

The Gospel Plan As It Relates To Israel

In the context preceding Romans 9, we have seen the scope of God's plan to work all things for good, turning evil upside down as He reshapes it for His glory. We have also seen the power of the gospel to turn sinners into sons of God by grace through the righteousness of Christ. Following these joyful truths, Paul shifts to a tone of sorrow, addressing the Jews and how they fit into this gospel plan. The Christian church started in Jerusalem; it was entirely comprised of Hebrews. Yet, by the time Romans was written, Gentiles were the majority, and a great deal of persecution came from Jewish zealots. Israel had, for the most part, rejected their own Messiah, leaving some to wonder how God's chosen people had not received God's promise. If God always planned to let in the Gentiles, what were all those Jewish promises and covenants for? Had God abandoned his people? Has He been unrighteous to Israel? Romans 9-11 will focus on these topics, discussing Israel's past (ch 9), present (ch 10), and future (ch 11).

Chapter 9 Highlights

VS 1-5

Paul speaks most sincerely of the incessant sorrow he feels for his fellow Israelites, desiring them to be saved. If it were possible, he would even be willing to lose Christ if it meant they would gain Christ. What a selfless, Christ-like heart he had for them, wishing he could trade his salvation for theirs, even though they vehemently denied the Lord and labeled Paul a betrayer. This makes it clear that everything he will say is coming from a place of love.

In chapter 3, Paul posed the question, "what advantage has the Jew?" and noted their chief advantage: having the Word of God. **HERE, HE LISTS 8 SPECIAL BENEFITS ISRAEL ENJOYED:**

THE SERVICE OF GOD: The Levitical priesthood served God in sacrifices and worship

THE PROMISES: They had the blessings of Abraham, the land of rest, and the future promise of a new covenant and a new heart

THE FATHERS: They were of the patriarchs, i.e. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

THE ANCESTRY OF CHRIST: The genealogy of the promised seed traces back to Abraham

THE ADOPTION: Israel was God's special treasure. "Israel is my son, my firstborn"

THE GLORY: They were shown the visible glory of God and didn't die

THE COVENANTS: God made covenants with Abraham that were renewed and extended to Isaac and Jacob, Moses, and David

THE LAW: They had the revelation of God's will to man

VS 6-9

It's not that these advantages didn't matter; the reason much of Israel had not received Christ was not because God's Word had failed. Rather, not all called "Israel" are truly of Israel. In other words, being an Israelite by ethnicity does not necessitate having faith in the heart, which is what truly marks God's children. Romans 2 taught us that a Jew is not one outwardly by circumcision, but inwardly in the heart. Therefore, only a subset of Israel would inherit the promise of God, and using Old Testament examples, Paul explains that it has always worked this way. For instance, Abraham had several sons, but God said that the promise would be through Isaac and only Isaac. Likewise, not everyone who boasts of being a child of Abraham is really a child of promise. God's election has always been by faith and not by flesh.

VS 10-16

So if it isn't by genetics, could it be by good works? No, it can't, as Paul will show using the next Old Testament example: Isaac's sons. God chose Jacob to inherit the promise instead of Esau while they were still in the womb, before either of them had done anything good or evil. Even though Esau was older than Jacob, God told Rebecca "the older will serve the younger." So just as the descendants of Abraham were not all chosen, so also the descendants of Isaac were not all chosen. And in the same way, not all who come from Jacob (Israel) receive the promise of the Messiah. God can narrow his promises while still keeping them.

One very important point is that **these examples are NOT referring to God specifically choosing which individuals will be saved.** This section is about the carriers of the promise and God's justice of choice for which nations can receive Christ. When God says "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," he is not saying that before these boys were born, God chose Jacob for salvation and Esau for damnation. In fact, that quote is from Malachi 1:3 which was written over a thousand years after they lived. Instead, it speaks of the nations that came from their lineage: Israel and Edom. Edom went on to do much evil, as did Israel, but Israel was graced with the promise of a perpetual future and Edom was not. Thus, God's choice to bless Jacob was not based on works, as it was made prior to any works. God's hatred for Esau is not in the sense of injustice to an unborn child, but in the sense of judgment against a nation, holding them accountable for sins of a thousand years.

VS 10-16 CONT.

