

Exegetical Analysis – Romans 9:1-13

1-2 – 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. (1. Άλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι, συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεως μου ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ, 2 ὅτι λύπη μοι ἔστιν μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος ὁδύνη τῇ καρδίᾳ μου)

The previous context of chapter 8 was a discussion on soteriology and the elect. We now encounter Paul in chapter 9 in great anguish over his fellow kinsmen. Why is Paul in such great anguish? Why are his fellow kinsmen rejecting their Messiah? Paul has such unceasing grief and sorrow in his heart because he watches as his kinsmen deny Messiah continually. His desire is that they come to know the Lord as he has:

Romans 10:1 NASB

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

3-5 – 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. (3. ήγε μην γάρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγώ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα, 4. οἵτινες εἰσὶν Ἰσραὴλιται, ὃν ἡ ψιλοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ διαθῆκα καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ ἡ ἐπαγγελία, 5. ὃν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὃν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὃ ὡν ἐπὶ πάντων θεός εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν)

Paul makes a stark comment in [v.3]. He would rather be accursed [or to trade places with his brethren] who are in accordance to the flesh here. This is how deep the grief has gone.

John Gill Commentary — "according to the flesh", to distinguish them from his spiritual brethren and relations; for though they were brethren in a national sense, they were not all so in a spiritual relation

Paul views his kinsmen according to the flesh or unbelieving Israelites as being 'accursed' or literally 'cut off'.

John 12:39-40 NASB

For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, [40] "He HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE hardened THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM."

Romans 11:7-8 NASB

What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; [8] just as it is written, "God GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."

We see that these kinsmen have been given a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not. It is God who has blinded the Israelites from seeing the truth. From the Israelites came the covenants, the giving of the law, the adoption as sons, the temple services, and the promises [v.4-5] At this point the obvious question would arise. Why has Israel through whom the promises, the covenants, the law have come to reject their Messiah? It doesn't make any sense, nor does it make sense that the Gentiles are now flocking to the Messiah when they were not the privileged people. Paul is going to unpack this over the next few chapters (9-11), but Paul will initially explain why the Jews are not responding to their Messiah.

6 – But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel. (6 Οὐχ οἷον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. οὐ γάρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ)

Paul's immediate reaction is to clear up the notion that the reason for their unbelief is because the Word of God or the

Promises made to them have failed. This response is automatic from the text. The failure really lies in the inability for his audience to understand the promises and how they ought to be fulfilled [v.6a]. The kinsmen according to the flesh were mistaken in thinking that just because they participated in the blessings and promises that this somehow made them right with God. The Jews thought that by having "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" as their Fathers that they were in good relation with God:

Matthew 3:8-9 NASB

Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; [9] and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

John 8:33-34,37-39 NASB

They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" [34] Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. [37] I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. [38] I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father." [39] They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

The point that is being made is that it is not enough to have these Fathers by virtue of physical descent. What follows [v.6b-13] must be answer the implied question directed by Paul. Why has Israel rejected their Messiah? In [v.6b] Paul says something radical to any listening Jew. Not everyone who physically descended from Jacob is an Israelite. Paul destroys the notion that just because you're an Israelite by descent doesn't make you a true Israelite.

7 – nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." (7. οὐδέ τι είσιν σπέρμα Ἀβραὰμ πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ' ἐν Ισαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα)

Paul continues addressing the statement in Romans 9:7 and goes back two generations to Abraham to show what he means in [v.6]. The question implied from [v.6] is how are you a descendent but not a descendent? Paul is going to demonstrate what he means in [v.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. (8. τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογιζεται εἰς σπέρμα)

Immediately one would note the "That is" at the start of the verse which means this verse is going to clarify [v.6-7]. Paul is going to demonstrate the difference between a an offspring in the spiritual sense and an offspring in the physical sense. Paul earlier in his letter identified what true saving faith looked like in Abraham and his spiritual offspring.

