

## “God’s Roller Coaster Ride” (Romans 9:1–13)

[Show the following roller coaster video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEZIG-KEONA>]<sup>1</sup> Do you want to throw up right now? My wife nearly did when she was previewing this video clip last night. You’re probably wondering why I showed you a video clip of a roller coaster ride. I can think of nothing better to kick off Romans 9–11 than a terrifying and exhilarating roller coaster ride. The reason is simple: For many people these chapters contain the most terrifying and exhilarating words in the New Testament.

In 8:28–39, Paul established that: (1) God has a purpose for believers; (2) nothing can prevent that purpose from being fulfilled; and (3) no one can separate God’s people from His love. But a question remains: What about God’s chosen people—the Jews? God loved them and had a purpose for them too. Yet, Israel appears to be excluded from God’s program. Therefore, the inescapable question is: Since so many Jews appear to have become separated from the love of God, haven’t His promises and eternal purposes failed? If so, then what basis do you and I have for believing that God’s promises to us will be fulfilled? Our Christian hope is at stake! Paul addresses this concern.<sup>2</sup> In Rom 9–11, he explains Israel’s spiritual condition: past (9), present (10), and future (11).<sup>3</sup> In our first installment, 9:1–13, we learn that *God’s promises and plans never fail*. Paul shares two essential truths about God.

**1. God is committed to His people (9:1–5).**<sup>4</sup> This opening paragraph reveals both God and Paul’s burden and passion for Israel’s salvation. We will also see the necessary balance between human responsibility (9:1–3) and divine sovereignty (9:4–5).<sup>5</sup> In 9:1–2 Paul begins by expressing his sorrow. The intensity is built up by three doublings: **“I am telling the truth<sup>6</sup> in Christ,<sup>7</sup> I am not lying, my conscience<sup>8</sup> testifies<sup>9</sup> with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow<sup>10</sup> and unceasing grief<sup>11</sup> in my heart.”** Isn’t it interesting that Paul appeals to his truthfulness, to his conscience, and to the Holy Spirit? Why is Paul so concerned that his recipients know that he isn’t lying?<sup>12</sup> Because they would undoubtedly find it remarkable that he could love the Jews when they hated him so much. Everywhere Paul went they treated him as an enemy and a traitor. They harassed him, they threatened him, and they stirred up mobs against him. In Acts 23:12–13, 40, Jewish zealots bound themselves with an oath that they would not eat or drink until they had killed him. In 2 Cor 11, Paul states that on five different occasions he received from the Jews thirty–nine lashes, adding that he was in constant danger from his own countrymen. Yet nowhere in his writings is there ever found even the hint of personal retaliation or bitterness against the Jews. On the contrary, Paul’s spirit was the same as that of Christ, who wept over the city of Jerusalem even though He knew He was about to be crucified by its leaders (see Matt 23:37).

Years ago some servants of the Salvation Army went into an extremely tough American city and after working there for several years, they said, “It just won’t work. We’ve tried everything. The gospel is just not being received here.” They telegraphed that to General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, and he telegraphed back a two word message: “Try tears.” Do you have a family member, a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, or a classmate who doesn’t know Jesus Christ and you think you have tried everything? Well, have you tried tears? Have you asked God to break your heart for the lost?

Paul continues in 9:3 by claiming, **“For I could wish [pray]<sup>13</sup> that I myself<sup>14</sup> were accursed, separated from Christ<sup>15</sup> for the sake<sup>16</sup> of my brethren,<sup>17</sup> my kinsmen according to the flesh.”** Paul actually wishes he *could*<sup>18</sup> forfeit his own salvation if it would lead to the salvation of his fellow Jews.<sup>19</sup> He knows he cannot actually be separated from Christ—he just said so in 8:31–39.<sup>20</sup> Yet his feelings are, nevertheless, genuine. Paul loves his people enough to go to hell for them, if that were possible.<sup>21</sup> It’s difficult to fully appreciate his emotions, for he is exhibiting supernatural love. Nonetheless, we must seek to share Paul’s heartbeat. Do we love the lost like Paul did? Do we share his burden for souls? Would we be willing to go to hell if someone else would be saved? How far are we willing to go to see people believe in Christ? What sacrifices are we willing to make? If there’s a “secret” to evangelism, it is cultivating a heart for lost people. Do we have a burden that others will not spend eternity in hell?

