

Romans 9:6-13
God's Gracious Election of Israel

“God chooses those who choose to be chosen”

- Let me repeat that, “God chooses those who choose to be chosen”

Do you agree with that statement?

- If not, why not?

That was how one of my Bible college professors defined the doctrine of election

- Some of the class agreed with the prof
- Some of the class gasped in disbelief

Election has always been a controversial concept

- It has been misunderstood by many

Frankly, it was during my third year of Bible college that God began to open my eyes to understand this great doctrine

- It literally changed my ministry and my life

When you study the doctrine of election, it is not to be studied in a vacuum

- The doctrine of election is really a study of the nature of God

Those who don't want to study this doctrine are, in essence, refusing to study a very important element of God's own nature

I assure you that when you do study the doctrine of election, and the nature of God, you will never be the same

- You will learn things about God that are unexplainable
- You will grapple with things that you had never thought of before

This morning, we come to a passage of Scripture that has caused problems for many people for many years

- This morning, we will tackle Romans 9:13, “**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated**”

But instead of jumping ahead to this verse, we need to examine it in its own context

- I believe the truth of God's Word will seem very clear once we are finished this morning

As Christians, we should try to understand the entire scope of God's Word

- As we read, study, and familiarize ourselves with the Scriptures, we begin to put various truths into categories

This is commonly called systematic theology

- We group various tidbits of theology into categories
- This makes it easier to understand

But there is a danger in systematizing God's Word into human categories

- Quite simply, we don't always understand what category a certain doctrine should fall under

Think of a filing cabinet

- We place various pieces of paper under headings

Businesses may file according to last name

- Home use may file according to the names of various businesses (electricity, gas company, credit card, etc.)

If you misfile the credit card statement and put it with the automobile maintenance, then your filing structure has been compromised

- You put the right information in the wrong category
- This same danger exists with systematic theology

This morning as we study the doctrine of election, realize that this is really a study of the nature of God

- Frankly, this is why many people avoid Romans 9-11
- It is a rich and deep study of the nature of God Himself

Does this mean that we will come to grips with everything written in these chapters?

- Probably not

We will cover all ninety (90) verses of these three chapters

- But we will still have questions
- We will still need to plumb the depths of God's Word for greater understanding

But we must embrace the challenge

- To skip or avoid this portion of God's Word is to skip or avoid a very important part of the nature of God

Let's read Romans 9:6-13

The apostle Paul opened Romans 9 with an intensely personal unveiling of his heart

- He wanted to show the Jews just how much he loved them and was concerned for them

He highlighted the fact that he would have traded places with them

- He would have forfeited the benefits of salvation that he enjoyed and suffered eternal damnation so that his Jewish friends could be spared the wrath of God

Of course, God would not allow this to take place

- But it was Paul's wish and desire nonetheless

The apostle then outlined nine (9) privileges that the Jewish people enjoyed (9:4-5)

- He was showing them just how much God had blessed this nation

But Paul knew that many Jews were wondering, "So if God had blessed the nation Israel so much, then why have many of them rejected the Messiah?"

- This is a serious question with serious repercussions

Perhaps even more staggering than the rejection of the Messiah by many Jews was the reception of the Messiah by many Gentiles

- Those who were formally excluded from the covenants were now being introduced to the Gospel with full benefits!¹

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT, Romans*, 568.

At the heart of this question is an attack on the very character of God

- Do you see how these chapters are really a study of God's character?

To answer this question, Paul gives an opening statement in verse 6

- It helps us to transition from the blessings of Israel to the explanation for their rejection

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed.

Paul wants one thing to be crystal clear

- The problem with Israel's rejection is not because of a defect with God or His Word

What does Paul have in mind by the phrase, "the word of God"?

- Most likely, it is the portion of the OT that chronicles the covenants and promises from God to the Jewish people

As we saw in Romans 9:4, it was to the Jewish people that God gave the covenants and the giving of the Law and the promises

- No other nation enjoyed such a privilege

So Paul wants to reassure the believers at Rome that God's Word has not "failed"

- The word was used in the book of Acts to portray a ship going off its original course and direction (27:17)²

What a reassurance this is!

