

We left off last week with an unanswered question based on the teaching of Genesis chapters 12-25.

- Abraham & Nahor had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not.
- Isaac & Ishmael had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not.
- Jacob & Esau had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not.

The question we left unanswered is this—was it fair for God to choose one person over the other? Why Abraham and not Nahor? Why Isaac and not Ishmael? Why Jacob and not Esau? These are extremely important questions and because Paul answers these very questions in Romans chapter nine, we will look there for our answers.

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!^a Amen.

Let's stop there and ask a question. Does Paul love his people? This is one of the greatest statements of love in all of Scripture. Paul declared that he had *great sorrow and unceasing anguish in [his] heart*. He carried around with him the knowledge that only a few of his own Jewish people were going to escape the eternal flames of hell. This was a tremendous burden on him, as it should be on us. But I think we get overwhelmed with the thought of over five billion people in the world who are lost and do not know Christ. I would argue that it is essentially impossible to feel a burden for more than five billion people on the planet who don't know Christ as Savior, but it is possible to be similarly burdened for our loved ones who share the same future.

Paul's love extended to them not only through emotion but through desired action. *For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel*. What did Paul mean by this? Was he actually willing to suffer an eternity separated from Christ so that his fellow Jews could be with Christ? Would he really

assign himself to hell? I believe that Paul patterned his prayer or desire after the example of Moses in the incident with the golden calf. After the golden calf was smashed to dust, *The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."* (Exodus 32:30-32) Moses declared that he was willing to be blotted from the Book of Life in order to save his people from wrath and condemnation. Moses described this as "atonement for your sin."

If you recall from our study in Romans four, a better way of translating "atonement" is *propitiation*, which is the satisfaction of God's wrath. Moses knew that the people has incited God's wrath due to their pagan worship and he further realized that God's wrath must be satisfied. Moses offered himself as the proverbial scapegoat in order to save his own people. As Jesus said, *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13). Moses was willing to lay down his life for his people. In the same way, Paul would have given his life to save his unsaved Israelites.

I know this feeling well because something similar happened to me when my dad was dying of leukemia. Dad had taken a turn for the worse so I made a quick flight to Ohio to see him. As the plane was about to take off I had this really bizarre thought. I felt as though I should write a note to my dad in a small notebook I was carrying in the event that I was killed in a plane crash and they found the notebook afterward. I know it's a strange idea, but my feeling was that if he read the note knowing that I had thought to witness to him just before I died, that could lead to his salvation. In other words, I was willing to give my life to save his soul. Just as I was contemplating writing this note, I heard what was almost an audible voice that said three words, "I already have." I took these words to be an assurance from the Lord that he had already died for my dad. I don't know, but maybe this is a little of what Paul was referring to in this section—*For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers.* I don't think that he would have sent himself to hell, for he knew that would have been impossible. This was a raw demonstration of Paul's immense love for his people.

What added to Paul's level of grief is the fact that his people had not only rejected the gospel, but been given this long list of blessings and benefits. *Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ.* Despite being given all of these things, the Jews remained closed to the gospel. All of these blessings pointed to Christ, prepared the way for Christ and resulted in his birth, death and resurrection. Nevertheless, though living in the midst of blessing, they rejected the truth. What then was the purpose of these blessings? If Israel was God's chosen people yet they rejected his word, does this mean that his word has failed?

⁶ *It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*
⁷ *Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."*^b ⁸ *In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as*

Abraham's offspring. ⁹ *For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."*^c

I hope you can start to see the themes that Paul is pulling from Genesis. He is dependent on them. Paul wants to remind his readers that even though the majority of Jews have rejected the truth, God's word has not failed. God *will* save his people. He *will* leave a remnant regardless of their rejection. This is true because "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." We know that Jews traced their spiritual heritage and therefore their salvation through their racial lineage. If I can show that I came from the tribe of Benjamin, and we know that Benjamin was one of Jacob's sons, then this means that I am part of Israel. I am safe and secure—one of God's chosen people.

