

The Church of the Servant King
Soteriology Series

SO_6_Predestination & Election –
Part 12 – Predestination, Election & Romans Chapters 9-11 – Lesson 3

Introduction

In our previous lesson, we studied Romans 9:6-13. We saw that Paul was making a case that the “election” (v. 11 – “according to His *choice*” [NASV] or “according to His *election*” [KJV]) of Israel was based upon God’s sovereign prerogative. Israel as a corporate entity is in view – not Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. These individuals are used by Paul to illustrate a principle.¹ The corporate election of Israel as a people to be set apart from all other nations and peoples was not based upon works of self-righteousness (v. 11 – “not because of works, but because of him who calls”) contrary to the belief and practice of Jews in the 1st Century A.D. Rather, the corporate election of Israel was based upon God’s sovereign decision expressed in the divine decree in eternity past. That sovereign decision was rooted in an omniscient understanding by God of Abraham’s faith – faith in God’s promise of an heir through barren Sarah.

Romans 9:1-5 – Paul’s Desire for Israel to Be Saved

When one has a full grasp of 1) the dispensational paradigm shift that Paul was being used by God to communicate and 2) the religious and political dynamics of the 1st Century A.D. environment, one has a greater appreciation of Paul’s introduction to his argument in **Romans 9:1-5**. One can envision the accusations raised by Paul’s critics – e.g. “Paul, your teaching indicates that you have turned against your own people.” Paul refutes such an argument by illustrating how much he desired Israel to be saved.²

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons [**Ex 4:22**], and the glory [**i.e. the shekinah glory – Ex 16:10; 24:17; 40:34; 1 Ki 8:11**] and the covenants [**i.e. the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and New**] and the giving of the Law [**i.e. the Mosaic Law**]

¹ On the surface, the focus of Paul’s argument seems to be upon the sovereign right of God to elect specific individuals since Paul names specific individuals. However, God is not speaking about the individual Jacob, but about the nation of Jacob, i.e. Israel. In Genesis 25:23 which records the original prediction, Rebecca was told:

And the Lord said to her: “Two *nations* are in your womb, two *peoples* shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.”

² Joseph Dillow makes an interesting observation regarding this passage and the meaning of “saved” in Romans in his book – *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1992), 122-124. Even the footnote in the New King James Version for Romans 10:1 makes a similar observation regarding Paul’s use of the word “saved.” “Salvation, at least in Romans, refers to the work of God in the believer that continues after justification. It is deliverance from God’s wrath (see 1:18; 5:9, 10). The logical conclusion from ch. 9 is that Israel is under divine wrath (see 9:22). Paul’s deep desire and prayer is that Israel may be justified and saved from His wrath.” (See Earl D. Radmacher, gen ed, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1898).

and the temple service [*worship in the Temple*] and the promises [*e.g. promises regarding the Messianic kingdom*], whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 9:6-13 – True Israel Has a Precedent of Spiritual Faith Established Through Its Founding Fathers

The nation of Israel was founded based upon God's sovereign decision to choose one descendent of Abraham (i.e. Isaac) over another (i.e. Ishmael) in such a way that human merit and ability was excluded from the equation.³ Specifically, Isaac's birth was a miracle of God in fulfillment of a promise of God (Gen. 17:15-16 cf. 21:3). Abraham believed that God could accomplish this action and it was credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6).⁴ Paul affirms this in **Romans 9:6-9** where he concludes that God's instruments are those who respond in faith to His calling. In other words, God's sovereign decision was not made apart from His omniscient knowledge of the volition of each man.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 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 the children of God, 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."

God's sovereignty is illustrated again in **Romans 9:10-13**. Paul makes it clear that the fathers of the Jewish race were chosen on a basis other than human merit. Paul reinforces the point that he has made in verse 8 – spiritual faith, not genetics or works of self-righteousness resulted in salvation. Jacob was the younger of Isaac's two sons and was the lineage through whom the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 would come.⁵

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.

