

Romans 9... 10... 11

Paul is explaining to the Jews at Rome how it is God can temporarily set aside the nation of Israel and still keep His Word to them.

Through a series of illustrations from their Scriptures, what is to us the Old Testament, Paul establishes that God is being both faithful and consistent in His dealings with the Jews.

Last time we were together we saw how the two sons of Abraham illustrated two kinds of birth. Ishmael was born before Isaac. But he was not the son God had promised Abraham and Sarah. He was a natural born son by their own fleshly schemes to produce the heir. God intended Isaac to come along after Abraham and Sarah were physically incapable of producing a son. He would be, in a sense, supernaturally born to them.

Paul showed the Jews how it illustrated what was happening to them in the first century. Natural birth was not enough to save you. Whether you were a Jew or a Gentile you required a supernatural birth. You must be born again.

Paul next looks at Isaac and Rebecca and their twin boys, Esau and Jacob. He goes from discussing *birth* to discussing *birthright*.

Romans 9:10 And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac

Romans 9:11 (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),

Romans 9:12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger."

Romans 9:13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Esau was Isaac and Rebecca's firstborn son and, by privilege, should have inherited the birthright. Instead Jacob received the birthright. The second born son ended up with the privileges that belonged to the firstborn.

Now, before you get lost in the secondary theological ramifications of these verses, don't overlook Paul's primary meaning. Esau and

Jacob and their birthright are used here to illustrate an important point.

- Esau had the privileges of birth, but he later despised them.
- Jacob did not have the privileges of birth, but he later desired them.

Esau represents the nation of Israel, and Jacob represents the Gentiles! The nation of Israel had the privileges by birth, but later despised them by rejecting Jesus. The Gentiles never had the privileges by birth but later desired them and were being saved by the preaching of the Gospel.

Israel was God's firstborn, but is now second in prominence to the Gentiles. Thus the Old Testament is consistent with God's present dealings with the nation of Israel.

What I've just told you is the context of these verses. It is why Paul wrote them. He did not write them to develop or to defend a theology about salvation that would teach God predestines anyone to Heaven while simultaneously predestining others to Hell.

What are we therefore to make of verses eleven and thirteen?

Verse eleven reads, "(for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls)."

I'd like to quote Dr. Harry (H.A.) Ironside:

What a tremendous amount of needless controversy has raged about these verses! Yet how plain and simple they are, viewed in the light of God's [dealings with Israel as a nation]. There is no question here of predestination to heaven or reprobation to hell...we are not told here, nor anywhere else, that before children are born it is God's purpose to send one to heaven and another to hell...The passage has entirely to do with privilege here on earth. It was the purpose of God that Jacob should be the father of the nation of Israel, and that through him...our Lord Jesus Christ...should come into the world. He had also

predetermined that Esau should be a man of the wilderness - the father of a nation of nomads, as the Edomites have ever been."¹

Let me put it another way. God's elect are predestined. One of the things this means is that God has already predetermined a path for the lives of His children while they are on the earth. Here in verse eleven Paul speaks of "the purpose of God according to election." In other words, God had already determined or predestined the *earthly* path of these two boys in Rebecca's womb. Their earthly predestination is in view, *not* their eternal destination.

This, I believe, is the simplest and most accurate way of understanding this verse.

But doesn't verse thirteen clearly say, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated"?

It certainly does - but you need to go back to *where* and *why* it says that! It is not a quote from the first book of the Bible. It is a quote from the last book of the Old Testament, from Malachi. It was not said before the children were born and it was not said of Esau as a person but of his descendants, the Edomites, as a nation.

In Malachi God was pleading with the Jews, the descendants of Jacob, to return to Him in love. They say to God, "In what way have you loved us?" God tells them to consider that He has blessed them in ways He has not blessed other nations - like for example their own cousins, the Edomites. Israel received privileges while He withheld them from others.

Just in the same way, first century Jews - perhaps even the believing Jews at Rome - could look at God's present dealings with Israel and say, "In what way have you loved us?"

¹Ironside, *Romans*, pps.116-117.

God tells them, through this example of Jacob and Esau, to consider that He has indeed blessed them with many privileges - "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises..." - while withholding these from other nations.

God is not unfaithful or breaking His Word to the Jews. He has set them temporarily aside while calling out to Himself a people from all ethnic groups - Jews and Gentiles alike.

And even as we say that God has "temporarily set them aside," it's clear He is still dealing with the Jews. He has, after all, miraculously preserved them through many centuries of persecution. He has brought them back into their ancient homeland.

We could be gone any moment. Israel will then take center stage. In the mean time we take the Gospel into the whole world and proclaim that "whosoever will believe" can be saved.