

The Doctrine Of Israel (Part Seven): Romans 9

An Elect Remnant

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Well, it has been since February 22nd since I gave my last sermon on the doctrine of Israel, so I want to quickly summarize where we are in the series. Hopefully this will not take too long, but if there is anybody out there who is jumping in right now and have not heard those other six sermons, then maybe that we can all get a running start. Here are the main points of those previous six sermons and I will just go sermon by sermon and hopefully this will only take about a minute for each one.

1) The first sermon: Israel's origins lie in God's calling and the teaching of Abraham. He is the original Israelite, if you will. He really was not an Israelite, he was a Hebrew, but he was the one that God began things with and then He worked through Isaac and then He worked through Jacob who was renamed Israel. So really Israelites technically started after Jacob with his sons. Now these men, these patriarchs, we call them, put a lasting mark on their descendants, the children of Israel, and they did this in both positive and negative ways. These were certainly fallible men. And even though they did good things and were converted men, they also had bad aspects to them and their children picked up on some of those things.

2) The second sermon: God made a covenant with Abraham that is still in force as the basis of both the Old and New Covenants. The covenant with Abraham is one of the most important covenants and there He gave Abraham the groundwork for the rest of the covenants that we find in Scripture. Then God made, 400 or more years later, the Old Covenant with newly-freed Israel at Mount Sinai, and this covenant was designed to form them into a nation of priests. You will find that in Exodus 19, where He said that that was His desire. Now, like any contract that is made between two parties, the Old Covenant contained the responsibilities of both parties within the covenant. It is what are they getting together to do and what is one going to do and what is the other one going to do to make the product that they want to see at the end of things. But it also contained inducements for good

behavior and that sort of thing. It also has rewards, as well as penalties for noncompliance. And you will find this in just about any kind of contract between parties.

3) The third sermon: This one was about the fact that we find in the Bible and the history there, that almost immediately after the Israel agreed to this covenant, the nation fell into a continuing cycle of rebellion, divine chastening, deliverance, and repentance, and after a short while, because their repentance normally was rather short-lived, they would go again into rebellion and then they would have to be chastened. Then they would be delivered by somebody God would raise up and they would repent. So it just went around and around and around. It was a big cycle throughout their history. What we find in looking at these examples is that most Israelites could not continue in God's covenant for long. They soon flirted with idolatry and Sabbath breaking and many other breakings of God's law and they would after just a short time fall into outright apostasy. They would be worshipping the Baals and such.

4) The fourth sermon: We find, mostly in the writings of the prophets, that God indicts Israel and Judah on several charges, which boiled down to the overall charge that they forsook the covenant. They just did not keep it. In particular, the Israelites dove wholeheartedly into idolatry and Sabbath breaking and they foolishly trusted in the other nations around them rather than trusting in God. God was always there. He was ready to protect them, defend them, do whatever they needed, but they would forget about Him and just see the kings and nations and such that were around them. God said that in terms of righteousness, in terms of knowledge, the Israelites did not even know how to do right. It is very similar wording to what was found in Genesis 6 about the people before the Flood. They had no concept of right and wrong. They were just totally anchorless as far as that is concerned and would drift here and there and do whatever they wanted rather than adhere to a certain set of principles.

So God had then to use Assyria to destroy the kingdom of Israel, and so He did with great slaughter, and sent the survivors into exile and they are still in exile to this day. We call them the Lost Ten Tribes, lost Israel, however, you want to put that. And we know from our researches, and the researches of men in the church before us, that they have lost their identity and do not

know who they are. They think themselves Gentiles and do not have any idea of their relationship with God.

5) The fifth sermon: About 150 years later, God had to go through the same process with Judah. He had to send a foreign nation against them as their destroyer and sent them into exile. This time He used the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom did not last long. Just a couple of generations after him. The succeeding Persian empire had a different policy. They sent the remnant of Judah back to Jerusalem rather than keep them in Babylon or put them in another foreign land somewhere nearby. Cyrus, particularly, sent them back to rebuild the Temple as way that he could get favor with Israel's God. And so, in doing so, he really helped to reestablish a Jewish community in the Promised Land and therefore God had the opportunity then (of course He was orchestrating everything all along), to send His Son to His people. Otherwise, if Cyrus had not done that, there would not have been any Israelites in the land to which He could have sent their Savior.