But Paul says, "No, that is not right." *Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.* Another way of saying it is that not all who are descended from *national* Israel are *spiritual* Israel. Not everyone who is a Jew by natural birth is born again in the spirit. This is a very important distinction between national Israel and spiritual Israel. This is a distinction that is more obvious to us than it would have been to a zealous Jew. As some have said, salvation is by grace, not by race. Within the nation of Israel there is a smaller segment of individuals who are actually "Israel"—they are saved by grace. This is what Paul taught all through the book of Romans. Salvation does not come through the Law. Salvation does not come through circumcision. Salvation does not come by good works and salvation does not come by being born as a Jew. These are all Biblical facts that are taught throughout Scripture and upon which we all agree. This is what Paul meant in verse six—*Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*

This also serves to highlight the difference between the blessings given to Israel. On the one hand, Israel was God's chosen people. They were given all of the blessings and benefits already listed by Paul—adoption, glory, covenants, law, temple worship, promises, patriarchs and ancestry of Christ. Anyone who was born as a Jew was born into and lived under these blessings. But Paul's point is that those blessings are not the same as being one of God's children. In other words, you can be one of God's chosen people but not one of his children. This could not be more clear than in verse eight. *In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.* This promise is the same one we have been studying for the past five months in Genesis 12-25. *For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."* The phrase "God's children" is always used as a designation of those individuals who are saved. This has to be true, otherwise Paul's distinction in verses six through eight does not make any sense.

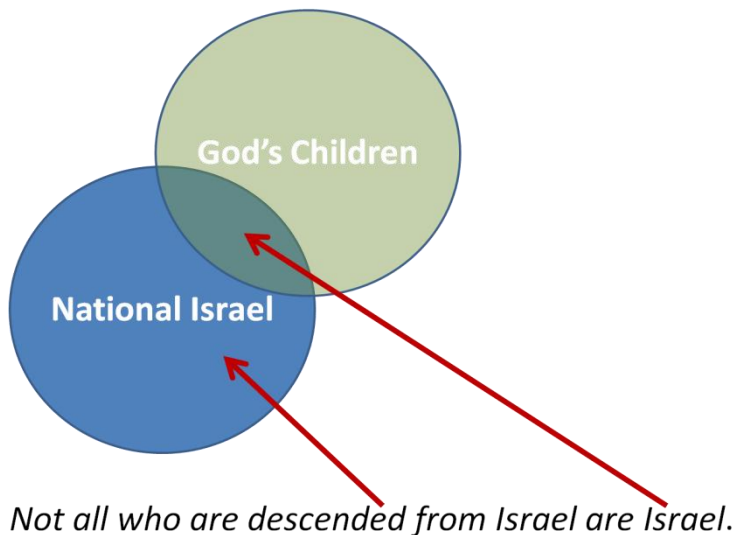
Let's break these verses down into a chart format.

v.6	Not all who are descended from Israel	are Israel
v.7	Nor because they are his descendants	are they all Abraham's children
v.8	it is not the natural children who are God's children	but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring

CONC	National Israel	Spiritual Israel

Here is our conclusion:

Those designated as “descended,” “descendants” and “natural children” are “national Israel,” that is they are Jews by birth but clearly not “God’s children.” Those designated as “Abraham’s children,” Abraham’s offspring” and “God’s children” are all born again individuals who are also Jews by birth. National Israel has been given the blessings of God’s chosen people, but by themselves, these blessings have not resulted in their salvation. Paul repeated the same thought three times in a row in these three verses.



Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

Here is one more way to illustrate what Paul is saying. There are two categories of people—national Israel and God’s children. Would you agree that not all of national Israel are saved? This should be obvious. But there is a place where national Israel and God’s children overlap. These individuals are Jews by birth but are also born again believers, one of God’s children. Therefore in this diagram, where national Israel and God’s children overlap, we have a group of individuals who are the true, spiritual Israel. It may sound like I

am repeating myself but it is vital that we understand the first nine verses because the remainder of the chapter depends upon these distinctions that Paul is making.

