

Has God's Prophetic Word Failed?

Romans 9:1-13

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Introduction: Now....if I told you that God makes promises to His people in Scripture, would you believe that? What if I told you that God is so powerful and faithful that you can absolutely trust Him to keep the promises He makes? Would you believe that? Suppose I told you that the keeping of God's promises to you was not dependent on your strength or goodness, but on God's power, grace and kindness? Would you believe that? Sure...because we have just spent 8 chapters in Romans listening to God tell us those very things.

Romans 5:6-8 ⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Now...imagine with me for a moment that you are a Jew living in Rome at the time Paul wrote this Scripture. You know the promises that God has made to Israel and have come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, but you wonder... how is it possible that Israel has not believed in Him? Has God rejected Israel? After all the centuries of graciously protecting and preserving her, has He abandoned His promises to her just as her Messiah appears? Promises like:

Isaiah 59:20-21 ²⁰ "A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the LORD. ²¹ "As for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the LORD, "from now and forever."

Zechariah 8:3-8 ³ "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain.'⁴ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. ⁵ 'And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.'⁶ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?' declares the LORD of hosts. ⁷ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; ⁸ and I will bring them *back* and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.'

But Israel has seen Her Messiah and has not received Him. In fact she is occupied by Roman troops as Paul writes. In a few years she will be scattered to the four winds.

John 1:11 ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

Paul has been preaching the Gospel for some time when he writes Romans. Jewish believers had many questions about it... as do we still. Questions like:

- Has God replaced His love for Israel with love for Gentile believers? [1-5]
- Has God revoked or cancelled His promises to Israel? [6]
- If Israel is still loved and chosen why do she and her leaders reject Their Savior? [7-13]

Romans 9:1-13 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. ⁶ But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. ⁹ For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." ¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹ for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." ¹³ Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

Paul uses the literary device of arguing with his questioners as he writes the next three chapters. He starts with two vital revelations.

- How God still feels about Israel and her unbelief [9:1-5]
- God's Eternal, Sovereign plan for her Redemption [9:6-13]

How God still feels about Israel and her unbelief [9:1-5]

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit [1]: 'TRUTH, I SAY...IN CHRIST!' Would that get your attention? Well that is exactly how Paul begins in Greek. In koine the most important word goes to the front of the sentence. Paul, under inspiration is stressing two vital things. What he is about to say is true and he is speaking to them in union with Christ. This is more, as we will see than Paul's personal feelings about Israel.

Truth is that which corresponds to reality. That is not today's definition. Today it means what you personally like to think about something. Funny that we do not use this definition in the world of engineering or physics. It does not matter what you prefer to think about the acceleration of gravity or centrifugal force. They act the same anyway. This is also true of God's laws and principles.

In Christ is a reference to Paul's union with Christ. God the Spirit has placed us into life giving union with Christ. This is how we become sons of God. It is how we get eternal life. Only God is eternal so for you and me to have eternal life means we are in union with Jesus. He says...."I am in the very presence of Christ...in union with Him as I say this. Who would knowingly lie with Christ right there?" So He asserts....

I am not lying: This is the second witness. He says I'm telling the truth and I AM NOT LYING!

My conscience testifies with me: The third witness is his own conscience. He claims that in the presence of Christ, who knows all things that what he is about to say is true and not a lie.

In the Holy Spirit: Finally he brings in another member of the Trinity to testify. There are three reasons to believe what Paul is about to say. It is the Truth! Christ is witnessing him say it! His conscience is clear about what he is about to say and The Holy Spirit is also present as he speaks. This is Paul's testimony to the Corinthians concerning his [Paul's] writing under inspiration.

1 Corinthians 2:12 ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

That I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. [2]: This is not just Paul speaking. He says it with the testimony of the Holy Spirit. We also already know that it is how Jesus felt about Israel and this is the point here. This is not Paul asserts, just my ramblings. It is how God feels too.

Matthew 23:37-39 ³⁷ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a **hen** gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ³⁹ "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh [3]: Now...Christ actually did this. Paul wished he could do it, but Jesus actually did do it.

Galatians 3:13 ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "

Of course Paul would never be able to be cursed on behalf of Israel because he was part of Israel and a son of Adam. Christ died for Paul also, but Paul is reflecting the desires of Christ toward Israel. He says that Christ, his conscience, and the Holy Spirit all affirm that he is telling us his heart's desire toward Israel.