In the film, *The Guardian*, the viewer is taken into the world of United States Coast Guard rescue swimmers. Eighteen weeks of intense training prepares these courageous men and women for the task of jumping from helicopters to rescue those in danger at sea. The challenges they face include hypothermia and death by drowning. Why would people risk so much for strangers? The answer is found in the rescue swimmer's motto, "So Others May Live."<sup>22</sup> May you and I share this very same mission. I challenge you to share Christ with someone this week. Don't be bashful. Don't be presumptuous and assume that people aren't interested. God may use you to lead someone to faith in Christ. Today, pray that God gives you an unquenchable burden and zeal for the lost.

In 9:4–5, Paul emphasizes divine sovereignty by listing the remarkable privileges that God has given Israel. Verse 4 is arranged in two sets of three that are grammatically and conceptually parallel:<sup>23</sup>

- **The adoption as sons/the giving of the Law:** The "adoption as sons"<sup>24</sup> refers to a national adoption that has to do with a unique action on God's part to put His special mark of ownership upon one race of people.<sup>25</sup> God "adopted" Israel and gave them instructions on how to be different than their surrounding neighbors. It was an extraordinary privilege for the Jews to be God's people and have received the very words of God.<sup>26</sup>
- **The glory/the temple service:** The "glory" likely refers to the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led Israel through the wilderness during the Exodus.<sup>27</sup> Later, when the tabernacle and the Temple were built, the Levites were given the amazing privilege of temple<sup>28</sup> service.<sup>29</sup> Though anyone could come to worship in the Temple, only Levites (i.e., Jews) could serve the Lord there. No other nation ever received such a remarkable sign of God's presence.
- **The covenants/the promises:** "The covenants" refer to the special agreements that God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.<sup>30</sup> These covenants included the "promises" that God made to Israel regarding their place in His plan and His unconditional love for them despite their failures. No other nation has been so privileged.

Two other privileges are mentioned in 9:5. "**The fathers**" is a reference to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. No other nation has had such great leaders as Israel. "**The Christ**" was, of course, the greatest privilege ever granted to Israel. But this privilege is stated differently. The previous items are mentioned as possessions of Israel. The Messiah, on the other hand, is simply "**from**" Israel.<sup>31</sup> Notice, however, that Paul not only identifies Christ as of the Jewish race, but also stresses His deity. Jesus is "**God over all**" and is "**forever praised.**" Because of His heavenly origin and mission, He cannot be claimed exclusively by any segment of the human race.<sup>32</sup> He is the greatest gift known to humankind.

Despite the privileges God freely gave to Israel, the bulk of the nation continues to reject Jesus as their Messiah. Like Israel, many people in our lives have been blessed with great privileges. Yet, many still reject Christ. We must recognize that privileges such as information, opportunity, and blessing don't guarantee salvation.<sup>33</sup> However, privileges *do* guarantee accountability. Jesus said, "To whom much is given much is required" (Luke 12:48 paraphrase). Those who have heard of Christ are responsible to believe. If you are reading this message you likely have exceptional privileges, yet you still must believe in Christ as your Savior. Today, is there anything keeping you from trusting in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? If not, I urge you to place your faith in Him alone right now. Don't wait another minute. I'm not trying to scare you or manipulate you, but I must remind you that you are not guaranteed tomorrow. So settle the issue today once and for all. You will then come to realize that *God's promises and plans never fail.*

[Not only is God committed to His people, we will now see that . . .]

**2. God is committed to His sovereign choice (9:6–13).**<sup>34</sup> We have now come to the top of the roller coaster. We are about to take a hair-raising plunge that may leave you breathless. So, hang on and let's see if we can survive the ride. First, let's quickly define our terms. If you draw a line right in the middle of the word "sovereign," it looks like this: "sov | reign." Only royalty reigns and that word "sov | reign" means "reigns alone." Only God has ultimate and absolute authority. This section begins, perhaps, the key passage in the Bible on the subject of predestination and election. Yet, these doctrines create a lot of spiritual heartburn and indigestion for many Christians, so I'm going to substitute a simple English word that means the same thing but doesn't carry nearly so much baggage. It's the word "choose" or "choice." The result is the same—God chooses people *before* they choose Him.<sup>35</sup>