Romans 2:28-29 NASB

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. [29] But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Similar language was used of Paul in Romans 2:28-29 when explaining the outwardly or physical aspect of being a Jew. Paul is expounding upon the nature of the physical circumcision and the spiritual circumcision of the heart [regeneration]. A true Jew is one who is circumcized inwardly of the heart by the Spirit.

Galatians 3:29 NASB

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

Galatians 4:28 NASB

[28] And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

There is no mistaking it, to be apart of true Israel or the Spiritual Israel one must be a child of promise. These passages clearly indicate that to be a true descendent of Abraham one must "belong to Christ" [Gal 3:29]. In order to belong to

Christ one be must saved.

Romans 8:9 NASB

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Ephesians 1:4-6,11-14 NASB

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love [5] He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, [6] to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. [11] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, [12] to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. [13] In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, [14] who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

NOTE: This doesn't mean that the Gentile becomes an Israelite, it simply means that the Gentiles become partakers as the unnatural branches grafted into the promises of God [Romans 11, Ephesians 2].

The argument Paul is making from vs.1-13 is strictly Jewish and Gentile inclusion should not be brought into the passage at this point. Next, there is an important distinction made re: the children of flesh and the children of promise. There is a contrast between physical offspring of Jacob (National Israel) and spiritual offspring of Jacob (the remnant). Paul is now going to tie all this into [vs.9].

9 – For this is the word of promise: "At THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." (9. ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὗτος· κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐλεύσομαι καὶ ἔσται τῇ Σάρρᾳ υἱός)

What's important to note immediately is that the verse starts with a "For" which means this is tying together [vs.7-8]. The word of promise here is the promise that was given to Abraham, it was a physical descendent that was promised [Ishmael] but rather a spiritual/true descendent [Isaac].

Galatians 4:21-31 NASB

Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? [22] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. [23] But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. [24] This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. [25] Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. [26] But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. [27] For it is written, "Rejoice, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." [28] And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. [29] But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. [30] But what does the Scripture say? "Cast OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR the SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." [31] So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

It is important to see the contrast here.

Two Women: Hagar & Sarah

Two Covenants: Physical & Spiritual

Two Sons: Ishmael & Isaac

Two Lands: Physical Jerusalem & Jerusalem Above

Two Positions: Slave & Free

Two Births: Flesh & Spirit

This is important to understanding Romans 9. Hagar as the bondwoman gave birth to Abraham's physical offspring Ishmael as a result of the flesh or can be noted according to works. These two can be compared to the covenant established at Mt. Sinai which is physical Jerusalem and her kingdom.

Sarah on the other hand represents the free woman and not the bondwoman who gave birth to Abraham's spiritual offspring Isaac as a result of the promise of God, which was in accordance to the Spirit. Sarah and Isaac represent the Spiritual covenant and Spiritual Kingdom which is represented by the Jerusalem up above. Sarah and Isaac represent a "type" a shadow of regeneration, and spiritual birth. Remember that God has to intervene for Sarah as she is well passed the age to be barren. In order for Sarah to give birth to her son (Isaac) she needed to have her womb regenerated. Thus resulting in a physical + spiritual descendent, which is contrasted against Abraham's attempted works to bring about the child of promise with Hagar on his own.

Ishmael represents: Unbelieving Israel, born according to the flesh, the present Jerusalem.

Isaac represents: Believing Israel, born according to the Spirit, the Jerusalem above.

↑ These two distinctions of individuals are the key to moving into the next section.

10 – And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac (10. Οὐ μόνον δὲ, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ῥεβέκκα ἐξ ἐνός κοιτήν ἔχουσα Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ πατρός ἡμῶν)

"And not only this" connects us back to [vs.9] so that we see the connective pattern of thoughts. Notice the usage of the term "Our father Isaac". Paul is purposely distinguishing between who are Abraham's children and who are not. Unbelieving Jews cannot call Abraham their "father" which is why Jesus makes a sharp contrast to whom their true father really is in John 8.

