of God to us. There are some things concerning God’s foreknowledge, predestination, election, justification, and resurrection glory that God has revealed in the Word. Beyond that, Paul seems to say in vv. 33–36 we have to throw up our hands, acknowledging how unsearchable and untraceable is God’s wisdom and knowledge on these matters. **So, each week we’ll start with that Scripture, and I want to encourage you to commit it to memory. Learn it.**

Over the next few weeks, we’ll be exploring what the Bible teaches on this subject and do our best to refrain from speculation.

Recap:

Paul concluded Chapter 8 by drawing our attention to “the called ones.” Who are they? They are those Jews and Gentiles whom God has foreknown from eternity past, predestined to adopt as his own, called by the Spirit out of the grave, justified by faith in Christ’s free grace, and destined for resurrection glory.

Because of this, as Pat reminded us, we can be fully persuaded that we are more than conquerors in Christ, and nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ. You name it. Not the world, not powers, not Satan, not even our own conscience which at times condemns us—nothing can remove us from being the foreknown, chosen, called, justified, glorified saints of God.

Chapter 9 may seem like he begins a new line of thought. Why go from all that and then turn back to a discussion about Jew and Gentile relationships that he started in Chapters 1 and 2? Because—*this is where the whole idea of salvation by grace through faith has been headed*. One would think that if God has now turned to the Gentile nations to include them as the elect, chosen people of God then his plan has failed. Is the Christian Gospel and the church, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles, “Plan B.”

Main Idea: *God’s original promise to Abraham has not failed but has succeeded because through Christ (Abraham’s descendent) all the nations of the earth have been blessed with salvation.*

So what about the Jews? If God has now saved the world through Jesus the Jew, and that salvation is by faith in Christ apart from the righteousness sought through works of the law, then what is God's plan for ethnic Israel? You can almost hear ethnic Jews in the Roman church asking "So where does that leave us Paul?"

The primary issue/objection that Paul anticipates and answers in this passage is in verse 6.

Did God's promise/Word to the Jews as his elect people fail (Rom 9:6)?

1. God's promise has not failed because they are Israelites (Rom 9:1–5). Paul makes it clear that God has no intention to merely cast his people aside in favor now of the Gentiles who have faith. It is both and. We are one people, one family—Jew and Gentile, by faith in Jesus the Messiah.

- Paul was deeply burdened for the salvation of his countrymen (Rom 9:1–2). "I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience testifies to me through the Holy Spirit—² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart."

A quick point of application on that: The historic antisemitic attitude toward Jews is entirely out of place for Christians.

While today Evangelicals have had a very positive and affirming view of the Jews, and fostered good relationships, historically Christians have struggled with antisemitism. This can be traced all the way back to the bar Kochva revolt of 135 AD when, because of the Jews' insistence on rebelling and making war on Rome (which the Christians rejected due to the teachings and example of Christ), there was a great parting of the ways. From that moment forward, Christianity became almost entirely a Gentile movement, and sentiments toward ethnic Jews soured.

But today we enjoy an unprecedented friendship and partnership with ethnic and national Israel.

But even though that's true, he does say in verse 3...

- The Jews were cut off from Christ due to unbelief (Rom 9:3). "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the benefit of my brothers and sisters, my own flesh and blood." So, he frames Israel's predicament in terms of their salvation, not in terms of merely their national vocation.

Second quick point of application—Christian Zionism at the expense of the gospel is also out of place. While we want to follow Paul's sentiments of deep anguish and great sorrow for the salvation of God's original covenant people, we should also avoid an excessive emphasis on them at the detriment of sharing the gospel with them. ***There are certain ministries that teach that all Jews will be saved because of their ethnic heritage.*** Paul says, "I wish I could exchange places with them" well, what place are they in? They are cut off from Christ and salvation and therefore remain condemned for their sins.

And we should never forget...

- The Jews were privileged in election (Rom 9:4–5). “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. ⁵ The ancestors are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Christ, who is God over all, praised forever. Amen.”

Paul is reminding the Gentiles that salvation comes from the Jews. They are Israel, sons of Abraham by birth—originally adopted and given the promise of resurrection glory, given Abraham as their national patriarch, Moses as their lawgiver and prophet, and David as the prototype for the permanent Messiah-king. They have the Torah—God’s good law, Solomon’s temple rebuilt and far more glorious than the first temple, all the promises in Isaiah about God saving a remnant. It is from them that God’s Christ comes—***but here’s the rock that makes them stumble—here’s why they’ve been cut off and cursed due to their unbelief—that Jesus Christ is God over all, praised forever.***

Even though they have this enviable heritage, they cannot accept this message that their God—Yahweh—has become enfleshed in a human life, Jesus of Nazareth.

Recap: God’s promise to Israel has not failed, even though at present they are cut off from Christ and have received the curses of Deut 28; Lev 24 due to unbelief. They still have the pedigree, the heritage, but they have rejected the unerring witness of that heritage—that God would save the world through His Son, who bore our sins on the cross, raised to vindicate his claims, now exalted over all things in heaven and earth.

2. God’s promise succeeded because God’s election is according to His will (Rom 9:6–13). Paul wants to redefine what we think “success” in this context is. Success is not then defined by certain external metrics applied to God—but by God’s own will—God’s promise to make Abraham’s descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and grains on the seashore hasn’t been nullified—in fact God accomplishes this by bringing in the Gentile people. “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring (i.e. natural, physical descent from Abraham), but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.” Paul’s argument here is that if it were a mere matter of being a physical descendent of Abraham, then the promise would include Ishmael and his descendants. But it doesn’t. Now, what if Paul’s Jewish audience countered, “Yeah, but Ishmael was half Egyptian, not a true Jew.”