Paul begins 9:6a with his thesis statement for the whole of Rom 9–11: **"But it is not as though the word of God has failed."**<sup>36</sup> Paul begins his response to the question that was raised in 9:1–5: If Israel is God's covenant people, to whom so many glorious privileges have been given (9:4–5), why are so few Israelites saved? Has God failed Israel? Paul responds with conviction and certainty, "But it is not as though the word of God has failed."<sup>37</sup> This is one of the greatest principles in the entire Bible. Things are not always as they appear to be. When it looks like God's Word has failed us, we should repeat this verse with personal application. "Even though this situation has happened, it's not as though God's Word has failed me."<sup>38</sup> Always remember: *God's promises and plans never fail.*

In 9:6b, Paul gives the reason "for" his thesis. He points out that God's promises to the Jews have not failed,<sup>39</sup> because God never promised to save every Jew.<sup>40</sup> He puts it like this: **"For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel."**<sup>41</sup> Paul denies that God ever intended to save all ethnic Israelites. His purpose has always been to save a remnant within Israel. Paul informs us that salvation isn't a matter of physical descent.<sup>42</sup> When he says, "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel," he means that being an Israelite does not automatically make one a child of God. Simply put: "Salvation is not a Jewish birthright."<sup>43</sup> If we went downtown and observed a parade passing by with banners that read, "American Communists for the Downfall of America," we might look at each other and say, "They're not all Americans who are Americans." What we would mean is that though these people may have been born in America, they are not committed to the principles upon which our government is based; they are outside of what America really stands for. Hence, whether we're talking about Israel, America, or any other people, God is more about "grace, rather than race."

In 9:7–13, Paul now uses two illustrations to support his thesis from 9:6.<sup>44</sup> In the first illustration, Paul shows that salvation has never been based on heritage, lineage, or pedigree. In 9:7–9 he writes: **". . . nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: 'THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.' That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God,<sup>45</sup> but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is the word of promise: 'AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.'**" Abraham, the father of our faith, had two sons—Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was a child of the flesh in the sense that he was the product of Sarah's carnal effort to help God out. See, God had made a promise that Sarah would have a son. But it didn't happen within Sarah's allotted timetable, so she gave her handmaid to her husband and the handmaid bore a son. Thirteen years later Sarah herself had a son, a son of Promise, a supernatural son, and God said in 9:7, "Through Isaac your descendants will be named." God made the choice.<sup>46</sup> To demonstrate that there is a difference between ethnic and spiritual Israel, Paul reminds us that God sovereignly selected Isaac over Ishmael. Though Ishmael was also Abraham's son, Isaac inherited the promise by grace. It was Isaac, not Ishmael, who was a "child of promise." The ignoring of Ishmael and the calling of Isaac illustrates the fact that some have been called to salvation and others have been left as they are. The modern equivalent of this truth might be, "It is not the children of Christian parents who are Christians; it is those who have personally embraced Christ as Savior who are Christians."<sup>47</sup> God is free to choose however and however He likes—this is His prerogative. Whether I like how He operates or not, He's God and I am not. I must allow God to be God.

You may be able to stomach this first illustration, for Isaac was the only legitimate son of Abraham and Sarah.<sup>48</sup> But Paul now provides a second illustration of God's divine choosing that may make your stomach turn. In 9:10–13 Paul shows that salvation has never been based on personal character or works. The apostle writes: **“And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man,<sup>49</sup> our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad,<sup>50</sup> so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.’ Just as it is written, ‘JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.’”** Now here we have two twin sons, so both have the same mother and same father. Yet, God also made a choice between them, namely that “the older will serve the younger.” This choice was contrary to the culture of that day, which required that the older son be given priority. In fact, these verses seem contrary to our entire experience and western thought process so we must delve further into some specifics:

- ***God's saving choice includes individuals (9:6–13).***<sup>51</sup> Some try to argue that Paul is referring only to nations in these texts and not individuals. They support their view by showing that two of the Old Testament texts that Paul cites (Gen 25:23; Mal 1:1–5) have to do with the privileges and blessings of the line of Jacob over that of Esau. It is agreed that these two Old Testament texts do not immediately pertain to salvation. But the real question is: “How does Paul use these two Old Testament quotations to respond to the question that he raised?” His initial question in 9:6a was: Why are so few Jews saved? If Paul is referring to nations, then he is saying that the reason not all the nation of Israel is saved is that God has chosen the nation Israel. His answer is unintelligible! An appeal to the collective election of Israel (i.e., Jacob and his seed) doesn't resolve the problem of unbelieving, lost Jews. In fact, it only fuels the question! We must also bear in mind that specific people are mentioned: Isaac, Jacob, and Esau. Clearly, the principle of divine election involved individuals *before* it involved nations (9:13).<sup>52</sup>

Imagine that I was a multi-millionaire who was able to purchase a major league baseball team. However, I had to choose between my two favorite teams: the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Seattle Mariners. Even though I would be selecting a team, I would base my decision upon the individuals on the team.<sup>53</sup> So, it truly is a matter of individual election, not corporate or national election. We should also note that the language Paul uses throughout this paragraph generally refers to the issue of eternal salvation.<sup>54</sup> Hence, Paul's use of these verses pertains to God's sovereign election of individuals.

- ***God's saving choice was predetermined before birth and before behavior (9:11, 13).*** Paul tells us that God differentiated between Jacob and Esau before they were born. Their destiny was predetermined. Moreover, He differentiated between them before they did anything good or evil. Hence, their behavior had nothing to do with God's choice. Paul clearly denies the notion of God looking ahead to see faith. God's choice was not contingent upon anything about them! God doesn't wait to see who will believe, or choose us because He knows we will believe.<sup>55</sup> As Augustine said, “God does not choose us because we believe, but in order that we may believe.”<sup>56</sup> As for the seemingly problematic 9:13: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,” Paul is using “hate” (*miseo*) as an idiom where the opposite is used to express a lesser degree.<sup>57</sup> He's simply saying that God loved Esau less than He loved Jacob. More precisely, Esau was “not chosen” as the object of God's electing purpose.<sup>58</sup> Now if this troubles you, please reevaluate your thought process. We really ought to be appalled that God would love Jacob. Why in the world would God choose a scheming, conniving, lying cheat like Jacob to love? Moreover, we ought to ask: Why did God choose me and love me? Why did He send His Son to die for me while I was a sinner and His enemy (5:8)? There is only one correct answer: God was immeasurably gracious and chose me and loved me from eternity past. And, His grace is all in spite of me.

- ***God's saving choice was based upon His own good pleasure (9:11).*** While denying that the basis of God's predetermination is anything in people, Paul affirms what that basis is—His sovereign purpose and pleasure. In other words, the reason why God saves one and not the other is grounded in His own will. He does what He does for His own good pleasure! Now this may make you uncomfortable. We must be very careful that we aren't deceived into thinking that God chose each one of us for salvation because of our personal attributes or works.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps you've always assumed that your salvation has been the result of your quest for God and your faith. I can assure you that before you were seeking to fill the God-shaped vacuum inside of you, God was drawing you to Himself. Before you exercised faith, God had chosen you and Jesus was praying for you to come to faith. It is important to acknowledge God's ultimate role in salvation. You and I are not nearly as important as we think. Stick your finger in a glass of water. See the impression you leave. You're not that important. God is the One who is important. In the end, this passage teaches us one very important truth: God is completely sovereign. This ought to lead us to worship our great God. *God's promises and plans never fail.*

My favorite roller coaster episode belongs to my wife. When Lori was five years old, her parents took her to Disneyland. They decided to stand in a two-hour line for a new ride called "Space Mountain." They weren't really sure what the ride was all about but since it was so popular, they decided to beat the heat and endure. As they approached the height requirement sign, Lori just passed by a hair. Also, at this point they began to realize that this ride was some form of a roller coaster. This didn't set well with Lori's parents. They were concerned about taking Lori on this ride. Immediately, Lori began stroking her Mom's arm, consoling her by saying, "Mommy, don't worry, I'll take care of you." Finally, they made it to the top of Space Mountain. Lori's dad and sister sat in the front car and Lori and her mom sat behind them. As the ride began, there was a slow pull to the top, and then as many of you know, the violent dips and curves followed—all while in a dark outer space environment. Well, Lori began screaming, "Jesus save me! Jesus save me! Jesus save me!" She then ducked under the lock bar and was on the verge of being thrown out of the car. Lori's dad was leaning back and trying to keep Lori in the car. It was a frightening experience. When Lori got off the ride and out of the car, she spooked a lot of tourists as she began exclaiming, "Thank you for saving me, Jesus. Thank you for saving me, Jesus."