Who are Israelites [4a]: Paul's kinsman are the descendants of Israel.

To whom belongs the adoption as sons [4b]: Even though the term adoption is not used of Israel in the OT the idea is certainly there.

Exodus 4:22-23 ²² "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. ²³ "So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me';

Hosea 1:10 ¹⁰ Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And in the place Where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "*You are* the sons of the living God."

And the glory and the covenants [4c]: Paul continues to identify his kinsman, as those given the glorious privilege of receiving the covenants and the Law. Some of those are:

Genesis 17:1-2 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. ² "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly."

Exodus 24:8 ⁸ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Psalms 132:12 ¹² "If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I will teach them, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forever."

The giving of the Law [4d]: Only one people ever received the Law of God. It made them unique among all the peoples of the earth. God told them who He was and what He required. It was an awesome privilege and an amazing advantage.

Romans 3:1-2 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

And the temple service [4e]: The officially sanctioned and directed worship of the living God of creation was given exclusively to Israel. They could have confidence that they were doing exactly what God wanted them to do.

And the promises, [4f]: There were many. We read just a smattering earlier.

Whose are the fathers [5a]: These were the great men of faith. The Patriarchs [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob] were all kinsmen of Paul.

And from whom is the Christ according to the flesh [5b]: The most amazing was the promise of a Messiah who would save the entire world. HE would enter the world through Israel. . The hatred of Israel is traceable to this fact. Satan has always tried to destroy her because he knew God was sending His Only Son to redeemed the world through Israel.

Who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. [5c]: It is Christ who is over all and who is God. It is He who is blessed forever. The ESV and the NIV capture the idea more precisely;

Romans 9:5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Paul like Jesus, was constantly hated and persecuted by the Jews, but still loves them and would lay down his life for theirs. Paul...who is accused of hating the Law of God and overthrowing the Old Testament is willing to be accursed for the sake of Israel. His heart toward Israel is vital to understanding these chapters. He is not anti-Israel! Nor is he mindlessly pro-Israel as some today are.

God's Eternal, Sovereign plan for her Redemption [9:6-13]

But it is not as though the word of God has failed [6a]: The word "failed" means fall away or become inefficient. Here is just one such word from God. After God unilaterally established The New Covenant with Israel He said this to them.

Jeremiah 31:35-37 ³⁵ Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: ³⁶ "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever." ³⁷ Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD.

For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel [6b]: The Word of God toward Israel has not failed. But clearly they do not believe. They did not receive...as a nation....their Messiah. Their leaders actually so hated their God's Son that they brutally murdered Him. What is going on here?

Being a Jew can't save you. Salvation is a gift of God through faith in Christ, not a gift of Abraham through Jewish birth. God has never accepted genealogy for salvation. It proves that Jesus is the Christ but nothing else. Just being born Jewish does not make you an heir to the promises of salvation. Salvation is reckoned through Christ, by faith...just like with Abraham. In other words, Paul is about to show that ancestry has zero value for salvation. This is not the first time he has made this argument.

Romans 3:1-4 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

"If descent from Abraham was what mattered, then the Ishmaelites and Edom were in the same position as Israel. But Israel was not ethnic Israel. Whatever might happen to ethnic Israel, the promise to Israel stood; The falling away of some who were not true Israelites, had no bearing on the issue. Israel is not a term like Mammon, Moab, Greece or Rome. Israel cannot be defined in terms of Physical descent, or understood simply on

the human side. It is created not by blood and soil, but by the promise of God and therefore exists within the limits of God's freedom. If he were bound by physical descent, he would be unfree, and no longer God." *Leon Morris*

Nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." [7]: Taking this argument a little further Scripture argues that coming from Abraham does not make you an Israelite. Palestinians and Arabs like to point out that they too are children of Abraham and therefore heirs of the land of Israel, but God has never agreed with that.

Genesis 21:12-13 ¹² But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for **through Isaac** your descendants shall be named. ¹³ "And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant."

The Messiah, God the Son would enter humanity through the human lineage of Isaac. Jesus is that promise and the legitimate descendant [humanly] of Abraham. It is in this way that all believers are sons of Abraham and not because God has transferred His affection from Israel to the church.

Galatians 3:29 ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 4:28 ²⁸ And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. [8]: This is not a repudiation of the status of Israel. It means the same thing that Jesus said to Nicodemus.