At this time, about 500 years before Christ, He could send back a fairly small remnant and over those 500 years they grew into a largish nation, a people again, and then He could send His Son to them so that He could grow up among Israelites and in that basic community. But by the time Jesus came, the people of Israel, the Jews, were no better than their forefathers. They had started out pretty well under men like Zachariah and Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah, those type of people that we find toward the end of the before-Christ era. But over that time they had degenerated in their beliefs to the point where they were people like the Pharisees and the Sadducees (which Ted talked about during the Days of Unleavened Bread and leaven there), and they were ruled over by people like Herod. So they were actually very much like their forefathers who God had destroyed. And of course God destroyed the people of Judea in 70 AD because they had reached the same point as their forefathers.

6) The sixth sermon: We explored Jesus' teachings about Israel. What did He have to say about them? We found that He looks forward a great deal to a new Israel and living under a New Covenant rather than saying that He is going to necessarily use Israel to start His Kingdom in terms of this church age. Because it was plain to Him, and it is plain to us if we look at history,

that physical Israel at the time, and the Old Covenant, were inadequate in achieving the goals of His plan to create spiritual sons and daughters for God. It could not be done with the raw material of Israel at that time. They just did not believe it. And you could see that, they did not believe Him, because they killed Him. So, New Testament teaching tends to emphasize the Israel of God, as Paul says in Galatians 6:16. That is, it emphasizes those who are called or elected to receive God's Spirit and then to live according to God's way of life. They are a new people, chosen just like Israel was and, as we would see later on in Romans 11, they were grafted into Israel and they became the new spiritual Israel that God would use in the church age.

There are other nuggets of teaching that we could find in the New Testament about Israel. They are scattered here and there throughout the New Testament. But we are not going to go into them to any great degree. They essentially follow the same pattern that Jesus used in teaching about Israel in the gospels. But there is a long doctrinal section in Romans 9-11 that explains Israel's place in God's plan, both in the church age now and in the age to come. Why did God choose to do it as He has chosen to do it? Why did physical Israel fail so fantastically, fabulously. I mean, they were failures in terms of what God wanted of them. He wanted them to be a nation of priests. And they turned out to be a nation of apostates, a nation of reprobates that He had to reject.

So what is this all about? Paul has to explain this so that the people can understand the place of Israel—physical Israel and spiritual Israel—in God's plan. And so Romans 9-11 is in some ways like the epistle to the Hebrews in that it attempts to explain the paradox of God's chosen people rejecting their Messiah. On the other hand, it also tries to explain why Gentiles, held for so long at arm's length, more readily accepted Him. Why are the people who are on the outs suddenly in, and why are the people who were in suddenly out? Why is that? How did everything turn on its head? Paul tackles this in Romans 9-11.

Now, a big difference between Romans 9-11 and Hebrews is the audience. In Romans, Paul explains this paradox to the Gentiles. At this time, the church in Rome was predominantly a Gentile audience. This was about the time that Nero kicked most of the Jews out of Rome. So the ones that were left were mostly of Gentile stock. The book of Hebrews, on the other hand, which we

believe Paul had a very big hand in, speaks to Israelites, to Hebrews, to mostly Jews, although I am sure the book got to other Israelites later. Obviously it has gotten to us at this time, but at the time he was mostly writing to Jews and perhaps even specifically Jews that were still in Palestine, because they would be the most involved in all the things that we find in Hebrews—the Temple and all the the things there that is mentioned in the book of Hebrews as part of the old way.

So, in Romans 9-11, Paul does not write much about angels, Moses, the Levites, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the law, tithing, all those things that are mentioned at some point along the way in the book of Hebrews. He does not have to because those were things that the Gentiles were maybe familiar with, but they did not need to know, at least they thought they did not need to know, any of the particulars about them. Paul does not have to convince the Gentiles of Christ's superiority. That is why they turned to Him. They could see He was superior to what they had. He did not have to convince them that the changes that were made under the New Covenant were superior because they recognized that the New Covenant was superior. So he does not have to go to those lengths to convince the Jews about what was going on, but he had to explain other things that they could grasp so that they could see why they were now favored, and the Israelites, the chosen people, were not.

Instead, in Romans 9-11 Paul tends to use more what we might call universal principles and logic. A lot of these Gentiles were out of the Greek world where these kind of rhetorical devices were common. That is how they argued. That is how they discussed things. So he used a lot of those things to help them understand what was going on here. He also leans very heavily on Old Testament Scripture so they could see the continuity of God's thought about how it was going to be in terms of chosen Israel versus elect Christians. He tries in Romans 9-11, and succeeds I think, but he attempts to show not only what has happened—they knew the history, they understood that—but maybe more, he wanted to show them why and how. Not only why it happened, but how it is going to work for good in the end. So that is kind of Paul's goal here, to help the Gentiles understand not only what has happened, but why it happened and how it is going to work out for the good of all in the end.