- God's Word was not somehow diverted or driven off course by Israel's rejection of Christ as Messiah!
- Mankind cannot frustrate the eternal, sovereign plan of God!

But along the line, Jews began to forget the original intent of God's promises

- They began to trust in their physical lineage from Abraham

So the fault does not lie with God's Word

- The fault lies with those who misunderstand God's Word!³

We see Paul address this issue in the second half of verse 6

For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;

At the first reading, this sentence seems confusing

- He makes a distinction between "Israel" and "Israel"!
- The distinction is subtle, but important

In God's eyes, there are two different kinds of Jews⁴

- Physical Jews
- Spiritual Jews

² Steven A. Kreloff, *God's Plan for Israel*, 26.

³ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 352.

⁴ Kreloff, 26.

Physical Jews are those who were born into a Jewish family

- They are the biological descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Spiritual Jews are not only physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

- But they are spiritual descendants, having the same faith as their fathers exhibited in the Lord

Earlier in Romans, Paul wrote these helpful words, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.” (2:28-29)

- Paul contrasts the outward vs. inward nature of a Jew

On one level, every true Jew remained the people of God

- They were a part of the nation to which God made tremendous promises

But on another level, being a part of the nation Israel did not ensure individual salvation

- Salvation has always been on an individual level⁵

Being in the physical lineage of Abraham is not synonymous with being in the same spiritual lineage of Abraham

- At the very outset, the apostle wants to refute such warped, unbiblical thinking

Many Jews were trusting in the fact that they could trace their history back to the original bloodline of Abraham

- But the promises given to Abraham and to his descendants were based on spiritual faith, not physical family

As Gentiles, we don't trace our lineage back to Abraham

- But that doesn't mean that Gentiles don't struggle with misplaced assurance

Gentiles may be tempted to think that just because they are born in the South, that they are Christians

- This isn't so!

Suppose you were born in your parent's garage

- Does this make you an automobile?
- Certainly not!

But isn't it more foolish to place trust in...

- The fact that your parents were Christians
- The fact that you donated money or time to charitable organizations
- The fact that you try to be moral?

Many Jews placed faith in their ancestry during Jesus' day

- Listen to this interaction between Jesus and some misguided Jews, “They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.’ They said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, *even* God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from

⁵ Moo, 573.

the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.” (John 8:39-44)

Talk about being mistaken!

- These Jews honestly and sincerely thought that they were descendants of Abraham

In a physical sense, they were from Abraham

- But from a spiritual sense, they were children of the devil!
- They were unbelievers!

This type of spiritual deception exists today

- Some 2000 years after the death of Christ, some Jews are still trusting in their physical pedigree

These unbelieving Jews believe that the promises that God made to Abraham are binding upon all of his physical descendants

- But that simply isn't the case

This is why Paul says here in verse 6, “*for they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel*”

- It is possible to be a Jew without being a Jew
- It is possible to be a physical Jew, but not a spiritual Jew

How can this be?

- Simply put, because of God's election

God chose some of the physical Jews to be spiritual Jews

- He chose a remnant to receive the fulfillment of the OT promises

To make his case, Paul will cite four (4) physical descendants of Abraham

- But only two of the four were elected by God to be the spiritual heir of the promises
 - o Isaac, not Ishmael (9:7-9)
 - o Jacob, not Esau (9:10-13)

I. God elected Isaac, not Ishmael (9:7-9)

7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants.

Paul knew that in order to convince the Jews of the truth of election, he would have to do so by turning to the pages of the Old Testament

- This was the basis for their misunderstanding

The apostle went directly to the literal descendants of Abraham

- His very own children!

