



Romans 9:6-13 (ESV)

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Romans 9:6-13 (HCSB)

God’s Gracious Election of Israel

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants.^[a] On the contrary, your offspring will be traced^[b] through Isaac.^[c] ⁸ That is, it is not the children by physical descent^[d] who are God’s children, but the children of the promise are considered to be the offspring. ⁹ For this is the statement of the promise: At this time I will come, and Sarah will have a son.^[e] ¹⁰ And not only that, but also Rebekah received a promise when she became pregnant^[f] by one man, our ancestor Isaac. ¹¹ For though her sons had not been born yet or done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to election might stand— ¹² not from works but from the One who calls—she was told: The older will serve the younger.^[g] ¹³ As it is written: I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.^[h]

English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Romans 9:6-13

9:6-7 Even though many Jews have failed to believe, God’s promise to them has not failed, for there was never a promise that every Jewish person would be saved. It was never the case that all the physical **children of Abraham** were truly part of the people of God, for [Gen. 21:12](#) teaches that the line of promise is traced **through Isaac**, not Ishmael.

9:8 The words **children of God** show that Paul is thinking of salvation (see [8:16](#)), and hence he is not thinking merely of physical blessings given to Israel.

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 9".

9:9-10 The promise ([Gen. 18:10, 14](#)) was not given to Hagar ([Genesis 16](#)) but was specifically given to Sarah and her offspring. The birth of Esau and Jacob is further evidence that God did not promise that every person of Jewish descent would be saved, for they had the same father and mother and were even twins, and yet God chose Jacob and not Esau.

9:11 God did not choose Jacob on the basis of anything in Jacob or Esau’s life but to achieve the fulfillment of **God’s purpose of election**. Christians can be assured, therefore, that God’s promise will be fulfilled because it depends solely upon his will. The contrast between **works** and calling shows that salvation is in view, not merely the historical destiny of Israel as a nation. For the OT background on “election,” see [Gen. 18:10](#); [Ex. 33:19](#); [Mal. 1:2](#). See also [Eph. 1:3-6](#).

9:12 The promise given to Rebekah ([Gen. 25:23](#)) was that God had chosen the **younger** Jacob over the **older** Esau. One of the themes in [Romans 9-11](#) is that God works in surprising ways, so that no one can ever presume upon his grace.

9:13 The citation of [Mal. 1:2-3](#) also shows that God set his saving love on Jacob and rejected (**hated**) Esau. “Hated” is startling, but as a sinner Esau did not deserve to be chosen by God, who remains just in not choosing everyone. The salvation of anyone at all comes only from God’s mercy.

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*² *Romans 9:6-13*

9:6 It is a basic misunderstanding of the OT promises to think that all who were in the nation of Israel were guaranteed to receive God's spiritual blessings. Paul provides examples in the following verses.

9:7 Abraham had children by Hagar and Keturah, but the promised line was through Sarah's son **Isaac**.

sperma

Greek Pronunciation	[SPUHR mah]
HCSB Translation	descendant, seed
Uses in Romans	9
Uses in the NT	43
Focus passage	Romans 9:7-8

The English word *sperm* comes directly from the Greek noun *sperma*, meaning *seed*. The term was often used for the *seeds* of plants ([Mt 13:24-38](#); [Mk 4:31](#)) and sometimes even of animals (referring to reproduction as in

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 9".

humans). The term *sperma* could refer figuratively to origin but refers more often to *descendants* or *offspring*. Paul develops the *descendant/offspring* meaning along three main lines.

(1) Jesus the Messiah came from the promised *sperma* or family line ([Rm 1:3](#); [2Tim 2:8](#); see [Gal 3:16,19](#); cp. [Jn 8:33](#); [Ac 13:23](#)).

(2) Those who are the *sperma* or *descendants* of Abraham by physical descent, that is, the Hebrew race ([Rm 9:7,29](#) [translated "*descendants*"]; [11:1](#)).

(3) Those who are the *sperma* or *descendants* of Abraham by faith, that is, believers in Christ ([Rm 4:13,16,18](#); [9:7-8](#) [translated "*seed*"]; [Gal 3:29](#)). Through these various uses of *sperma*, Paul indicated that actual physical descent from Abraham is neither necessary nor sufficient for salvation; faith in Christ alone brings a person into God's family.