Israel was only shown mercy because of the promise, and as the Jews should have known from Moses (Exodus 33:19), God gets to have mercy on whomever He chooses. All these examples are here to point to the fact that God's gospel plan is to show mercy on those of faith, as opposed to those who seek it on the basis of genetic lineage, zeal, or good works. God is not unrighteous; he doesn't have to let all the descendants in by default. The standard for who receives His favor and which nations inherit the promise is based solely on His choice, even if it subverts expectations. Today, God's choice is for the promise of the blessing of Abraham to be through faith in Christ, regardless of nationality. Otherwise, there will be judgment like there was against Edom.

VS 17-18

Just as God has mercy on whom He wills, He also hardens whom He wills. What does that mean? In Exodus, it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but it also says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Both are true. This Biblical principle is sometimes called "**judicial hardening.**" This hardening is an act of just judgment against those who reject God. God knew the pride of Pharaoh, and used it for his gospel plan. God was the one who put Pharaoh in his position so that the power of God might be shown in him. This is in keeping with the nature of God: He transforms evil into good and repurposes sin for righteousness. Pharaoh was an active agent in the choice to keep his pride, and God abandoned him to his stubbornness, reaffirming his choice. We saw this same concept in Romans 1 in the way God dealt with humanity when they rejected Him: He gave them over to their own depravity so that someday He could reveal the justice of his wrath against the ungodliness of the world. Another example of this idea is seen in the story of Joseph. Joseph's brothers intended to do evil against him because of their jealousy, but God designed good to come out of it, preserving millions of lives (particularly the Christ-line) during a worldwide famine. Even Paul himself had rejected the gospel and was much like Pharaoh in his hardness against Christ, but God had mercy on him. God had a plan for Paul's life, choosing him to be an apostle of grace before he was born. God purposed to turn all the evil Paul had done into greater good, but Paul also had to choose to accept that mercy.

VS 19-24

We must remember who is the Creator and who is made of dust. We dare not reply against God, questioning Him or refusing His mercy. As Romans 3 said, "let God be true, and every man a liar." If God is judicially hardening some of Israel, it wouldn't be unjust. This can be seen in how Annas and Caiaphas chose to crucify Jesus, and yet that also was part of God's greater plan and played into His justice. The larger point of this is to show that God is the Potter with the authority to choose what happens to the clay: mercy for those of faith, and destruction for those of unbelief.

VS 19-24 CONT.

This is why Israel didn't receive the Messiah. They were hardened because they rejected the path of mercy that God gave them, choosing their own way instead. So God gives them up to be vessels of dishonor. Still, God will work all things for His glory, whether by their eventual repentance or by His wrath bringing justice to their rebellion. He is longsuffering with those who are prepared for wrath, so that he might also make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy prepared for glory. The vessels of mercy are believers on Christ, both Jewish and Gentile.

VS 25-33

Hosea marrying a prostitute and consistently taking her back is a 3D picture of God's relationship with unfaithful Israel. The lesson is that God can make people who are disowned to be His again; both Jews and Gentiles. However, the Old Testament actually shows a pattern of only a small remnant of Israel remaining faithful when the majority of the nation is in unbelief. Israel sought righteousness by works, and so they stumbled over the rock of Christ just as Isaiah prophesied. Meanwhile, even though they had never been God's people, the Gentiles found righteousness because they believed. But as for those of Israel who are still hardened, God has historically cast his people aside for a time with a view to bringing them back to Him. So He can do it again, as we'll see later in chapter 11. The gospel remains for them.

Conclusion

So why with all of their advantages was Israel rejecting the gospel? It's not because God has been unfaithful to his promises: He kept his word to the Israel within Israel, just like He always has. It's not because God is unjust to show mercy on those of faith, and harden those of unbelief: He has mercy on whom He wills. It's not because God is unfair to hold human beings accountable: He is the potter and we are the clay. The real reason Israel rejected the gospel is because of pride and because they pursued righteousness by works instead of by faith. Still, like Paul we can have compassion on those who reject the gospel, knowing at any time they may be reshaped to become a vessel of honor fitted for glory. Don't forget when you were the one who needed God's mercy; when the hardness cracked and the light of Christ broke into your heart.

Romans

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