

Romans 9:1-13 – A Calvinistic Dispensational Defence

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. Ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι, συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεως μου ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, 2. ὅτι λύπη μοι ἐστὶν μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος ὀδύνη τῆ καρδία μου)

The previous context (i.e., chapter 8) finished with a celebration (Romans 8:31-39), yet the tone completely shifts in chapter 9.¹ Paul begins this parenthetical section with a lament (cf. 9:1-3). He says that he is *telling the truth in Christ*. This means that “Paul’s conscience will attest to that which his tongue will speak concerning the absolute veracity of the Holy Spirit.”² This message of *truth* has led him to great sorrow and unceasing grief in his heart. Constable says: “Paul’s sorrow and grief over Israel’s condition contrast with his joy and exultation over his own condition (Romans 8:38-39).”³ Douglas Moo provides some excellent clarity for why Paul is stressing the truth of his concern for Israel in verse 2 when he says, “Almost certainly because he knew that his passionate and well-known defense of the law-free Gentile mission had earned him the reputation — in Rome, as elsewhere — of being anti-Jewish. To the Jewish Christians in the church Paul therefore wants to make clear that his focus on the Gentile mission has by no means meant the abandonment of his concern for, and, indeed, plans for, the salvation of their fellow Jews. But he also wants to dispel any notion that he might have joined with the Gentile Christians in Rome in their sinful disdain for the Jewish people (cf. 11:13-24).”⁴

3-5 — For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, [4] who are Israelites, to whom belongs the

¹ “What fills the gap between the end of chap. 8 and the beginning of chap. 12 is Paul’s anguished wrestling with the problem of Israel’s unbelief. Is this section, then, a detour from the main line of Paul’s argument in Romans, an excursus that disrupts the natural flow of the letter? 1 Not at all. Rom. 9-11 is an important and integral part of the letter.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 547. S Lewis Johnson said in his sermon notes, “One might say at this point, “What joy to be a Christian.” But now the apostle says immediately afterwards, “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.” “What sorrow!” “What joy!” In the next breath, “What sorrow!” Why? How is it that the apostle who has expressed such assurance may now suddenly speak of the pain that has come to him? That, of course, is a problem.” <https://slj.institute.net/pauls-epistles/romans/christ-over-all/>

² Woodrow Kroll, *The Book of Romans: Righteousness in Christ*, (Tennessee: AMG Publishers 2002), 154.

³ Constable, Thomas. DD. “Commentary on Romans 9”. “Dr. Constable’s Expository Notes”. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/romans-9.html>. 2012.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 556.

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 God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (3. ηὐχόμεν γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα, 4. οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλιῖται, ὧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι, 5. ὧν οἱ πατέρες, καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὧν ἐπὶ πάντων Θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.)

Paul using the conjunction “for” (γὰρ) points us back to the previous verse. Paul is going to tell us exactly why he has great sorrow and unceasing grief. Paul says that he wishes⁵ he could be *accursed* (ἀνάθεμα – i.e., doomed) and so separated from Christ. Why? For the sake of his brothers, the *kinsmen according to the flesh*—his fellow ethnic/national/territorial Israelites. Paul’s heart here is important and should reflect all Christians toward the Jewish people.⁶ Paul wishes that he could essentially take the place⁷ of his *kinsmen according to the flesh* so that they could believe in the gospel (Rom 1:16). He wishes nothing more than their salvation, as a people group. Yet, his racial brothers and sisters were not believing the gospel message which Paul has been presenting since Romans 1, they were hardened to the truths of the gospel, and this continued to be on display since their rejection of Christ.

Paul goes on to list what he has in common with his *kinsmen according to the flesh*. Paul builds on the privileges that he already outlined for them in Romans 3:1-2 (***“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? 2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”***) Here Paul adds several important facets that are worth looking at:

⁵ “I could wish” introduces a wish that God would not possibly grant (Romans 8:35). Nevertheless it was a sincere wish. Paul had given up many things for the salvation of others (Philippians 3:8). Moses voiced a similar self-sacrificing wish for the Israelites’ salvation (Exodus 32:30-35). Paul’s brethren here were not his spiritual but his racial brothers and sisters. Even though he was “the apostle to the Gentiles” he still took pleasure in being a Jew.” Constable, Thomas. DD. “Commentary on Romans 9”. “Dr. Constable’s Expository Notes”. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/romans-9.html>. 2012.