Lori's Space Mountain experience ought to parallel our experience as we ride the roller coaster of Romans 9. When we don't understand the depths of God's truth, we ought to be able to cry out, "Jesus save me!" Save me from a small mind. Save me from putting you in a box. Save me from trying to completely understand that which can't be understood. When we conclude our study, we ought to exclaim, "Thank you Jesus for saving me. I'm amazed that you did it. I don't deserve it. But thank you."

### **Scripture References**

Romans 9:1–13

Romans 8:28–39

Genesis 12:1–3

Genesis 25:19–34

Amos 3:2

Deuteronomy 29:29

Matthew 20:1–16

### **Study Questions**

1. Like Paul, have I experienced “great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart” over those who do not know Christ (Romans 9:2)? To what extent, have I been willing to remedy their plight (9:3)? Am I concerned enough to pray? Do I care enough to give? Will I share the good news of Christ? How far am I willing to go?
2. Do I have a heart for Israel (Romans 9:1–3)? Why or why not? How can I cultivate a greater burden for God’s chosen people? Which of Israel’s privileges are especially meaningful to me (9:4–5)? How have I been given similar privileges? Have these good gifts caused me to become more or less responsive to God?
3. How has God proven that He is true to His Word in my life (Romans 9:6)? How has He fulfilled various promises? Are there any promises that seem to be unfulfilled? If so, is there a condition to these promises? Have I fulfilled the condition? Am I taking time to read God’s Word to learn more about these promises and privileges?
4. How have I been guilty of misunderstanding God’s thoughts and His ways (Romans 9:7–13; cf. Isaiah 55:8–9)? How does God’s sovereign choice of individuals often surprise me? Have I been guilty of trying to earn God’s faithfulness? How can I rely upon Christ’s performance instead of my own?
5. Do I have any specific objections to God’s election of individuals (Romans 9:11)? What bothers me the most about this doctrine? How does it make me feel about myself and God? Are these feelings in line with Scripture? Why or why not? How can I seek to submit myself more fully to potentially difficult biblical passages?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This video is entitled, “Six Flags Colossus front view”: Accessed 15 May 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Some commentators have noted that there is, grammatically speaking, a relative lack of clear connection between the end of Rom 8:38–39 and 9:1 (i.e., there is no conjunction or inferential particle in 9:1). Though there is no clear grammatical connection between these chapters, they are nevertheless *conceptually connected*. E.g., “salvation” (1:16) and “save” are prominent. “Righteousness” (1:17) is found nine times; “believe” (1:16), eight times; and “faith,” six times.

<sup>3</sup> Paul uses twenty–five OT quotes in Rom 9–11. Moo points out that a third of all Paul’s OT quotations in his writings occur in these chapters, undoubtedly to show that his gospel is in keeping with God’s Word and promises in the OT. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 550.

<sup>4</sup> Rom 9–11 begins with great sorrow (9:1–3) and it ends with great praise (11:33–36).

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 278.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 11:31; Gal 1:20; 1 Tim 2:7.

<sup>7</sup> This is the only use of the phrase “in Christ” (*en Christo*) in Rom 9–11. It is used twelve others times in the letter (3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:1, 2, 39; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7, 9, 10).

<sup>8</sup> “Conscience” (*suneidesis*) in Paul’s letters is an innate faculty that monitors a person’s conformity to a moral standard (see Rom 2:15).

<sup>9</sup> The verb *summartureo* (“testifies”) is only used two other places in the NT (Rom 2:15; 8:16).

<sup>10</sup> A form of *lupe* (“sorrow”) is used by Paul in 2 Cor 2:1, 3, 7; 7:10; 9:7; Phil 2:27.

<sup>11</sup> *Odune* (“grief”) only appears in 1 Tim 6:10.

<sup>12</sup> The noun *aletheia* (“truth”) is in the emphatic first slot.

<sup>13</sup> BDAG s.v. *euchomai* 2. The word can also be translated “pray” (BDAG s.v. 1). This is the meaning in the rest of Paul’s uses.