9:8-9 Ishmael was a physical son of Abraham, but Isaac was the **physical** son with the spiritual promises.

9:10-11 The case is clearer with **Rebekah** because she had twins. God's choice of the younger twin before their birth showed His gracious **election** and indicated again that God's blessings are His to hand out and that they were not an automatic birthright of all ethnic Jews; see note at [verse 6](#).

9:12-13 The divine purpose was revealed from the beginning of the Hebrew nation when God chose one twin over the other. The prophet Malachi traced God's differing treatment of two nations to this divine choice ([Mal 1:1-5](#)). Both nations were punished for their sins, but only one received grace. **I have loved Jacob** means God chose or elected his descendants (the nation of Israel), whereas **I have hated Esau** means that God rejected the nation that stemmed from him (Edom).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Romans 9:6-13

9:6 God's word in the form of beautiful covenant promises came to Abraham. Covenant people, the true children of Abraham, are not just his biological descendants. They are all those who trust in God and in what Jesus Christ has done for them (see also [2:29](#); [Galatians 3:7](#)).

9:11 The Jews were proud of the fact that their lineage came from Isaac, whose mother was Sarah (Abraham's legitimate wife), rather than Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar (Sarah's servant). Paul asserts that no one can claim to be chosen by God because of his or her heritage or good deeds. God freely chooses to save whomever he wills. The doctrine of election teaches that it is God's sovereign choice to save us by his goodness and mercy, not by our own merit.

9:12-14 Was it right for God to choose Jacob, the younger, to be over Esau? In [Malachi 1:2, 3](#), the statement "This is how I showed my love for you: I loved your ancestor Jacob, but I rejected his brother Esau" refers to the nations of Israel and Edom rather than to the individual brothers. God chose Jacob to continue the family line of the faithful because he knew his heart was for God. But he did not exclude Esau from knowing and loving him. Keep in mind the kind of God we worship: He is sovereign; he is not arbitrary; in all things he works for our good; he is trustworthy; he will save all who believe in him.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1910.

When we understand these qualities of God, we know that his choices are good even if we don't understand all his reasons.

Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary⁴ *Romans 9:6-13*

9:6 The Jewish nation as a whole did not respond to the gospel, even though God's gifts had made them better prepared than any other nation to receive Christ. On the surface, it might seem that God has **failed to fulfill his promise to the Jews**. But that is not the case: Human beings failed. Earlier in this letter, Paul clarified that **not everyone born into a Jewish family is truly a Jew**—that is, not all Jews are part of spiritual Israel (see [2:28-29](#); [11:5-6](#); [Galatians 3:7-9](#)). Israel's history demonstrates that God was fulfilling his promises, apart from human failures and misunderstandings. Paul illustrates this from three Old Testament events: (1) [verses 7-9](#), the lineage passing from Abraham to Isaac, rather than Ishmael (see [Genesis 16-21](#)); (2) [verses 10-16](#), the lineage passing from Isaac to Jacob, rather than Esau (see [Genesis 25-28](#)); (3) [verses 17-18](#), the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (see [Exodus 7-12](#)).

9:7-9 Paul's first illustration of God's sovereign choice is **Abraham** and his children. Just being Abraham's physical descendants did not guarantee an inheritance. The line of natural descent was not the same as the line of promise. Abraham had children by three different women (Isaac, by Sarah—see [Genesis 21:1-7](#); Ishmael, by Hagar—see [Genesis 16](#); and six sons by Keturah—see [Genesis 25:1-4](#)). But God made it clear that **Isaac** was the **son** through whom Abraham's **descendants will be counted**. God made a sovereign choice regarding who among Abraham's physical descendants would carry the line of promise, the line that would result in the Messiah. God did not choose Isaac because he was better than his half brothers; the choice was made before Isaac was even born. Instead, it was simply God's sovereign choice. Therefore, **Abraham's physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. It is the children of the promise who are considered to be Abraham's children.**

God's sovereignty, not people's works or character, is the basis for election. The Jews were proud of the fact that their lineage came from Isaac, whose mother was Sarah (Abraham's legitimate wife), rather than from Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar (Sarah's maidservant). Paul asserts that no one can claim to be chosen by God because of his or her heritage or good deeds. God freely chooses to save whomever he wills. The doctrine of election teaches that it is God's sovereign choice to save us by his goodness and mercy, and not by our own merit.