Paul makes several arguments, and I use that term judiciously because this is not an argument like you are yelling at somebody trying to defend a position. This is an argument like a scholar would make on his side of a question. So Paul makes several arguments within these three chapters, Romans 9, 10 and 11, and we are going to analyze each one of these one by one. The bulk of them are in Romans 9, which will get to today.

But you have to understand something about Paul's method of argument here that he uses specifically in Romans 9-11. His reasoning, or his arguments, move somewhat organically from one argument to the next. The earlier argument gives supporting help for the next argument. This book was dictated so it is a kind of stream of consciousness discourse between Romans 9-11. And he gives you these arguments one by one and they just flow one to the other. So we will grasp the teaching that he is giving us here easier if we can follow the flow of Paul's arguments.

That is how I decided to approach this. I am going to be pointing out the flow of Paul's arguments here so that we can grasp what he is trying to say to us. And he helps us a lot in several spots by asking leading questions at the head of new arguments so that we get a proper transition of his thinking of why he is going now into *this* argument based on what he just said in the *last* argument. You can see these leading questions in chapter 9, verse 14, verse 19, verse 30. Each one of those start with questions that brings up, "Well, what about this?" That is kind of how it is that the question is "Well, have you considered this?" or "If you say that, then why is this argument not valid?" And then he goes to explain why it is not or why it is. You can also find this in chapter 10, verse 14, and chapter 11, verses 1 and 11.

So he guides us through this fairly nicely so that we understand and that is the whole reason for it. He wants us to understand and grasp this, so he is trying to weave his arguments through here in a way that we can grasp easily.

Our plan for today in the next 45, 50 minutes (hopefully I will stop then), is to cover his opening arguments in Romans 9. I hope to cover this whole doctrinal section in three sermons, one chapter at a time. I was trying to cram it into two sermons or even one sermon and I found out it could not be done. So we are going to do this one chapter at a time and I think it is important

that we do this because we need to understand this paradox just about as much as the Gentiles in the first century needed to. Maybe even more, because these things, the end of the ages are coming upon us and we need to I understand why God is doing what He is doing.

Paul's arguments here contain very serious implications about the nature of God that need answered, His purpose, and His ultimate desire to show mercy and grace to everyone—to all mankind. So we are getting quite a lot of theology and also it will touch on prophecy and what God is leading toward in His purpose, of course, and also His own character. That is an important thing to keep in the back of your mind, that though God seems to be doing something bad with Israel at this point, though it seems very negative, it is actually very good. We just have to look at it from a long distance view rather than close up and seeing how people's lives were destroyed in some of the things that He had to do. But God is all-powerful. God is merciful. God can make things right. We just have to look at it from the 30,000 foot range rather than right on top of it.

I do not want to start in Romans 9. I want to start in Psalm 94. This may seem like a strange place to start, but I think if we grasp what the psalmist is saying in Psalm 94 and have this right up front, then we can understand what Paul is saying far better in Romans 9, 10, and 11. The psalmist here is unknown. It does not have any title or any author ascribed to it.

Psalm 94:3-15 Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph? They utter speech, and speak insolent things; all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O Lord, and afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, "The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand." Understand, you senseless among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile. Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit is dug for the wicked. For the Lord will not cast off His people, nor will He

forsake His inheritance. But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.

Like I said, this may seem like a strange place to start in our understanding of Romans 9-11 because it is a prayer to God to avenge His people after they have suffered a very severe defeat of one form or another. But this section of Scripture includes a few statements that provide a foundation for understanding Romans 9-11 and Paul's thinking. Remember Paul was steeped in these type of scriptures. He knew them by heart and we can get an understanding of some of the principles that he was drawing from this particular psalm.

Now we are going to take what is said here somewhat ironically. We are going to assume, because there are indications here, especially in verse 8, "understand, you senseless among the people," that the proud attacker, their oppressor, is an Israelite tyrannizing in his own people. Someone maybe like Manasseh or one of the other kings who was not very good. It is Israelite against Israelite here. And if we take it that way, some understanding pops out here. If we do that, the psalmist, then, is, we can conclude, one of the righteous remnant of the people. Think of Ahab and Jezebel trying to kill all the prophets and Elijah thinking that he is the only one left, and God says, "I have 7,000 left to Me that you don't even know about." They were the righteous remnant, along with Elijah and any of the prophets that may have escaped.