<sup>14</sup> Paul uses the personal pronoun *ego* (“I”) to intensify his testimony.

<sup>15</sup> The inclusion of the phrase “from Christ” (*apo tou Christou*) after “accursed” (*anathema*) suggests that eternal condemnation is in view.

<sup>16</sup> Paul uses the preposition *huper* (“for the sake of”) that he used in a substitutionary sense in Rom 8:31, 32, and 34.

<sup>17</sup> The Greek term *adelphos* should be translated either “brothers and sisters” or “people” (NET). See BDAG s.v. *adelphos* 2 b.

<sup>18</sup> Wallace puts the imperfect *heuchomen* (“I could wish”) in Rom 9:3 under the category of “conative (voluntative, tendential) imperfect,” that is, something that was desired (voluntative), attempted (conative), or at the point of almost happening (tendential). Specifically on 9:3 he writes: “Here the tendential or ‘desiderative’ imperfect is used. Paul is not saying, ‘For I was wishing’ (progressive) or ‘For I was attempting to wish’ (true conative).” Then, in a footnote, he says: “The desiderative imperfect is used ‘to contemplate the desire, but fail to bring oneself actually to the point of wishing’ (Fanning, Verbal Aspect, 251).” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 552.

<sup>19</sup> BDAG s.v. *apo* 1 e; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 347; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 557; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 480; Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*. The IVP NT Commentary series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 237; René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Press, 2005), 190. Ash writes, “To be cut off from Christ is to be like an astronaut whose line to the spacecraft has been cut, drifting off into space, still with a semblance of life but doomed.” Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 2* (London: Proclamation of Trust, 2009), 59.

<sup>20</sup> The force of Paul’s prayer is explained by John Piper: “Our artificial chapter and verse divisions obscure the fact that, when Romans was read in the churches, 9:3 would have been heard only seconds after 8:35 which asks, ‘Who will separate us **from the love of Christ?**’ Therefore, Paul’s statement in 9:3 must be taken to mean that he ‘could wish’ to experience what 8:35–39 said the Christian never would experience: to be separated from the love of God in Christ and left under his eternal (2 Thess. 1:9) wrath (Rom. 5:9).” John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Paul echoes Moses who asked that God would blot his name out of “the book” if he would not forgive the people of Israel (Exod 32:30–35). Paul is well aware of the precedent already established, in which Moses’ request was not granted, yet he is ready, were it possible, to sacrifice his own salvation for the sake of his ‘brothers,’ who have not responded to the gospel.

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<sup>22</sup> Bill Crowder, “So Others May Live,” *Daily Bread* 3/18/2008.

<sup>23</sup> Piper, *The Justification of God*, 21; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 561–62; Schreiner, *Romans*, 482.

<sup>24</sup> This is the only place in either Testament where “the adoption of sons” is used of Jews. Elsewhere this expression refers to the spiritual adoption, which occurs the moment one believes (e.g. Rom 8:15, 23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).

<sup>25</sup> See Exod 4:22; Ezek 16:1–14; Hosea 11:1; and Amos 3:2. As Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 562 says, “The term is Paul’s way of summing up the OT teaching about Israel as ‘God’s son.’”

<sup>26</sup> See Deut 4:5–8; Neh 9:13–14; Ps 147:19–20.

<sup>27</sup> See Exod 16:10; 33:22; 40:34; 1 Sam 4:21–22; 1 Kings 8:10–11.

<sup>28</sup> The word “temple” does not appear in the Greek. Paul may have been referring to either the temple or the tabernacle.

<sup>29</sup> The word translated “service” (*latreia*) can also be translated “worship” (ESV; cf. Rom 12:1).

<sup>30</sup> Abrahamic (Gen 12:1–3), Mosaic (Exod 19:3–40:38, Palestinian (Deut 30), Davidic (2 Sam 7:5–17), and New (Jer 31:31–34).

<sup>31</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 565 writes, “The shift is significant, suggesting, as do vv. 2-3, that the Israelites, for all the privileges they enjoy, have not, as a group, come into genuine relationship with God’s Messiah and the salvation that he has brought.” The Messiah comes from Israel only in respect to that relationship which is strictly human (the “flesh”).

<sup>32</sup> See also Gen 22:18; Isa 9:6–7; Gal 4:4.

<sup>33</sup> See also Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 155.