Every Jew could trace his history to this man

- When we preached through the book of Genesis, we noted time and time again how God chose Abraham to be the father of the nation of Israel

It was within Abraham's own family that Paul wanted to clarify his teaching

- Specifically that not all of Abraham's sons were elected by God

We are very familiar with Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael

- But do you know that he had six other sons by Keturah, most likely after Sarah died (25:1-2)?⁶

So out of eight (8) sons, which ones were elected by God?

- Just one, Isaac

but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

A brief history lesson is appropriate here

Abram and Sarai came to Canaan with no children

- We are told specifically that Sarai was barren (Gen 11:30)

God promised Abram that in him, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3)

- Later, God was specific that a child from Abram's own body would be his heir (Gen 15:4)
- Abram believed God, taking Him at His Word (Gen 15:6)

Sarai, still barren, decided to give her Egyptian maid, Hagar, to Abram as a wife

- Indeed, they were married
- Very soon thereafter, Hagar was pregnant with Abram's child!

Sarai was not pleased with this

- So she drove Hagar away

After this, God reappeared to Abram and promised him, "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations." (Gen 17:4-5)

- Consider those words, "Father of a multitude of nations"

Sarai was barren

- Hagar had been driven away

God then promised that Sarah would have a son

- This would be the elect heir through which Abraham's lineage would be perpetuated (Gen 21:12)

Abraham doubted, but believed

- Sarah doubted and laughed at the thought

But sure enough, just as God had promised, Abraham and Sarah were the parents of Isaac

- God's Word had been proven true

It would be through Isaac, not Ishmael, that Abraham's seed would be established

- Isaac, not Ishmael, was elected by God Himself

⁶ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Romans 9-16*, 22.

8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

Paul elaborates further on the difference between Isaac and Ishmael

- He refers to Ishmael as a child “of the flesh”
- He refers to Isaac as a child “of the promise”

With Ishmael, Abraham was shown to be impatient and doubtful of God’s promise

- Abraham gave into temptation from his wife and didn’t wait for God’s timing

Abraham took matters into his own hands

- Hence, Ishmael is a child “of the flesh”

Isaac, on the other hand, was a child “of the promise”

- He was the result of God’s own timing and oath
- This point is emphasized and repeated in verse 9

9 For this is a word of promise: “AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.”

Paul drives this point home with the reminder from Genesis 18:10 about Isaac being the son of promise

- Abraham and Sarah couldn’t take matters into his hands

They were too old!

- They were well beyond childbearing years!

But with God, all things are possible

- What God wills, God accomplishes

When it was humanly impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have a child, God stepped in and intervened

- God did the humanly impossible so that it would be obvious that something was special about Isaac
- It took Divine intervention for Isaac to be born!⁷

Paul reaches back into the OT and helps us to see that just because you are a physical descendant of Abraham does not mean that you are his spiritual descendant

- Not even his own son was exempt from this statement!

But someone could object, saying, “Ishmael wasn’t a pure Jew. His father was a Jew, but his mother was an Egyptian. Your illustration doesn’t apply to us.”⁸

To deal with the issue directly, Paul continues to trace the actual lineage of Abraham

- To Isaac’s sons, Jacob and Esau

We see that God elected Isaac, not Ishmael

- **But Paul has another example in mind**

⁷ Morris, 354.

⁸ Kreloff, 30.

II. God elected Jacob, not Esau (9:10-13)

10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac:

If the example from Isaac and Ishmael didn't convince the Jews of the reality of God's election, then the example of Jacob and Esau would

- This example is an airtight case of God's election

In the case of Isaac and Ishmael, there were some differences

- They had the same father
- But they had different mothers
- They were born several years apart

Some Jews could argue that Isaac had an unfair advantage in being the true Jew

- After all, Ishmael had an Egyptian mother
- She clearly was not a Jew

Notice that Paul deliberately stays with Abraham's literal lineage

- Abraham's elect son was Isaac
- So Paul deals with the two sons of Isaac

We are reminded that the two sons, Jacob and Esau, were twins

- So neither one had a tremendous time advantage of being older

Furthermore, we are told that they had the same father and the same mother

- So neither one had an advantage, unlike Isaac over Ishmael

So how would God choose one over the other?