³ The reason God wanted to use a miraculous birth in the case of Isaac and Jacob is at least twofold: 1) to provide a test of faith for Israel's founding fathers, thus establishing the spiritual basis for the race and nation and 2) to provide a very tangible means of verifying the subsequent claims of these men and their progeny to be the direct beneficiaries of the promise to Abraham known as the Abrahamic Covenant.

⁴ This is experiential (i.e. Phase 2) righteousness verses positional (i.e. Phase 1) righteousness. Abraham was already the beneficiary of Phase 1 positional righteousness via his belief in Yahweh (the pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ) per Genesis 12:1-8 cf. Romans 4:9-10; Hebrews 11:8-10. After becoming a believer perhaps before Yahweh first spoke to him in Haran (Ge 11:31 cf. 12:4), Abram later exercised faith in Yahweh's promise when he obeyed God's command to offer Isaac, the son of promise through barren Sarah, as a sacrifice (Ge 22:18 cf. Ro 4:16-22).

⁵ The firstborn had a pre-eminent right to a position of privilege in regard to inheritance from his parents. This would later be codified in the Mosaic Law (Ex 13:1-2, 11-16).

Jacob's birth, like Isaac's birth, was apart from human ability for Rebecca had been barren (Gen. 25:21). Again, the sovereign decision of God was not divorced from the faith of man (Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife - Rebecca). Thus, the precedent and pattern God desired for the Jewish race had been set. God in His sovereignty had selected a certain segment of the human race to be a people of faith in Him as a means of drawing others to Him. However, God's selection took into consideration all that His omniscience knew of every person's decisions (including faith).

Romans 9:14-29 – Is God Unjust for Setting Israel Aside Temporarily?

In this next section of verses, Paul answers the obvious question that arises as a result of his argument thus far. The question is – “Is God unjust?” In other words, is God unjust to exercise His sovereignty in such a manner so as to set aside a nation/people (established through faith) for His Own purpose? Paul argues that on the basis of the fact that God is sovereign, He has the prerogative to use whomever He wishes to accomplish His desires. Thus, God can set Israel aside temporarily without compromising His integrity.

As we have seen (and as we will continue to see) Paul is not presenting an argument for individual election of the believer as many Calvinists would argue (i.e. the “U” in TULIP – unconditional election).⁶ Rather, the context demands that we interpret Paul's arguments on the basis of the corporate nation/people of Israel verses the corporate body of the Church. Here are the reasons for my position:

- The Old Testament background that Paul uses to substantiate his argument in verses 6-13 includes Genesis 25:23 which provides God's view of the founding fathers of Israel. God viewed the founding fathers as representative of the nation that He would use them to inaugurate. In this passage, God refers to the two sons that are in Rebecca's womb as “nations,” i.e. representative of corporate bodies of people.
- Later in chapter 9:24, Paul applies his point to “Jews” and “Gentiles” as groups of people.
- As a dispensationalist and the apostle to whom God gave the mystery doctrines of the Church Age (see Ephesians 3), Paul knew and taught the distinction as well as the similarities between Jew (Israel) and Gentile (Church) earlier in Romans 1-3. The two groups of people represent distinct dispensations or ages of history in which two different groups of people are given administrative responsibility over God's revelation to man. So there is a distinction between the dispensations even though in the Church Age, there is no distinction between the believing Jew and the believing Gentile (Ro 10:12).

⁶ The extreme Calvinist's view of election is expressed by the phrase *unconditional* election (i.e. the “U” in TULIP – the acronym that represents the 5 points of Calvinism). Norman Geisler in *Chosen, But Free* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 66-67 notes that by this extreme Calvinists mean “there are absolutely no conditions for God's electing some to salvation. There are no conditions, either for God's giving of salvation or for our receiving it.” Needless to say, this is rather confusing since the only logical conclusion from these statements is that faith is not a condition for election or salvation. Yet, this contradicts the extreme Calvinist belief that “faith” is a gift of God to the elect so that they might be saved. The reason that this is an important point is that such a position establishes a slippery slope of interpretive precedent, e.g. if God's sovereignty is the predominant attribute in man's salvation (Phase 1 of the believer's existence), what does that say about the role of God's sovereignty in the believer's life subsequent to salvation (Phase 2)? Does God choose certain believers to be carnal (e.g. 1 Co 3:1-15) believers? Obviously, one's position needs to reflect a balanced understanding of the unified function of God's attributes rather than an undue emphasis upon any one attribute (i.e. God's sovereignty to the virtual exclusion of His omniscience) as is the case with the position of the extreme Calvinist. The arguments of the extreme Calvinists have even affected the positions of moderate Calvinists in regard to this issue (e.g. Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), Volume III, 172-176).