<sup>34</sup> Storms writes, “Virtually all misunderstandings of verses 6-13 arise from a failure to see that these verses were written to solve a problem posed by verses 1-5. The question or problem Paul is faced with is this: If Israel is God’s covenant people, to whom so many glorious privileges have been given (vv. 4-5), why are so few Israelites saved? Why are so many of them ‘accursed, separated from Christ?’ Has God’s word failed? Has God’s covenant promise and eternal purpose come to nothing? Has the rejection of Jesus Christ by the majority of Israelites thwarted God’s purpose? Have the trustworthiness and finality of God’s word been undermined by the unbelief of so many Jews? His response to the question is a resounding no!” Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 116. In addition to this, there are numerous other reasons gleaned from Rom 9 itself that lead me to believe Paul is talking about individual, not national, election. They have been summarized in Thomas Schreiner, “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election Unto Salvation? Some Exegetical And Theological Reflections” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36.1 (March 1993): 25–40. Osborne, *Romans* 242 however, maintains that both individual (Isaac and Jacob) and corporate (Jacob symbolizes Israel and Esau Edom) election come into play because “God calls individuals to be part of his church.” Yet, his argument is unconvincing.

<sup>35</sup> Eaton calls election “a family secret, a profoundly baffling matter, something the unsaved will never understand. There are questions which we might ask about predestination to which there is no known answer.” Eaton, *Romans: A Practical Commentary*, forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 573; Schreiner, *Romans*, 471.

<sup>37</sup> The word “failed” (*ekpipto*) here was a sailing term that meant drifting off course and running aground (Louv and Nida 54.19). This term was used in the LXX several times for something (Isa 6:13) or someone (Isa 14:12) falling.

<sup>38</sup> John Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute.

<sup>39</sup> God’s promises are sure (e.g., Num 23:19; Josh 21:45; 23:14; 2 Kgs 10:10; Isa 40:8; 55:11; 59:21).

<sup>40</sup> Rom 9:6a starts a series of supposed objections (cf. 9:14, 19, 30; 11:1).

<sup>41</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 472 puts it this way: “What troubles Paul is that many of his fellow Jews are separated from Christ (ἀνάθεμα ... ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *anathema ... apo tou Christou*, 9:3), not enjoying the promises of God’s saving righteousness that were pledged to them. The thesis of all of Rom. 9–11 then follows in 9:6a. ‘It is not as though the word of God has fallen.’ The central issue in the chapters is not predestination, nor is it even the salvation of Israel. At the forefront of Paul’s thinking is God’s faithfulness to his promises. Even though many Jews disbelieved in Christ, God’s word of promise to them was not nullified or canceled.”

<sup>42</sup> The first generation of “Israel” as a nation was at the time of the Exodus (see Exod 4; 14–15; cf. Ps 106). At the time of the Exodus they became a nation of believers. They all had put their trust in the promise of God. They had trusted in the blood of the Passover lamb and were “saved” in a NT sense. Consequently, the entire nation gets mentioned in Heb 11:29 as amongst the heroes of faith. However, subsequent generations do not fare so well. See also Eaton, *Romans*, 157.

<sup>43</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 575.

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<sup>44</sup> It is important to bear in mind that Rom 9:7–13 are just illustrations. It is quite likely that both Ishmael and Esau were indeed saved. (Luther held that both were believers.) But both men illustrate the way in which God calls someone into being for his own purpose.

<sup>45</sup> The phrase “children of God” in Paul always refers to people who belong to God and are thus partakers of salvation (see Rom 8:16, 17, 21; Eph 5:1; Phil 2:5).

<sup>46</sup> Eaton, *Romans*, 159 writes: “The calling into being of Isaac illustrates the calling into being of saved people as seed for Abraham. It is only an illustration. It is definitely salvation that Paul is dealing with in Romans 9. The starting point of the discussion is: why did not many Jews receive salvation at the time of the coming of Jesus? Why have gentiles received salvation in large numbers? Phrases like ‘not by works’ (9:12) are the very phrases Paul has used earlier with regard to salvation (3:28; 4:3–6). Being ‘prepared for glory’ refers to final salvation. Romans 9–11 are about how one gets to saving righteousness (9:30) and why Israel never obtained justification. Salvation comes by being ‘chosen by grace’ (11:5).” See also Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 579; Schreiner, *Romans*, 499.