John 3:6-7 ⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' It tracks with the Gospel message of Romans. "It is not who you are or what you do that saves. It is who Christ is and what He does that saves.

For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." [9]: Paul goes right back to the origin of the promise to explain that God was in charge of the plan of redemption from the very beginning. God had **promised** a son to Sarah. She in her impatience had sought to help, but...God comes back and insists that He is in charge of every detail of redemption.

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac [10]: For those who still want to make it about physical ancestry, God goes a step further. Rebekah had two children conceived at the same time by Abraham and God chose one and not the other. They were both children of Isaac but God is directing redemption and not mankind. We want to do it soooooo....bad, but it is Him alone who made the promise and made certain it would come about.

For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad [11a]: And it had nothing to do with their behavior. Just like your salvation has nothing to do with your behavior. Like the twins....God set his affection on you before you were

born and Christ died for your sins...before you were born. It is His love and mercy and grace that saved you and not anything you are or ever did. Likewise you will not be lost because of anything you may do. Believing Israel was not chosen because of anything they did. They are not rejected because of anything they did.

Now if you think this is unjust then you are playing right into Satan's trap. What is unjust is that you and I should be saved. It is unjust that you should not pay for your sins with eternal death in hell. NOT the other way around! ALL men are born in rebellion to God and they live that way. Justice would condemn us all, but Christ in mercy and grace saved you. This is the gospel of grace. Don't let Satan steal its Joy and quench your love for Christ. Rejoice in your sonship...your adoption as sons.

So that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand [11b]: The twins illustrate this perfectly. God chose to have mercy on one rebellious and hateful sinner and let the other one do what he perfectly well wanted to do. It is not God's doing that Esau despised his birthright and God, who gave it to him. It is however entirely God's doing that the other brother, who was a conniving, sneaking liar and cheat was forgiven and saved by God. It is God's purpose that stands and never man's!

Not because of works but because of Him who calls [11c]: Again...It is the call of God that trumps all other considerations. Israel was not God's chosen because she was worthy. How can she be rejected because she is unworthy? Were you worthy when you were called to the Cross? Are you even worthy now? Are our children worthy of our love and steadfast commitment? You know the answer!

It was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." [12]: This is best understood as speaking of the people of Jacob and the Esau rather than the two men themselves. Again...this is God's choice not man's culture or custom. God is free to act as God and He does. He is Sovereign!

Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." [13]: This is puzzling to us westerners because it seems so unlike our idea of God. Scripture makes it clear that God did not pick Jacob over Esau because of anything either of them did. It was a sovereign choice made because God is sovereign and He alone rules creation. He planned redemption and carried it out. Esau and Jacob stand for the peoples that came from them. God hated the Idolatry and law breaking that characterized the people of Esau while He loved the people through whom He was sending His only Son.

CONCLUSION: God's Word toward Israel still stands! It has Not Failed! [6] The reason for the confusion, Paul explains is that Israel does not just mean anyone who descends from Abraham. It does not even mean anyone who descends from Isaac who was the legitimate child. If that were true then Esau would be an Israelite and he absolutely isn't. In fact there is clearly a spiritual element to Israel and it has to do directly with Christ.

Romans 9:8 ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

To be a child of God is to be a child of the promise and that Promise is Christ Jesus. He entered the world through Israel. He was the child of promise that came exactly as God intended Him to come to humanity.

Paul is not setting up a dynamic between Israel and the Church here. It is between belief and unbelief. Between faith and works. Between God's gracious saving of men and man's arrogant trust in himself. Just like there are saved and unsaved gentiles there has always been saved and unsaved Israel. Elijah complained about it to God saying...

Romans 11:3-4 ³ "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT **BOWED THE KNEE** TO BAAL."

God has always saved men the same way. By Sovereign Grace. The fact that the vast majority of Israel is presently in unbelief is no obstacle to God keeping His Word toward them. Trust God's Word to be true and don't feel the need to explain it or spiritualize it away. In the verses ahead God will give us even more understanding, but know this...God can change this ratio of belief to unbelief as easily as He brought you and me to faith. He says He has ever intention to do so. You should believe Him because just like He did for His church He intends to call His chosen ones to repentance and salvation. How will He ever manage it? By a mighty display of His Sovereign Grace to save the hopeless and helpless.

Zechariah 12:9-10 ⁹ And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. ¹⁰ "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have **pierced**, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.