So within Israel, there were two Israels: there were the physical Israelites and there was the righteous remnant. So the psalmist then is one of these of the righteous remnant who was baffled, just confused by the arrogance, the unbelief, and the foolishness of his fellow Israelites. He cannot understand how they cannot see that what God has said, what He has promised, what was in the covenant was good for them, and now they have gotten to the point, taking it ironically, as I said before, that they are actually terrorizing, persecuting, trying to defeat their own people—the righteous remnant, this small minority of people who were following God.

What he develops here, then, if we take it from this standpoint, are two ideas that we need to understand. The first idea that comes out is from verses 4-11. This is where the psalmist is talking about all the bad things that this

oppressor is doing, and then he says, "Don't you understand God? God is our Creator. He made the ear, He made the eye. If He made these things for us, don't you think that He can hear and He can see Himself? His hearing, His seeing is far more acute and focused than ours. So how can you say that He doesn't see? And how can you say that He doesn't know?"

The oppressor commits all sorts of evils and he justifies it, which we see in verse 7, by saying that God is not paying attention. So the oppressor can get away with whatever he wants to do, because if God does not know what is going on in His own nation, He cannot avenge the victims, can He? So he just thinks he is free to do whatever he pleases.

This is where the psalmist reacts in such amazement in verse 8. He is by saying, "Understand, you senseless among the people, and you fools, when will you be wise?" He calls this reasoning by the oppressor as illogical stupidity. It does not make sense for you to go about doing all these things and justifying it by saying God is not aware, when it is absolutely clear that God is aware! He knows what is going on and He is going to do what is best for His people. So to put it in modern terms, verse 8 could be paraphrased as, "How can you say that unless you're an idiot. It's the height of foolishness to think that the Creator God, the Almighty Sovereign Lord, is unaware of what is happening among His people. So, you must be an idiot." That is what he says. It is kind of harsh, but it is true.

So, the psalmist concludes the section here in verse 11 with an admission that God knows that men do not think straight. They cannot think straight. They cannot think righteously. "The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile." They will come to nothing. Man's ideas, which they think are so wise and so great, are nothing to God. The foolishness of God is wiser than man.

This admission tells us that God is aware of what is going on and He is just biding His time. He knows that they think this way, but He has got other plans. He knows that men cannot know what He is doing, how He is doing it, and why He is doing it. Men just do not have the education, the scope or whatever, they do not have, especially, God's Spirit to understand His mind. So when they look at a situation and they say God is not aware, God lets all these people suffer. God sends the Assyrians, God sends the Babylonians to

crush His people. They cannot see what God is doing, they are too small. Their thoughts are too small. They are puny in their thinking. They do not think broadly enough, they do not think deeply enough. They do not think with the mind of God.

So the first idea that I have been getting at here between verses 9-11 is this: It boils down to there being two groups of people within Israel. There are the righteous to whom God has revealed His plan by His Spirit. This would be the righteous remnant of which the psalmist is a part. And then there is everybody else—ignorant humanity, foolish humanity, idiotic humanity, who just do not know, they have not been clued in to what God is doing. But a few people have, among whom is the psalmist.

Let us go on to the second idea which appears in verses 12-15. I will read it again.

Psalm 94:12-15 Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit is dug for the wicked. For the Lord will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance. But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.

Now that we know that there are two groups of people, you can see that the psalmist, in verses 12-15, is concentrating on that second group, that righteous remnant, that small number of people who have been made aware of what God is doing. So the righteous stand in a unique favored position under God. We see here in verse 12 that God works most closely with them. He teaches them out of His Word, out of His law, to give them instruction, to help them in their walk with God. And then it says here, He also does something further by giving them rest.

Rest is probably not a good term here because the word that the psalmist used actually means more correctly, peace of mind or an inner quietude in the face of outward troubles. So, what he is saying here is, while all this turmoil is taking place outside—the oppressor is oppressing and they are being defeated—even so, the righteous remnant can have peace. They can have a kind of quiet mind. They do not have to worry about what is going on

because they trust in God that He is working something good out, even though all indications on the outward side is that it is a terrible disaster. But God gives them knowledge and He gives them the inner peace that allows this righteous remnant to continue on following him.

The psalmist then makes a confident unassailable statement that God will not forsake or abandon His people. Now we are thinking about this (and hopefully we are), remember the two groups? Who does he mean here? Well, he certainly means that righteous remnant that is following Him. But it is broad, that God will not forsake even those who have gone away, that have rejected Him, that His people include all of Israel. They are the chosen ones, even though some have gone toward destruction.