Therefore we can see that there are two types of blessings given to Israel. All Jews were God’s chosen people and received all of these blessings, but these blessings by themselves did not guarantee their salvation. This is why Paul was doubly grieved for his people—they were blessed in all of these ways yet most did not receive the promise. God had determined in advance that Sarah would have a son and that Isaac, and not Ishmael, would receive the promise. There were blessings that were given to all people that did not result in their salvation and there was a promise given to some that did result in their salvation.

This summarizes what we said earlier: Isaac & Ishmael had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not. The promise was given to Isaac but not to Ishmael. Why one and not the other? Who gets to decide who receives the promise and who does not? This question is straightforward—God decided. When he called Abraham out of his pagan land, God chose Abraham but not Nahor. Abraham did not have a say in this choice. He believed God when the promise was spoken to him, but his belief was not the cause of God’s choosing him. When God gave his promise to Sarah and not to Hagar, God showed his choice of Isaac but not Ishmael. Isaac certainly did not do the choosing because it was determined long before he was born that

the promise would be given to him and not to Ishmael. God's decision to choose Isaac occurred decades before he was born.

This is exactly what Paul meant in verses 10-13.

¹⁰ *Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.* ¹¹ *Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand:* ¹² *not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”*^d ¹³ *Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*^e

According to this section, why did God choose Jacob but not Esau? Was it based on something they did or didn't do? No, the text is clear—God chose Jacob over Esau *before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad*. As much as any other verse in scripture, this one completely eliminates human merit as a basis for salvation. Jacob and Esau were fetuses in their mother's womb. They were incapable of “doing” anything, let alone being morally responsible for either righteous or wicked behavior. God did not choose Jacob because he was righteous nor did God reject Esau because he was wicked. What then was the basis of God's choice? *In order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls...*

We need to stop and think about this word election. Many of you will be familiar with the phrase “the elect.” “The elect” are those who are chosen by God. The elect are believers and the non-elect are unbelievers. This phrase, “the elect” is used 13 times in the NT. The elect come about through election. Election is as simple to understand. What is it called when politicians are put in power? Some would call it cronyism, but usually they are placed in power by election of the people. When you go into the voting booth what are you doing? You are voting for your candidate. You are choosing one candidate over the other. This is all that election means—to choose. Therefore the verse could read, *in order that God's purpose in **choosing** might stand: not by works but by him who calls...*

When we look at these important terms—election and predestination—in Scripture, not everyone in this room will be in complete agreement. Therefore, let's begin with truths on which we should all agree.

First we would agree that there is such a thing as election and predestination taught in the Bible. These words and concepts are used by Jesus, Paul, Peter and John, which covers nearly every book in the New Testament. We may have disagreement about how election and predestination are worked out, but we should all agree that it is taught throughout the NT.

Second, we should also agree that God elects some and not others. To be chosen assumes that some are not chosen. If all were chosen we would be forced to believe in Universalism—that all people are saved and the Bible certainly does not teach this. There are the elect and the non-elect.

Third, we would agree that election fulfills God's purpose. This is stated explicitly in verse eleven—*in order that God's purpose in election might stand*. What that purpose is will be understood later.

Fourth, we would agree that election is equivalent to salvation, the elect are “God’s children.” This might seem incredibly obvious but it needs to be stated here because some will say that the choosing over Jacob over Esau doesn’t have anything to do with salvation but it a matter of receiving God’s blessings. But this view is not possible because everywhere else in Scripture election and predestination clearly result in salvation, so why should that be any different in this chapter. Furthermore, we have spent the majority of our time showing how Paul makes a distinction between those who are part of national Israel and those who spiritual Israel. There are genuine believers saved by grace and not by race. Election is not election unto generic blessings but election unto salvation. I think that virtually everyone will agree with these first four points, but where we tend to have disagreement is on the next point.