John 8:37-38,41-47 NASB

I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. [38] I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father." [41] You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." [42] Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. [43] Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. [44] You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. [45] But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. [46] Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? [47] He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."

Much could be argued at this point as to why Isaac might have been chosen over Ishmael, so Paul uses another example. He brings in the picture of Rebekah who like Sarah also was barren. However, Paul is going to now restrict from this any notion that circumstances, or actions came into play.

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 (11. μήπω γάρ γεννηθέντων μηδὲ πραξάντων τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαῦλον, ἵνα ἡ κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ μένῃ)

God's choosing of Jacob over Esau wasn't based upon anything they did nor because of some foreseen faith, but rather that God's choice of election would stand. Thus the entire argument is built at an individualistic level. Paul usage of words in [v.11] demonstrate to us that he is speaking in a soteriological manner here.

"God's Purpose"

Romans 8:28 NASB

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Ephesians 1:11 NASB

also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

"Choice"

Romans 11:5 NASB

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.

Romans 11:7 NASB

What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

"Works"

Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; [9] not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Romans 3:20 NASB

because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

"Calls"

Romans 8:28,30 NASB

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. [30] and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

1 Corinthians 1:9 NASB

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The same Greek words are used here in Romans 9, which show us the call for individualistic salvation and not a national argument.

12 – it was said to her, "The OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." (12. οὐκ ἔξ ἔργων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος, ἐρρέθη αὐτῇ ὅτι ὁ μείζων δουλεύσει τῷ ἐλάσσονι)

These two passages quoted in the OT context ARE speaking about nations. There is no doubt that the passages in the OT refer to nations. However, the problem becomes if we jump now to nations rather than individuals the whole passage becomes disconnected. We've been looking at a physical line of descent and a spiritual/true line of descent. It makes no sense to jump to speaking about Nations at this point as it provides no clear understanding to connect to what's been previously said. Yes, understanding the nationalistic perspective is important but Paul's goal is not to stress the importance of the nation's rather the importance of the individuals within the nation. [vs.11-13] clearly demonstrates the act of God's sovereign election.

NOTE: Paul doesn't quote all of Genesis 25:23. If Paul wanted to bring in nations into the argument he could have:

Genesis 25:23 NASB

The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger."

Paul quoted the section which suited his needs and his audience in relation to Romans 9:6 and the true Israel. The focus remains on the doctrine of election and not on the two nations.

13 – Just as it is written, "Jacob I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." (13. καθάπερ γέγραπται· τὸν Ἰακὼβ ἤγάπησα τὸν δὲ Ἐσαῦ ἐμίσησα)

This passage is a clear indication of God's election unto salvation and election into reprobation. God chose Jacob, and rejected Esau. Paul's purpose is not to get us fixated on nations but rather on election.

Romans 9:11 NASB

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,

Jacob was loved by God, because before he was born God demonstrated his love to him. He set his love upon Jacob and not Esau... Because GOD chose to have mercy on Jacob:

Romans 9:14-15 NASB

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! [15] For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

Titus 3:5-7 NASB

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We can now ask and answer the question why has Israel rejected her Messiah? Because God has not elected them unto salvation they have been cut off. God's choice is his individualistic election is what answers the question of Romans 9:1-5 and why Israel is in a state of unbelief. The nationalistic argument (Israel + Edom) doesn't answer the question of why Israel is in a state of unbelief. The children of promise / children of the flesh (election unto salvation, and reprobation) is exactly what is in view here. God chooses whom he desires, he hardens whom he desires, and no nationalistic argument will ever trump the glorious truth of unconditional election.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 NASB

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. [14] It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 1:9 NASB

who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

The whole passage is about individuals. We need to be consistent:

1. Abraham
2. Sarah
3. Pharaoh
4. Moses
5. Vessels of Wrath
6. Vessels of Mercy
7. Rebekah
8. Isaac
9. Children of Promise
10. Children of God
11. Children of Flesh
12. Descendants
13. Twins conceived (Jacob & Esau)