- Or would He choose both?

11 for though *the twins* were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to *His* choice might stand.

The apostle tells us something that we would not know otherwise

- We are told that God elected one of Isaac's sons before he was even born

Furthermore, God elected one son before either "had...done anything good or bad"

- God didn't wait to see the actions of the two sons before He made a choice
- He made a choice before either son performed any action

This is so critical to a proper understanding of election

- God doesn't look for a reason outside of Himself to elect anyone
- God chooses out of mercy, grace, and compassion

Was Isaac more deserving than Ishmael?

- No

Was Jacob more deserving than Esau?

- No

Are we somehow more deserving than Average Joe who is an unbeliever?

- No

In understanding the doctrine of election, we do not look for a reason why God elected a particular individual

- We simply remind ourselves that God elects out of grace, not obligation

We are unlike God in this capacity

- We oftentimes decide whether we like someone based on their actions
 - o Were they nice to me (or to a friend or loved one)?
 - o What is their character?

You might say that we elect people based on their actions, after we meet them

- God elects people based on His own choice, before they are even born!

This verse cannot be used to support the false notion that God decided who to elect based on who would respond to Him in the future⁹

- This would make God's election based on the human actions of men

not because of works, but because of Him who calls.

Divine election is not based on works

- We have seen that very clearly with Jacob and Esau

Earlier, I quoted you the definition of how one of my college professors defined election, "God chooses those who choose to be chosen"

- That puts the electing power in the hands of sinful mankind

Frankly, the Bible never attributes election to a human

- Election always begins with God

Verse 11 elaborates on this point, "not because of works, but because of Him who calls"

- Election always begins with God
 - o He takes the initiative
 - o He is the One who "calls"

We have to look back just a few verses to see a reference to God's calling

- Romans 8:28-30, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

God's calling really goes all the way back in time to God's foreknowledge

- From other portions of God's Word, we know that God's foreknowledge takes place before the foundation of the world

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, 351.

God's election can never be criticized for being unfair

- If God were fair, then He would allow every sinner to die and be separated from God forever
- Because there is no one who deserves to be spared from Divine punishment

When properly understood, election is one of the most humbling doctrines in all of Scripture

- Because there is absolutely no reason why God should have chosen me

Spurgeon once commented, "I am sure it is true in my case, and true in respect most of God's people; for there is little to love in them after they are born, that if he had not loved them before then, he would have seen no reason to choose them after; but since he loved them without works, he loves them without works still; since their good works did not win his affection, bad works cannot sever that affection; since their righteousness did not bind his love to them, so their wickedness cannot snap the golden links. He loved them out of pure sovereign grace, and he will love them still."¹⁰

- Outside of Spurgeon's mastery of the English language, his words are thoroughly Biblical

It is purely our pride that allows us to think, "Oh, but God would have chosen me!"

- As Spurgeon said, if God had not set His love on us before we were born, He would have never loved us after we were born

12 it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."

God's Word came to Rebecca, saying, "The older will serve the younger"

- This is the latter part of Genesis 25:23, "And the LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.'"

The interesting part of Biblical history is that we are never told of a time when Esau served Jacob

- Does this mean that God's Word is not true?
- Does this somehow cast doubt on God's character?

It is true that God's Word doesn't tell us of Esau serving Jacob

- But it does tell us of Esau's descendants serving Jacob's descendants

I think this is a wonderful opportunity to remind all of us that oftentimes Paul will speak of nations in Romans 9-11

- Sometimes he will have individuals in mind
- But other times, he will have nations in mind

In the case of verse 12, Paul has nations in mind¹¹

- The Edomites did, in fact, serve the Israelites

13 Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

Now we come to verse 13 which has been difficult for some people to understand

- But I think we have established enough of the context to make this verse fairly straightforward

¹⁰ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons01.titlepage.html>

¹¹ Morris, 356.