So He is saying, "Look, even though there are only 7,000 who call upon the name of God in Israel (just using that example from Elijah's lifetime), God is still going to work this out for good for all the rest of them." He is not going to abandon His people even if they are the oppressors, because He is working something out. So do not worry. But He is especially going to preserve those who live within the covenant because they are the apple of His eye. They are the ones He is working with most closely. But everything that He is doing is for the greater good of all.

Now, verse 15 is very tricky to translate. "But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it." I guess it is kind of understandable written like that. Most translations render it to mean that soon judgment or justice will turn in favor of the righteous, and the virtuous will pursue righteousness. That is understandable, but it is limited. It may have a farther-reaching connotation though. And this farther-reaching connotation has a central concept that is like this: Divine justice will ultimately be shown or manifested in favor of the righteous and everyone who is honest at heart will recognize it and follow it.

What it is showing is that God has a long term plan that He is working out here and even though it goes bad with the righteous for a long time, that ultimately all this is going to turn around and the righteous will be vindicated, that God's justice will be vindicated, that even though He is judging His people and sending them great plagues or foreign armies or what have you, all of this is going to show that God's judgment was not only just,

but it was good that He did it that way. And then in time, once this is shown, the people who are given a good heart through the Holy Spirit, will follow it. They will be able to look back and see, "Oh, what a wonderful thing God was doing in working all this out." And it will become, then, righteousness to them. Interesting look at things, that there could be a near and a far understanding of this particular verse.

So the second idea that we get from Psalm 94 can be summarized like this: God is teaching, working with a righteous few during this present evil age, and His work with them will one day be vindicated as righteousness. And once that happens, once that turn is made in world history, it will turn many to God's way. But it has to go like this now.

Let us get into Romans 9. That is the background to Paul's argument here that I pulled out of the Old Testament and I am not sure if Paul was actually thinking about Psalm 94 in any of this, but Psalm 94 was just a very compact way of explaining some of these things without having to go to various other verses. So let us read the first five verses here in Romans 9.

Romans 9:1-5 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscious also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Paul is beside himself with grief over what has happened with Israel, for his kinsmen, for those who were fellow Israelites, because most of them had rejected Christ to the point of killing their Savior. And, like Paul himself, were persecuting Christ's followers. He found this to be tragic. And he said here that he would have traded his own salvation for theirs, if such a thing were possible.

Just let me say as an aside here, that the Greek text where it says, "I could wish" there at the beginning of verse 3, it is said in a way, or written in a

way, that it is very clear that Paul knew it could not happen. It was an impossibility, and that is how the Greek text understands it. That he knew that it was not a possibility. It goes against all kinds of theological principles that one person could give up his salvation for a bunch of other peoples to have salvation. That just does not work that way. Each one is judged according to his own works. So that could not be. He is just saying, "I would do this if it were possible, but it's not possible."

This is the first argument. Actually, it is really not an argument, it is a statement of undeniable fact. But the argument is that God chose Israel for His own people. That is something, if you read the Old Testament, it is very, very clear God chose Israel as His people. It is a historical truth that cannot be denied. And Paul does not try to deny it at all, because it is the only viable starting point for his overall argument. He has to start with the fact that God chose Israel. If God chose Israel, his reasoning goes, it matters. God does not do things that do not matter. He does not just do things as throwaways, you know, "Okay, who cares?"

No, He did this for a great reason and further, in doing it, He did not make a mistake by choosing Israel. It was all part of a plan. What He did here was adopt (that is the word that is in the New King James), but I would prefer a longer phrase, adoption to sonship, so that we can understand that the familial relationship between God and Israel was real. It was inviolable in God's estimation. It is not just a metaphor to be spiritualized away. It was a real thing. God considered Israel His son in every respect. Even if you use like the genealogy that is found in Luke of Christ, it shows His genealogy going all the way back to Adam and Adam was the son of God. And so God considered Israel to be His son.

Let us see this just very quickly in two places.

Exodus 4:21-23 And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all these wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.'""

So he equated His son, His firstborn with Pharaoh's son, his firstborn. There was no difference in category between God and Israel and Pharaoh and his son.

Let us go to another one in Hosea. A Messianic prophecy here, but it also reaches back to Israel where he says very simply,

Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son."

In this case, he equates the Sonship of Christ with the sonship of Israel. They were both very real to Him.

God gave Israel, over time, several vital gifts that prove Israel's sonship and Paul lists them here and I want to go quickly through them.

