

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 9:6-13

Study Notes

Paul's first question in this passage: *"Has God's promise failed?"*

Paul's preliminary answer: "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'"

Paul's point: Physicality alone didn't make one a true Israelite. It wasn't only about birthrights.

Two Israels: One formed by birth. Another -- the true Israel -- those whose hearts actually belong to God.

- **Isaac and Ishmael: An Example of True Israel**

"Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'"

In the same way that not all who are descended from Israel are Israel, not all who descended from Abraham are *Abraham's* true offspring.

Genesis 21: Ishmael mocks Isaac. The results: 1. Sarah demands that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. 2. Abraham is reluctant to comply with her demand.

God's statement: "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because

it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." -- Genesis 21:12

The coming nations will be counted through Isaac, not Ishmael.

- **Tying It Together With Romans 9:**

Who are God's Old Testament children? They are the descendants of Abraham. They have been designated as Abraham's offspring.

Paul's further explanation: Romans 9:8-9:

"In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

A Separation Of Family Lines:

- Abraham's true descendants are those who came through Isaac, because he was the "child of promise".
- Ismael's family are known as the "the natural children", or as some versions put it, "the children of the flesh". Ishmael was the natural product of a natural process.

In Abraham and Sarah's case, God regenerated the biological components to make conception possible.

God's words to Abraham when he appeared to him at the tent in Mamre, near Hebron: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." Sarah is the conduit through which the original promise is to come – not Hagar.

Two sons came from Abraham: One was a natural byproduct of Abraham and Hagar. The other was the appointed, promised son.

- **Jacob And Esau: A Second Supporting Illustration:**

Verses 10-13: “Not only that, but Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

- **Two Nations – Two Sons: Jacob and Esau**

If you know the story ... when Rebekah was carrying twins, she felt the babies “jostling” each other. When Rebekah asked God for insight, this is what he said to her:

“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.” -- Genesis 25:23

In His sovereignty, God chose Isaac to carry the promise, but not Ishmael. Now, God chooses Jacob to carry the promise, but not Esau. Paul simply tells us that God did this “in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls...”

What does Paul mean by, “not by works, but by him who calls?”

Paul is telegraphing his later argument, built upon what he has previously told us. If God had followed the strict genetic markers, Esau would have received the bulk of the inheritance, and he would have become the head of Abraham’s family.

Esau might have been born first, but God had already determined that the family line would be carried through Jacob. He said, “The elder will serve the younger.”

Paul is telegraphing his future argument: Not all of Israel are Israel. The one who didn’t qualify as the firstborn eventually received all the

inheritance of the firstborn. Paul says, “not by works, but by him who calls?”

- **Salvation by Grace:** Those who were not Israelites genetically became the sons and daughters of God. Those who did not qualify to be the “chosen people” became part of the family. It was not by the works of the Law – but by God’s decision.

Wrapping up this second illustration: Paul quotes two Old Testament Scriptures that come from different books. The first is from Genesis 25, while the second is from Malachi 1.

Genesis 25: “*The older will serve the younger*”. Malachi 1:1: “*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.*”

Three possibilities: 1. The reference is pointed more at Esau’s family line, the Edomites. They have a rather ignoble history throughout the Old Testament. 2. The phrase can be translated as “I chose Jacob and rejected Esau.” 3. A Hebrew antithesis – a strong declaration of preference.

A parallel in Jesus’ teaching: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. -- Luke 14:26

In the case of Jacob and Esau, God decided that Jacob would carry Abraham’s promise, not Esau. In that sense, the Israelites were God’s people, not the Edomites.

- **Paul’s overarching argument:**

The story of Isaac and Ishmael, as well as the story of Jacob and Esau confirm the same thing: “God’s purpose according to election.”

In that sense, God’s promise did not fail. Instead, it was accomplished in what we can call the Israel within Israel.

Next Time: Paul’s second question: “*Is God unjust?*”