The quotation given here in verse 13 is from Malachi 1:2-3, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”

What disturbs most people is not the phrase, “Jacob I loved”

- It is the phrase, “Esau I hated”

A lady questioned Spurgeon on this verse, saying, “I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.”

- Spurgeon replied, “That is not my difficulty, Madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob.”¹²

Sinners don’t like hearing about God hating anything

- We tend to think in terms of God’s love

Remember in verse 12 that the phrase, “The older will serve the younger” was part of Genesis 25:23

- The Lord told Rebecca, “Two nations are in your womb”

I have to be honest that until last week when I was studying for this passage, I had a tendency to read verse 13 in terms of individuals

- Jacob (the person) I loved, but Esau (the person) I hated

But now I read this, and I believe it is the correct interpretation, differently

- Jacob (standing as the head of the nation Israel) I have chosen, but Esau (standing as the head of the nation Edom) I have rejected

Did you hear how I changed “loved” to chosen and “hated” to rejected?

- Regarding the nation Israel, God graciously elected this nation to be His own special people
- Regarding the nation Edom, God rejected this nation

I don’t believe that “hated” implies a categorical loathing and disgusting of the nation of Edom

- God blessed Esau and his descendants

In the book of Genesis, the Word of God chronicles the descendants of Ishmael and Esau, even though they aren’t the chosen seed¹³

- Certainly, God didn’t have to do this

The statement that God “hated” Esau came nearly 1000 years after Esau actually lived

- This is further proof that God has the nation, not the one individual, in mind¹⁴

God’s love for the nation of Israel did not guarantee that every Jew would be saved

- God’s hatred for the nation of Edom did not guarantee that every Edomite would be damned

The use of “hated” simply implies that Esau was not the object of God’s electing purpose¹⁵

In Romans 9:6-13, how many OT passages have been cited?

- Four

¹² William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse*, 364.

¹³ Morris, 354.

¹⁴ MacArthur, 27.

¹⁵ Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Romans*, 105.

Three of these four verses are found in what book of the Bible?

- Genesis

Where is the other verse found?

- Malachi

What is significant about this?

- Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament
- Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament

So from beginning to end, what does the Old Testament teach?¹⁶

- It teaches the doctrine of election!

Why did God reject the descendants of Esau?

- Because He had elected the descendants of Jacob

Why did God reject Ishmael?

- Because He had elected Isaac

This isn't to say that Jacob and Isaac were somehow more worthy than Esau and Ishmael

- God's election isn't based on merit
- It is based on grace

Listen to the words of a believing Jew on the subject of election, [“To deny the doctrine of election would be to deny the history of Israel”](#)¹⁷

A Jew might try to redefine election, but every Jew believes in election

- After all, Israel was the elect nation
- There was no avoiding this issue!

Listen to what God said of the nation of Israel, [“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”](#) (Deut 7:7-8)

But what about us as Gentiles?

- How does the doctrine of election affect us?

We are not part of the elect nation of Israel

- But in order to go to heaven, we must still be chosen by God

Before the foundation of the world, God knew those who would be His

- He had already written their names in the Lamb's book of life (Rev 13:8; 17:8)

Augustine once said, [“God does not choose us because we believe, but that we may believe”](#)¹⁸

Do you realize that there is nothing you can do to make God choose you?

- By the time you were born, you were either chosen or you weren't

¹⁶ Newell, 364.

¹⁷ Kreloff, 32.

¹⁸ Moo, 588.

None of us deserves to be saved

- We all deserve to be punished for our sins
- We all deserve to be separated from God in hell forever

But God is gracious on some

- He elects His people out from the mass of humanity
- He spares them from His own wrath
- All for His own glory

The doctrine of election, however, should never lead to a fatalistic view of life that says, "If God has already chosen His elect, then there is no need for me

- To pray
- To evangelize
- To work"

On the contrary, God has commanded us to pray, to witness, and to work

- God's sovereignty does not negate our responsibilities

Those who God elects, He draws to Himself in salvation

- He needs no one tell Him how to do this

As God, He is sovereign in election

- And He can do as He wills