1. The glory, which is the Shekinah glory, with the visible presence of God in the wilderness in the cloud and the pillar of fire. It also was the cloud that came into the Tabernacle and the cloud that came into the Temple. That could be visibly seen and it was known that God was there, He was with them.

2. Then there were the covenants: the Old Covenant, the Sabbath covenant, the Davidic covenant, and several other covenants that God made with Israel, showing that they were different. They were His, they were chosen.

3. There is the law in all of its forms: the commands, the statutes, the judgments, the precepts, the Word, you name it. All those are mixed in here with this giving of the law to Israel which made them different, should have made them a better people, and one that other people look to to say, "Man, what is this nation that has laws like this?"

4. There is the service of God. That is, all the priestly and Levitical functions: the sacrifices, the Temple services, and all that sort of thing. It set them apart. It showed them that God had given them a way, a rule of life, a way of approach to Him.

5. Then there are the promises. Those that particularly are found in Genesis 12:11-3 which God gave to Abraham. And there are many others, many blessings. We have two chapters in the Pentateuch that are chapters of blessings (and curses). But God made great promises to them of those sorts of things, of blessings. He gave them promises of land, promises of prosperity, promises of safety, promises of health, promises of a king of David's line not ceasing, and promises of Messiah and ultimate salvation.

6. Then there is the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph through whom were established the nation's foundation. Those were great gifts to give them, wonderful examples of God's way of life.

7. And finally, there is Messiah Himself who was an Israelite. He belongs to them according to the flesh. He came out of them.

All of these things that I have just named are irrefutable possessions of Israel from God. They mark Israel as His son, His firstborn. They illustrate His intimate presence with them and His work with them as His chosen people. So, this is why I say it is irrefutable that they are the chosen people of God.

This is what he starts with. Let us get that down. The first argument that he makes is Israel is definitely, without a doubt, God's chosen people. He is not denying it. He is not trying to argue it away. So, he goes to his next argument:

Romans 9:6-13 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (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), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Now Paul's second argument here answers an unspoken question. This is one of the places where he does not actually ask the question himself. The unspoken question is this: if Israel had all these gifts and all these advantages from God, why did they fail so spectacularly? If this is the case, if God had chosen them and given them so many good things, why did they reject Him? And his answer may be a bit surprising.

His first sentence there is "but it is not that the word of God has taken no effect." Another way we could render this is they were more effective than you think. Or the word of God or the what God did was more effective than you think. He could also add to that, "You're looking at all the failures. But the Word of God has actually been quite successful. You see the failure of physical Israel but you're ignoring spiritual Israel." Because that is when he goes on and he makes this separation out between the children of the flesh and the children of promise. That there is, like we saw in Psalm 94, a physical Israel and a righteous remnant—a spiritual remnant.

So he is bringing out these two different categories and he says, "You're looking at all the ways that the majority, physical Israelites, failed. But on the other hand, if you concentrate on the minority, spiritual Israel, there was great success there because through all of what had happened and all this failure of physical Israel, God was making something good but He was only doing it with a very chosen few—those who are called in Isaac.

You have got to remember, Romans, this great book of doctrine, being all about justification by faith rather than by works, belief rather than law keeping, spiritual rather than physical, these ideas keep popping up as Paul tries to explain what the doctrine of the church is. And in this particular case, the same logic applies. He is applying the same idea of physical versus spiritual. So, he brings out this argument of children of the promise over the children of the flesh. That the more important of the two is the children of the promise and he uses Genesis 21:12 as his base there. "In Isaac your seed shall be called," as well as, "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."

Now, Abraham had several sons. He had one by Hagar and he had several by Keturah. But he had one by Sarah and it is only the son mothered by Sarah,

Isaac, who was born according to the prophetic promise of God and was born miraculously because Sarah could not bear and Abraham was impotent by this time. It was this one, Isaac, who became the heir, the miracle boy, the miracle child, not the one who was born naturally, like Ishmael or any of the sons of Keturah. So, God would work, then, only through Isaac's descendants, not Ishmael's.

I have in my notes Genesis 18:1-2 and 9-11 and then I was going to go to Genesis 21:1-3. But it is basically the same thing that I have been talking about. And you find, using Paul's arguments here in Romans 9, that physical descent is far less important than God's spiritual miraculous involvement. God was involved, not in Ishmael's birth, but he was involved in Isaac's and He made a prophecy then in Genesis 18 that at this time next year you are going to have a son. And what do you know! This time next year Sarah had a son, just as He had said. And even though Ishmael was a true son of Abraham, he was separated from Isaac and sent away and we barely hear from him and his descendants again. They were not important to the plan, not what God was working out at the time.