- The theme of Romans is expressed in Romans 1:17 – “the just shall live by faith.” That theme is applicable to two distinct groups of people – the “Jew” (i.e. Israel within the Age of Israel) and the “Greek” (i.e. the believer in the Church Age) per Romans 1:16.
- With regard to salvation, the focus of God’s choice is always upon a corporate body of people, never the individual. In the Bible we do see individuals, as well as groups of people, chosen for tasks, services and functions; however, this election or choice is different from salvation.⁷

With this interpretative framework in mind, we can understand Paul’s argument in the remaining verses of chapter 9 much more clearly. In **verses 14-18**, Paul answers the obvious question that arises in the mind of the reader – Is God unjust to elect (choose) one group of people (i.e. the Church) verses another group of people (i.e. Israel) to accomplish His purpose?

What shall we say then? 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 **[i.e. God’s prerogative to use whomever He desires].**” So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs **[i.e. the unbelieving Jew of Paul’s day who was depending upon his own works and his genetic status as a Jew]**, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens **[i.e. God even uses the negative volition of man for His purposes].**

As Paul begins to address the question that his argument in the preceding verses has forced, he quotes two passages from the book of Exodus that would serve as an indictment to the discerning reader. Paul quotes Exodus 33:19 where God is responding to Moses’ request to see the Lord’s glory. If God made such a statement to one of Israel’s most revered leaders, how much more did the principle of God’s sovereign prerogative apply to the remainder of Israel?

Paul then states the principle in verse 16 that all of his readers should have understood – God’s sovereign choice of whether to use one group of people verses another was not based upon acts of self-righteousness, human good, genetic heritage, or any other human factor. This was the very evident problem with the Jew of Paul’s day and the discerning person (Jew or Gentile) knew it. The Jews of Paul’s day were self-righteous and viewed their nation and race as special in God’s sight apart from a proper understanding of the spiritual dynamic that God required (see Romans 2-3).

Next, Paul quotes Exodus 9:16. God is instructing Moses in what Moses needs to say to Pharaoh when Moses announces the seventh plague upon Egypt (i.e. hail). God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was accomplished via God’s creation of adverse circumstances for Pharaoh (i.e. the plagues) that allowed Pharaoh’s negative volition to manifest itself to the fullest extent. As a result, Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (e.g. Ex 8:15, 32). Paul’s analogy – the Jews of Paul’s day were like Pharaoh – their negative volition was the catalyst for God hardening their heart through adversity. Their hardened heart was the reason they were being set aside and the Church being intercalated.

⁷ I have ordered a book entitled *The New Chosen People* by William Klein published by Wipf & Stock Publishers, July 2001 in which a similar position is presented. In this book, Klein makes the point that there is no case in the Bible where individuals are elected to salvation even though there are cases where God chooses (elects) certain individuals and groups for tasks or assignments.

In **verses 19-24**, Paul uses a pottery analogy to answer the reader who still questions God's fairness. At this point in Paul's argument, a reader might ask why God still finds fault if He is indeed sovereign and so chooses to use one group of people (i.e. the Church) verses another group of people (i.e. Israel)? After all, who can resist the will of God if He so chooses to use one group of people or another group of people (verse 19)?

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?