9:10-12 Paul's second illustration of God's sovereign choice focuses on **Isaac** and **Rebekah's** twin sons, Jacob and Esau. God chose to continue the line of blessing through the **younger son**, Jacob, rather than Esau ([Genesis 25:23](#)). This was quite unusual in the Hebrew culture, where the firstborn son was highly honored. In Abraham's case, Isaac and Ishmael were sons of different women—each was a firstborn, so a choice had to be made. But Isaac and Rebekah were the parents of children over whom God had a sovereign purpose. Again, this had nothing to do with either son's character, because the choice had already been made. Jacob's future conduct does not even enter into the discussion because it was unrelated to God's choice.

Was it right for God to choose Jacob, the younger, over Esau? God chose Jacob to continue the family line of the faithful because he knew that Jacob was teachable. But he did not exclude Esau from knowing and loving him. We must remember what God is like: he is sovereign; he is not arbitrary; in all things he works for our good; he is trustworthy; he will save all who believe in him. When we

4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 611-612.

understand these qualities of God, we will know that his choices are good even if we don't understand all his reasons.

9:13 The words **“I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau,”** refer to the nations of Israel and Edom rather than to the individual brothers (see [Malachi 1:2-3](#)). God chose Jacob to continue the family line of the faithful. God did not exclude Esau from knowing and loving him. God was not rejecting Esau's eternal salvation; he was choosing Jacob to lead the nation.

Paul answers the concern voiced in [verse 6](#) and shows that God's word has not failed. The Jews have simply misunderstood it. They missed the truth that God's election never has anything to do with works of the law, rituals, even family or community ties. They misunderstood their own election as God's people. They settled on enjoying the benefits of God's promises, rather than fulfilling their role as emissaries for sharing God's promises with the world. While we enjoy the gracious benefits of our salvation, we must not ignore the others whom God wants to reach through us.

Study and Discussion Questions

For Sept 19 – 26 (3 weeks)



God's Sovereign Choice - [Romans 9:1-29](#)

Topics: [Blessing](#), [Burdens](#), [Justice](#), [Opportunities](#), [Rejection](#), [Sovereignty](#)

Open It

1. When have you felt that you were judged unfairly in a contest?
2. *How do you react when someone brags that God is on his or her side?

Explore It

3. What strong emotion was Paul feeling? ([9:2](#))
4. What situation made Paul feel sad and anguished? ([9:2-3](#))
5. How far was Paul willing to go for his fellow Jews? ([9:3](#))
6. What gifts and opportunities had God given to the Jewish people? ([9:4-5](#))
7. How did Paul explain the difference between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe? ([9:6-8](#))
8. Whom did God bless as the parents of the nation of Israel? ([9:7-9](#))
9. *What did Paul say to people who claim to be children of God merely because they are descendants of Abraham? ([9:8-9](#))
10. Who were the children of Isaac and Rebekah? ([9:10-13](#))
11. What decision did God make about Jacob and Esau before they were born? ([9:12-13](#))
12. *How did Paul defend the accusation that God is unjust in His treatment of people? ([9:14-15](#))
13. *What determines how God bestows favor on people? ([9:16](#))
14. What examples from history did Paul use to demonstrate God's choice of blessing? ([9:17-18](#))
15. What right do we have to question God? ([9:19-21](#))
16. Why does God show great patience with us even though we deserve His wrath? ([9:22-24](#))
17. What did the prophets Isaiah and Hosea tell us about God's patience and justice? ([9:25-29](#))

Get It

18. What burdens do you carry for friends or relatives who do not know Christ?
19. *How could a person come from a very religious background and still not have a personal faith in God?
20. In what ways do people depend on a religious heritage for their salvation?
21. What's wrong with depending on a religious background or heritage for favor with God?
22. What sacrifices would you be willing to make to give others a chance to know Christ?
23. Why do we tend to question God's actions toward us or anyone else?
24. According to this passage, why are Jewish people often resistant to the message of peace with God through Jesus Christ?
25. What does this passage teach us about God's character?
26. What implications does Paul's burden for Israel have for our lives today?
27. *On what basis does God choose people to inherit His promises?
28. How have you experienced God's mercy and patience in your life?

Apply It

29. *What sacrifices or efforts can you make this week to help a friend come to faith in Christ?
30. When can you take time this week to thank God for His acts of mercy and love to you?