So the story of God's favor continues in the miracle baby, Isaac. And then from him his progeny, and you know what? He does not work with all of his progeny either. In the example of Esau and Jacob that he gives right after this in chapter 9, starting in verse 10, God favors Jacob, not Esau. And the same thing happens to Esau as happened to Ishmael. He gets separated out and we hear very little from him again. And so he caps this off with verse 13, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Basically what it means is that God favors or chooses one particular person to work through and not the other. And so He whittles away the dead wood, as it were, and works only with the one. He has done this down through the ages. Works with a very small element of the people, what we call the spiritual remnant or the righteous remnant.

Here, especially in verse 11, the element of election comes to the fore. Physical descent means little—God's choice or God's selection or God's election is *everything*. Note the phrasing there in verse 11, "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him who calls." It is all about the calling. And this is one of the great keys in Paul's whole teaching, not just here in Romans 11, but elsewhere. God's purpose

stands upon, it is based upon, it is founded upon God's choices alone. He alone acted, He did not have to consult with anybody else. He did not have to consult Abraham when He called him. And He did not. He just simply called him out of Ur of the Chaldees.

And He has done this with every other choice down through the ages in working His plan toward the fruition of the Kingdom of God. That this is *God* working according to His own will. No human works were involved in God's election. We see this in Paul's example of Isaac and then Jacob, Both were called before they were born. Isaac was called even before he was conceived. It was known he was going to be the one through whom God would work. They did not do anything themselves—talking about Isaac or Jacob. They did not do anything. Like I said, Isaac was not even in existence and Jacob was not even born. Yet God called them anyway with His special favor for His use.

So when He chooses He gives favor to His choice, He gives favor by giving gifts. Giving His Spirit, easing the way, helping, protecting, however you want to see it. And we see this as God's love being shown upon that particular person and the one He does not choose, say Ishmael or Esau, He does not give that person favor. It is as simple as that. He gives favor to one. He does not give the favor to another. And when He does not give His favor, we see it as hatred. "Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated," and that is how we see it. That is how a human sees it.

But in reality, when all is said and done, what we see as hatred is going to be manifested as love. Just the way it works in God's world, as it were, because He turns all of these things about. Right? Is that not what we saw in Psalm 94, verse 15, that all these things will be turned to righteousness.

So the second argument that we see in this paragraph here, is that God's election trump's physical descent. And what it did historically in the past is that it created an Israel within Israel—there was a spiritual remnant chosen by God and that one, that remnant, has been separated from physical Israel. So not all of Israel is Israel, as he says there in verse 6. These elect ones, the ones that He has chosen, are Abraham's true seed through Isaac. And what is left unsaid, which will be picked up later, is that this elect, the true seed, do not even have to be Israelites at all. That comes later.

Romans 9:14-18 What shall we say then? [after we have seen this] Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose, I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Paul begins his third argument by posing a question that might spring to mind after what he said there, his stark revelation in the previous paragraph of there being two Israels. The question is: Is God's purpose through election fair? And his answer is, absolutely! He writes it in the negative, but I just turned it into the positive. Is God's election fair? Yes, indeed!

His argument here goes back to Psalm 94 again, recalling what we saw there in verses 8-11—that we are talking about the sovereign Creator God here. Can we call the sovereign Creator God unfair? Once we establish that, that we are talking about God indeed, then we realize that He can do anything He wants with His creation or any individual creature, any individual person. He is God! We do not have any right to call Him out about that. He can use anyone whenever and however He wishes. He could use a person for good or for destruction. His choice. He can raise a Gideon or a Ruth to move His purpose along. And equally, He could use a Pharaoh or a Judas Iscariot to be an enemy who causes great hindrance and destruction. His choice—because He is the Great God.

Now, we, having grown up in a more democratic society, may think this is arbitrary and unjust. God, though, is a great King. He is a singular ruler. If you will, He is a tyrant, a dictator, an emperor in whom all authority and power is concentrated. He can do whatever He pleases. We see this in Psalm 95.

Psalm 95:1-7 Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with

psalms. For the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods. In His hands are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.