Paul anticipates this counter-objection...

⁹ “For this is what the promise said: ‘About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.’ ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, ***not because of works but because of him who calls***— ¹² she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ ¹³ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”

Two brothers from the same mother—twins in fact. And God’s choice of the one was not dependent on his works or anything in his life that God had foreseen (that is, meriting God’s choice of him).

Does this mean that God is capricious or arbitrary in his choices? No. Just because *we don’t know the reasons behind God’s choice of Jacob over Esau doesn’t mean that God doesn’t have sufficient reasons to do so.* We do know what the reasons weren’t however—it was not based on his works or anything he had done or would eventually do. ***Neither brother had done any works to merit God’s sovereign election of one over the other.***

Paul gives five examples of God’s Sovereign choice apart from the choices or actions of individuals.

- Example 1: God’s choice of Isaac over Ishmael (9:7).
- Example 2: Jacob over Esau (9:13).
- Example 3: Moses over Pharaoh (9:17) “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” **Paul anticipates a natural objection: “Wait a minute. How is**

that fair? (9:19). “You will say to me, ‘Why does he still find fault, for who can resist his will?’ But who are you o’ man to gainsay God’s choices?”

- Example/Illustration 4: The Potter and the clay (9:21) Will what is molded say to its molder “Why did you make you make me like this?” “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?”
- Example 5: The remnant of Israel within a vast number of descendants (9:27) “And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved,’”

So where do all these examples lead?

“even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?” (9:24). God’s program with Israel had not failed because God brought them into existence in order that through them the Messiah and the world’s Savior would come. While God promises innumerable descendants, Isaiah recognizes that only a remnant of actual Israelites—natural-born sons of Abraham—will be included in that vast number. So how does God accomplish this promise?

3. God's promise succeeded because the world is blessed with salvation through Abraham (9:22–26).

“What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” ²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

Paul quotes two quick passages, one from Hosea 2:3 and 1:10 and the other from Isaiah 1:9. Paul is here referring to God's promise to Abraham which is now fulfilled in Christ.

God's Plan: Genesis 12:2, 3 “I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and **you will be a blessing**. ³ I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and ***all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you***.” So right here we see that God is going to bless Abraham so that Abraham would be a blessing to the nations—all the peoples of the earth.

What kind of blessing?

Gen 22:17 (Exod 32:13) “I will indeed bless you and make your ***offspring as numerous as the stars*** of the sky and the ***sand on the seashore***.” Now, this promise has never been remotely true of ethnic Israel because they've always been a small people group.

Genesis 28:14 God's promise to Jacob “***All the peoples on earth*** will be blessed through you and your offspring.”

So how might this promise of innumerable children be fulfilled?

Isa 49:3, 6 “He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified...It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Now, let's see how the NT authors interpreted these and many other passages like this...

Galatians 3:8, 27–29 “Now the Scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham, saying, **All the nations will be blessed through you.** ⁹ Consequently, those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith... 27 For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. ²⁸ There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.” If you’re in Christ by faith, *you are in Abraham.*

Rom 4:16 “This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to ***all the descendants***—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of **Abraham’s faith.** He is the father of us all.”

So the reader in Rome might conclude that Israel’s rejection for the sake of the Gentiles’ salvation means that God’s plan had failed—God was unfaithful to his promises to ethnic and national Israel. Understand that is the objection that Paul is addressing in these three monumental chapters. He builds his case and let’s recap that:

First, we learned that God’s promise to ethnic Israel has not failed. God was faithful to call them, choose a remnant from among unbelieving Israel, and through them to bring the Messiah who would save many from among the Jews and the Gentile nations.

Paul shows that God has not thrown ethnic Israel away because he himself (Paul) is anguished for their redemption in Jesus (Rom 9:1–2).

Nevertheless, they have been cut off from their heritage because of their unbelief (Rom 9:3).

Their ethnic advantages still stand, and can be reclaimed if they would embrace their King and Saviour—Jesus Christ the Lord of all (Rom 9:4–5).

Second, we learned that God’s promise succeeded because he is the Potter and we are the clay, he alone reserves the right to elect according to His purposes, and those purposes do not include any works we had done or *would do* (Rom 9:6–13).

His examples of Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the remnant among ethnic Israel demonstrate that. Now, God has chosen “even us” from among the Jew and Gentile nations.

Thirdly, we discovered that God’s promise succeeded because the world is blessed with salvation through Abraham (9:22–29).

God accomplishes his plan to bless the nations by adopting them into his family—a remnant from among the Jews and Gentiles.

This salvation is not according to the fastidious or meticulous observance of Moses' law, but it is a righteousness according to faith. This teaching, Paul says (9:33) is the stone that makes Israel stumble and the rock of offense.

Application:

- (1) We should take comfort in God's sovereignty. I don't know about you but it comforts me to know that there is a God who is running things, and His wisdom is infinite in perfection.
- (2) We pray for ethnic Israel—indeed, they are coming to faith today in droves. This is unprecedented in 2,000 years of church history. But as we recognize them as God's original privileged covenant people—they need salvation that is found in Jesus the Messiah alone.
- (3) We should be grieved and in anguish over our own countrymen—sinful, rebellious idolatrous Americans. Pray for our nation who is cut off and rejected by God through unbelief and idolatry.
- (4) We should be grieved for all people groups who are oppressed by the devil. Like the Chinese people who are crying out in the streets for deliverance from this evil, godless, communist regime which has them in perpetual lockdown.