⁶ “Paul’s prayer that he become *anathema* for the sake of his fellow Jews strikingly demonstrates his love for his own people.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 558.

⁷ “In keeping with this substitutionary concept, the preposition translated “for the sake of” probably includes the connotation “in place of.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 559.

[1] Paul calls his kinsmen *Israelites* (Ἰσραηλιῖται)⁸. Israelites, “connotes the chosen people of God.”⁹ This simple fact cannot be overlooked, the kinsmen according to the flesh are Israelites—i.e., they are Jacob’s descendants, not spiritual offspring of Abraham. The word Israel is applied to Jacob and to his physical offspring (cf. Genesis 32:32; 46:8). To give the word Israel here any other meaning than what has been described above is to do damage to the text.

[2] Paul says that to them [Israelites] *belongs* [ἔσθ]—in the present tense—the *adoption of sons* (cf. Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1-2). To them belongs the *glory*, which is a reference to God’s presence among the Israelites. To them belongs the *covenants*, which includes the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Priestly, Davidic, and New. To them belongs the *giving of the Law*, which refers to the Mosaic Law. To them belongs the *temple service*, which refers to the tabernacle and by extension the later temples under Solomon and Zerubbabel, and the future Ezekielian temple. To this final list is given *the promises*, which guaranteed that God would fulfill what he promised to His people.

This list in vs.4 assures us that all these privileges *belong* to Israel. They were not taken from Israel and given to someone else (cf. Rom 11:28-29). They belonged to Israel in the past when Paul wrote his letter, and they belong to Israel in our present. Why? Shouldn’t their rebellion and hostility assure us that God is done with them as a people? Shouldn’t the promises be given to the Church, the true Israel—as our Covenantalist brothers teach? No. Paul assures us that everything in vs.4-5 belongs to them as a people, because they are tied to the Abrahamic Covenant (royal grant), which is unilateral and unconditional. The entire covenant rests on God’s shoulders, He will bring to pass the covenant promises and blessings even though Jacob’s line has been rebellious throughout its history.

Paul additionally notes in vs. 5 a reference to the *patriarchs*, which will further play into the importance of grounding Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant in Romans 11. The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were given the promises which later began unfolding for the nation of Israel.¹⁰

Paul lastly notes that the Messiah (Jesus) came through the seed of Abraham (cf. Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16). This climax of all the promises was the Messiah. It is interesting to note that Paul does not say that the Messiah *belongs* to them, but rather He came *from* or *through* them. The *kinsmen*

⁸ “Ἰσραηλίτης (T WH Ἰσραηλιτης, Tr only in John 1:47 (48); (see Tdf. Proleg., p. 86, and cf. under the word εἰ, ἰ)), Ἰσραηλιτου, ὁ (Ἰσραήλ, which see), **an Israelite (Hebrew יִשְׂרָאֵלִי; the Sept. Ἰσραηλιτης, 2 Samuel 17:25), one of the race of Israel, a name held in honor** (see Ἰσραήλ): John 1:47 (48); Romans 9:4; Romans 11:1; 2 Corinthians 11:22” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2475.htm>

⁹ Constable, Thomas. DD. “Commentary on Romans 9”. “Dr. Constable’s Expository Notes”. <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/romans-9.html>. 2012.

¹⁰ “Descent from the patriarchs is valuable because God gave promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that were valid both for them and for their descendants.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub., (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 564.

according to the flesh had not come into a real relationship with God's Messiah and the salvation that comes through Him. This is where Paul's grief is climatic. Paul knows that all the promises find their yes/amen through Christ (2 Cor 1:20), so for Israel to see the promises *fulfilled* they must come to Christ, and they must *belong* to Him. Right now, they do not (John 1:11).

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 οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ. οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραήλ, οἷτοι Ἰσραήλ)

After Paul shows of the great privileges that Israelites have received, he makes a bit of a puzzling statement. It appears Paul is anticipating a question or a challenge here: *Paul, if what you are saying is true, why then is Israel rejecting its Messiah and by extension the gospel? Why are they rejecting the word of God? Has the Word of God somehow failed?*¹¹ Paul's response is immediate: *But it is not as though the word of God has failed*—meaning that this is all in accordance with God's sovereign plan. While it might *appear* to his audience that something has gone wrong with God's plan, Paul is going to defend his claim through the doctrine of election. Paul is going to argue in 6b-29 that belonging to the true Israel was always contingent upon God's gracious and sovereign call, and not specifically rooted in an ethnic identity.