Psalm 115:1-3 Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, and because of Your truth. Why should the Gentiles say, "Where is their God?" But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

The key to his argument back in Romans 9 is what we read here in Psalm 115:1 and Romans 9:15. We will just call it God's mercy. That is the key to understanding this. Paul's quotation there about "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy," comes from Exodus 33:19 and that is God's response to Moses asking Him if he could see His glory. He says here in response to this verse:

Exodus 33:19 "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

The idea we can take from this is that God's glory resides in His goodness, which He breaks down into mercy or grace, and compassion. So though God is an absolute monarch, though we could call Him a dictator, though we can call Him the great King, the solitary ruler, whatever, authoritarian, we can trust His decisions because He is absolutely good. He is a *benevolent* dictator. He is a *benevolent* tyrant. There is no evil in Him.

So, though He makes a decision that we might not understand properly, because we do not have the unlimited mind like He does, we cannot see how good it is. Yet it *is* good just because of His nature. *He will not do anything that is evil*. And even though something looks right now to be evil or negative in some way from our perspective, in the end though, it is good. God will make it good because He has mercy, He has compassion. That is how He functions. That is what He does. Do we not say, following John the

apostle, God is love? He is also merciful. He is mercy embodied in a person. He is grace—very gracious.

We find in Romans 8:28 that *all* His purposes work out for good for the called, according to His purpose. So, even though He does something that may not seem fair to us, it is fair. And God will prove it in the end. His methods of getting to the fulfillment of His purpose will ultimately prove to be good too, just as He is.

So, the third argument, which we see in Romans 9:14-18, is that God's election is not unfair because He has the right to do as He pleases and He always pleases to do good. So, those things are going to work out in the end.

One more section here.

Romans 9:19-29 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God." Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth." And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah."

Here again, Paul reads the audience's mind and he asked the question that is probably on their mind. If God has done all this by His choices, how can He condemn those who reject Him? Is it not impossible for humans to resist His will? Were they not just pawns that He was using? So why does He condemn them? Why did they die? Why are they not saved?

His answer is startling and very blunt. His answer is, "You have no right to question God's decisions." That is basically what he says, using the potter and the clay. He is the potter, you are the clay. You have no right to question your Creator about how He uses you. He can do whatever He pleases with you or with the next guy. And he draws this from Jeremiah 18. I do want to go there because there is an important verse. We will just get that verse. Jeremiah had gone down to the potter and he saw that what he was trying to do was marred. So he flipped it back on the wheel and made something else from it.

Jeremiah 18:5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hands, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!"

God is in absolute control over His people and He is in absolute control over everything, not just His people. And He sees things more perfectly than we do. We cannot certainly see to the end of His purpose and how He is going to bring everything around to a fitting and good end, and we *have* His Spirit. So human judgment of His actions is flawed. It is incomplete, it is limited. We cannot evaluate Him on an equal basis. We cannot evaluate what He does to bring His purposes to fruition. We just cannot grasp it all.

So, Paul's response to this questions about how can He condemn those who reject Him and is it not true that humans cannot resist His will? His answer is sit down, shut up, watch Him work, and be amazed. Because you cannot question God. That may not sit very well as an argument with us because we tend to think too much about ourselves. But that is what Paul said. Do not question what God is going to do, do not find fault with Him because He is perfect. Did I not just get through talking about that? That is kind of what he says.

In verse 24, Paul then brings the Gentiles into the argument. This is actually the first place where he actually mentions the Gentiles. In his illustration from verse 22, the physical Israelites are the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. That is how God used them. And the vessels of mercy prepared for beforehand are the elect of God. And these elect are made up, not just of Jews, but also of Gentiles. So His elect is a selection from all humanity, not just His chosen physical Israelites.

Let me just mention Romans 15:4 and I Corinthians 10:11, where it says that God used physical Israel to be examples to us. And so that is how He decided to leave us, the spiritual remnant, a historical education about what not to do, mostly, and to see how people without God's Spirit would act and reject God. So, this "elect of the elect" that he is talking about here—the vessels of mercy, the spiritual remnant—is the remnant that will be saved, that he talks about there in verse 27. That this remnant, this elect of the elect, is the seed that will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Now, I do want to mention that there is a little hint here in the quotations from Isaiah at the end of the chapter, Romans 9:27-29. That God's work with the elect, that small remnant that He is working with, is the saving grace, as it were, for the rest of Israel. That if He did not work with this small elect, then physical Israel would be condemned. But He has this remnant that are being prepared to help bring Israel back into the fold. So the elect who come to righteousness through grace and faithfulness to Christ, will play a major role in the salvation of rejected Israel.

So, the fourth argument then, as we close, is that, yes indeed, God hardened Israel's heart like Pharaoh's, but He did it so that He could form and teach a remnant—the Israel of God through election and grace. And He even includes Gentiles among them.