Paul reaffirms the sovereignty of God in these verses. Paul argues that God has the right to choose one group verses another group and to use His honoring of one group and dishonoring of another group for His own glory. Paul is not arguing for the Calvinistic understanding of irresistible grace (i.e. the "I" in TULIP).⁸

Paul elaborates on this analogy in verses 22-24. He poses a hypothetical question that has a basis in the present set of circumstances of Jews (Israel) and Gentiles (Church).

What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering [*i.e. the negative volition*] the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction [*i.e. the nation of Israel which was facing divine discipline*], and that he might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy [*i.e. the corporate body of believers known as the Church*], which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

In other words, Paul is personalizing his hypothetical scenario. Israel (i.e. the Jewish people) has had ample opportunity throughout its history to become the spiritual people that God desired them to be and fulfill their destiny as God's chosen people. The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with example after example of their failure and includes the fifth cycle of discipline⁹ that the nation experienced on two occasions, i.e. the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and the Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom in 586 B.C. Paul knew that Israel faced that possibility again due to her rejection en masse of Jesus as the Messiah. Paul also knew that unless Jews repented, accepted the Jesus they crucified as the Messiah, and thereby became a part of the believing Church which was now the chosen body of people that God was using, they too would undergo the same fate as their ancestors.

Paul continues his argument in **verses 25-29** by citing passages from Hebrew Scripture (i.e. the Old Testament) that attest to God's righteousness, mercy and faithfulness.

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

⁸ See Norman Geisler, *Chosen, But Free* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 87ff.

⁹ See Leviticus 26:27ff.

of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.”

In verse 25, Paul quotes from Hosea 2:23 and in verse 26, he quotes from Hosea 1:10. The prophet Hosea was commanded by God to take a wife who God knew would commit adultery and Hosea was so informed. Hosea’s marriage was designed to picture the spiritual state of Israel prior to the Assyrian captivity. Through Hosea’s ministry, God announced that He would use severe judgment to free His people from their spiritual stupor and get their attention. This judgment would take the form of drought, invasion and exile thereby following the pattern delineated in Leviticus 26 (i.e. the five cycles of discipline).

Hosea had three children by his adulterous wife, Gomer. These three children each had symbolic names. The firstborn son’s name was Jezreel and he was a reminder of the spiritual adultery that God judged in that city. In 841 B.C., Jehu, with God’s approval, destroyed the evil dynasty of Omri by slaughtering Jezebel, the sons of Ahab, and the prophets and priests of Baal (2 Ki 9; 10).

The second child was a daughter and was named Lo-Ruhamah and her name meant “not loved.” The third child was a son and his name was Lo-Ammi which meant “not My people.” These two children symbolized the soon-to-come Assyrian captivity in which the Northern Kingdom would undergo the fifth cycle of discipline.

In spite of Hosea’s message of impending discipline upon Israel in the 8th Century B.C., the book of Hosea contains several references to the fact that Israel would not be destroyed forever (e.g. 1:10-11; 2:21-23; 14:1-9). Paul is very aware of this sub-theme in the book of Hosea and it causes him to reassure his readers that Israel has a future even though God has temporarily set them aside and Paul’s generation of Jews will soon undergo the fifth cycle of discipline. While Hosea was not anticipating the Church, Paul quotes Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to highlight the irony between what happened to the Jew’s ancestors in the eighth century B.C. and what was happening to Israel in Paul’s day.

Paul continues his argument in verses 27-29 by quoting from Isaiah. These passages in Isaiah affirm Israel’s continuance and future. God was not permanently casting Israel aside. A remnant of Israel will continue to exist until God can use that remnant in establishing the Messianic kingdom (9:27). God is faithful to His promises to Israel which will one day be fulfilled in the Messianic kingdom. Paul continues this subject in chapter 11.

Romans 9:30-33 – The Present Condition of Israel

In the next sections of chapters 9 and 10, Paul discusses the present condition of Israel before continuing the subject of Israel’s guaranteed future in chapter 11. The present condition of Israel is summarized very clearly by Paul in **9:30-33**. Israel was attempting to maintain and attain good standing with God by its works of righteousness even while rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, even the righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. AS it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.