It is also important to note that “Paul does not in 9:6ff. argue that the privileges names in 9:4-5 have been forfeited; he is beginning to show in what way they still apply.”¹²

¹¹ “God revealed that He had chosen Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6). The Israelites were to function as priests in the world by bringing the nations to God (cf. Isaiah 42:6). They were to do this by demonstrating through their life in the Holy Land how glorious it can be to live under the government of God. Israel had failed to carry out God's purpose for her thus far and consequently had suffered His discipline. It looked as though the word that God had spoken concerning Israel's purpose had failed. The Greek word translated “failed” (ekpeptoken) means “gone off its course,” like a ship. Paul proceeded to show that God would accomplish His purpose for Israel in the rest of chapters 9-11.” Ibid. Constable, Thomas. DD. “Commentary on Romans 9”. “Dr. Constable's Expository Notes”. <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/eng/dcc/romans-9.html>. 2012. S. Lewis Johnson notes, “But, has God failed? Israel has turned away. Israel has been partner with the Gentiles in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. So do God's promises fail? Is it possible that man's “no” cancels out God's “yes”? Is it possible that man's “no” is stronger than God's “yes”? Is it possible for men to reject unconditional promises from God? That's ultimately a question of biblical interpretation. In fact, that's the ultimate question of theology, “Is it possible that we have a God whose purposes can be overthrown by men, or do we have a God who accomplishes his purposes?” And, in fact, as you know that question really is the question around which hinges two systems of believing theology.” <https://slj.institute.net/pauls-epistles/romans/christ-over-all/>

¹² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub., (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 569. f.n. 1.

Paul's defence: *For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.* This statement again is puzzling. Paul is identifying two Israel's here. He's already mentioned one Israel above (*kinsmen according to the flesh*), so who is this second entity? The second entity here must be understood contextually. Paul had already been driving at a secondary Israel in Romans 2:28-29 (Jews of the flesh vs. Jews of the flesh and the heart). Paul emphatically states that just because one physically descended¹³ from Israel (i.e., Jacob) it didn't mean that he was *truly* of Israel. A true Jew, or a true Israelite was one that was not only circumcised in the flesh, but also in the heart, a point Moses drove at in Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6. Just because you belonged to the nation of Israel, did not mean you were saved. Paul is drawing a line between two forms of election:

God's Sovereign Two-Fold Election (9:6b)

<i>Election to Service + Mission (Israel I)</i>	<i>Election to Salvation (Israel II)</i>
- Kinsmen according to the flesh	- Saved Kinsmen according to the flesh
- Jacob's descendants	- Jacob's descendants
- Physical Seed	- Physical Seed + Spiritual Seed
- Tied to Abraham's Covenant ¹⁴	- Tied to Abraham's Covenant ¹⁵
- Circumcision of the Flesh	- Circumcision of the Flesh + Heart
- Unsaved	- Saved

What we see here, is simply a contrast between two groups. One group is saved by faith in Christ alone, they are the ones to whom the promises are finding their fulfillment (i.e., the remnant of Jewish believers – cf. Romans 2:28-29; 9:6; 11:5, 26; Galatians 6:16). Constable says, “Because God's election

¹³ Paul uses the preposition “of” (ἐξ) here to denote that there are those are taken “out of” the original group (Israel I), which signals that Paul is *refining* the original group of Israel to a remnant *within* (Israel II). There is no *expanding* here of Israel, Paul is drawing out those who are “of” Jacob.

¹⁴ Paul will later develop the idea that the kinsmen according to the flesh who sought the Lord through works and who remain in unbelief are cut-off from the Abrahamic Covenant during this present period (cf. Romans 11). They are partially hardened and remain separated from the covenant blessings that come through the Abrahamic Covenant during this present age, this is their punishment. Just as Israel was expelled from the land during their captivities, the land still *belonged* to them. Here, Israel is expelled from the blessings of the covenant for their unbelief, Gentiles will now partake of those blessings, but God is able to graft back in Jews, which he will at the fullness of the Gentiles (Romans 11:26).