God’s election is not based on human merit of any kind, foreseen or otherwise. Since predestination and election are so clear in Scripture, many Christians believe that God chose us based on his knowledge that we would choose him. In other words, God looked into the future and saw that we would believe the gospel, therefore he chose us based on this knowledge of our future choice. Without even being fully aware of it, at one time I held this viewpoint. Many of you were like me. Maybe you have never been taught this view explicitly but you have picked it up along the way.

I think most people hold to this view out of a sense of fairness and justice. After all, there are only two possible options—either God chose us based on our future choice of him, or else he chose us without any consideration of human merit, foreseen or otherwise. But if the latter is true, if God simply chooses us of his own free will, isn’t that unfair? How can everyone have an equal chance at believing the gospel if everything is decided by God? Is God unjust?

Paul himself answers this question in verse fourteen, but first, let’s make sure we understand the basis for God’s choosing. What does verse eleven say? *Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand:* The choice between Jacob and Esau was made prior to their birth—before they had done anything good or bad. In case that is not obvious enough for us, Paul hammers home the point in verse twelve—*not by works but by him who calls.* It was not Jacob’s choice. It was not Esau’s choice. It was not from human merit or works, but by him who calls.

Now some will likely insert here that God made his choice based upon his knowledge of future events. God looked into the future and saw that Jacob would believe him and that Esau would not. There is not the slightest hint that God made his decision based upon future actions of these men, but more than that, Paul’s entire argument regarding Isaac and Ishmael and now Jacob and Esau explicitly states that God’s choice had nothing whatsoever to do with the actions of Jacob and Esau.

“But that’s not fair. That’s not what a loving God would do!” When we think about God’s sovereign choice in election, this is a common response. It can’t be right because it doesn’t seem fair. As he so often does in the book of Romans, Paul anticipated this question and had a ready answer.

¹⁴ *What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!* ¹⁵ *For he says to Moses,*

*“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”^f
¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.*

First of all, we have to ask ourselves, if God’s election was based on seeing our future choice, why would Paul even have posed this question? If everyone has an equal opportunity to choose God and then he predestines us based upon our future choice, then we don’t have any issue of perceived injustice. From our viewpoint, this would be “fair” and Paul would have had no need to ask the question, “Is God unjust?” But he did anticipate the question because he knew that this is where our hearts would take us. As believers, we are so grateful for our salvation and, like Paul, we long for our unsaved friends and family to share this same joy. We want them to hear the gospel and respond to the gospel, but how can it be fair if they are chosen by God? Just as Paul longed for his fellow Jews to know Christ, so we are grieved at the lost state of our loved ones.

Did you notice how Paul answered this perceived objection regarding God’s fairness? First of all, he outright denies any possibility of God being unjust. “Not at all!” he replies. And then he offered a quote from Exodus 33 where God spoke directly with Moses. You could summarize his response this way: “God is God and he will decide who receives *his* mercy and who does not. I have been telling you all along that it does not depend on human merit or desire or any effort on the part of man. God’s mercy is his alone to give and that should be enough for you.” In other words, God is God and you are not. How can we question his sense of justice and fairness when his mercy is not ours to give?

But if salvation and election are God’s sovereign choice, instead of feeling that this is unfair, it should be the greatest comfort to us, because it was comforting to Paul. Remember that he started this chapter with “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” because of his fellow Israelites who were lost. Some questioned whether or not God’s word had failed because so many Jews were not saved. But Paul knew that God’s word did not fail because his word could not fail. God guarantees that some will be saved. Paul loved his people but he also trusted God and his word. His anguish was comforted by God’s sovereign purpose in election. Do you trust God to make this decision?

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July 11, 2010

^a Or *Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised! Or Christ. God who is over all be forever praised!*

^b Gen. 21:12

^c Gen. 18:10,14

^d Gen. 25:23

^e Mal. 1:2,3

^f Exodus 33:19