<sup>47</sup> Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 281.

<sup>48</sup> See Gen 25:19–26.

<sup>49</sup> Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 192 explains: “To further validate God’s sovereign choice apart from man’s actions, Paul adds another illustration from Isaac’s sons, since God’s covenant was not only established with *Isaac*, but also *with his descendants after him* (Gen 17:19). Thus by stating that Rebecca also had conceived, Paul may be thinking of her barrenness since she also *conceived* supernaturally (Gen 25:21). In case someone might object that God’s sovereign choice to bless Isaac is not unusual since he was Abraham’s firstborn from Sarah, the example of Jacob and Esau’s birth should dispel that argument since both children came from the same mother and father.”

<sup>50</sup> Osborne, *Romans*, 245, an Arminian scholar, acknowledges, “This [Rom 9:11–12] is ‘before the creation of the world’ language (compare Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20) and refers to God’s predetermined will.”

<sup>51</sup> Hughes writes, “We should also note that the doctrine of election is nothing new. It was the view of Tyndale and Wycliffe, of the hymn-writers Isaac Watts and John Newton, of the evangelist George Whitefield, of the revivalist-theologian Jonathan Edwards, of the founder of modern missions William Carey, of the Reformers Melancthon, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Hus, Knox, and of a host of Puritans and great preachers such as C. H. Spurgeon and Alexander Whyte. It is a basic element of Christian theology.” R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), Electronic ed.

<sup>52</sup> Eaton, *Romans*, 160 rightly states, “The predestination mentioned here is **unconditional**. It is not predestination because of foreseen faith. It is also **individual** predestination and it is predestination to **salvation**. It is all a great mystery. We must be ready to refuse to be drawn into answering unanswerable questions.”

<sup>53</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds. *Still Sovereign* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 102.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. “God’s purpose,” “His choice,” “works,” “calls” (Rom 9:11).

<sup>55</sup> Some have acknowledged that whereas “works” are excluded as the basis for election “faith” is not. Couldn’t God have chosen Jacob based on his foreknowledge of Jacob’s faith and rejected Esau based on the absence of faith. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 583 correctly remarks: “If Paul had assumed that faith was the basis for God’s election, he would have pointed this out when he raised the question in v. 14 about the fairness of God’s election. All he would have needed to say at that point was ‘of course God is not unjust in choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau, for his choosing took into account the faith of one and the unbelief of the other.’ Paul’s silence on this point is telling.” On the other hand, the Bible doesn’t *explicitly* state that God does not choose in spite of faith or without faith (cf. 2 Thess 2:13). It would seem that God elects, and somehow, He incorporates faith into the whole thing. Since God’s complete control over His creation is based on His omniscience (all knowledge) and omnipotence (all power), He has knowledge of all things actual and possible. Therefore, His eternal plan is not based on blind choice. Instead, God has wisely chosen a plan in which all details will finally work together to bring about the greatest good—the glorification of God.

<sup>56</sup> Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 2*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Gen 29:30 says Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah,” but the next verse literally reads that Leah was “hated” (translated “unloved”). In the Bible the word “hate” sometimes refers to a passive withholding of special affection. In Luke 14:26 Jesus says: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” Christ isn’t really asking us to hate our families but to love *Him* more than we love *them*, to withhold affection from *them* which rightly belongs to *Him*. I don’t believe God hated Esau in the normal sense of that term; He did, however, love Jacob more. It’s not entirely unlike your love for your child, as opposed to your attitude toward your neighbor’s child. You don’t hate your neighbor’s kid, but your love for your own child is so much greater that it may seem that you are apathetic toward your neighbor’s child.

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<sup>58</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 587 suggests: “It might best be translated ‘reject’. ‘Love’ and ‘hate’ are not here, then, emotions that God feels but actions that he carries out.” Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 193 writes, “Paul switches now from individual to national election by quoting Malachi 1:2–3: ‘*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.*’ The term *hated* here is an idiom understood as loving less (Gen 29:30–31; Matt 6:24; Luke 14:26; John 12:25). The two concepts of *love* and *hate* here are not to be viewed as feelings but a decision God took to bestow His mercy on Jacob and not Esau’s descendants (Moo, *Romans*, 587).”

<sup>59</sup> Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 292.