¹⁵ Paul teaches that since Christ has come, those who are in Him will see the fulfillment of the covenant blessings and promises (Galatians 3:7-9; 16). Gentiles have been brought near to Israel and have a new union with believing Jews in Christ (cf. Ephesians 2). Because Israel rebelled, they were cut-off, now Gentiles have been grafted into the place of blessing and experience the promises made to Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:3).

of Israel did not depend on natural descent (Romans 9:6-10) or human merit (Romans 9:11-14), Israel's disobedience cannot nullify God's determined purpose for the nation."¹⁶

Note: Paul is not taking about Gentiles here, the categorical distinction in 9:6b is restrictive to Jacob's offspring. We cannot interpret the text to mean anything other than a *narrowing* in on the word Israel. Gentiles are not mentioned until vs. 24, to read them backwards into the word Israel is grounded in a presupposition that Gentiles are a part of the true Israel. This perspective must be rejected exegetically.¹⁷

Moo is helpful here as well in concluding our comments on vs. 6, he says, "Paul does not deny that ethnic Israel remains God's people, in some sense (cf. 9:4-5; 11:1-2,28). But he denies that this corporate election of Israel means the salvation of all Israelites; and he insists that salvation has never been based on ethnic descent (see 2:1-29; 4:1-16). Therefore the people of Israel cannot look to their birthright as a guarantee of salvation. This is the point that Paul makes by asserting that "all those who belong to Israel (in a physical sense) do not belong to Israel (in a spiritual sense)."¹⁸

7-9 — nor are they all children because they are Abraham's seed, but: "through Isaac your seed will be named." [8] That is, the children of the flesh are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are considered as seed. [9] For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son." (7 οὐδ' ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ' Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα. 8. τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογιζέται εἰς σπέρμα. 9. ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὗτος Κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐλεύσομαι καὶ ἔσται τῇ Σάρρα υἱός.)

¹⁶ Constable, Thomas. DD. "Commentary on Romans 9". "Dr. Constable's Expository Notes". <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/romans-9.html>. 2012.

¹⁷ "But we must finally reject this interpretation. (1) Verses 1-5 establish the parameters within which Paul's language of Israel in Rom. 9-11 must be interpreted, and these verses focus on ethnic Israel. Throughout these chapters, Paul carefully distinguishes between Israel and the Jews on the one hand and the Gentiles on the other. Only where clear contextual pointers are present can the ethnic focus of Israel be abandoned. (2) Paul explains v. 6b in w. 7-13 with examples of God's selection of his people from within ethnic Israel. (3) Verses 27-29, which, as we have seen, relate closely to vv. 6-13, feature OT quotations that focus on the idea of the remnant — again, a group existing within ethnic Israel. The "true Israel" in v. 6b, therefore, denotes a smaller, spiritual body within ethnic Israel rather than a spiritual entity that overlaps with ethnic Israel. Paul is not saying "it is not only those who are of Israel that are Israel," but "it is not all those who are of Israel that are Israel.""
Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub., (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 574.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) Epub., (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 573.

Paul has stated that the election of Israel to salvation is crucial to understanding how the promises and blessings are finding their fulfillment at present (vs.6). The word of God has not failed, Israel is still seeing those promises fulfilled in and through a *remnant* within the nation (Romans 11:5).

Paul will draw out a new point here, but it is also important to his argument on election. In vs. 7 Paul says, “nor are they” (οὐδ ἔτι εἰσὶν) all children. Paul’s already shot down the argument that the promises depended on natural descent; he will further extrapolate that argument through another line of thinking; this pertains to *who* are regarded as “children” of Abraham.¹⁹ There was another type of election within Abraham’s physical line. Paul says, “nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s seed.” What this means is that not *all* can appeal to the title of “child” of Abraham because they were a descendant of Abraham, only those who are children are named “seed.” This means that within Abraham’s physical line, the “children” here are the descendants that are exclusively tied to *Isaac* “through Isaac your seed will be named.”²⁰

A point here is often missed by non-dispensationalists. They will often jump to Galatians 4:28 and read this passage backwards into Romans 9:7. While it is true that we “like Isaac” are children of promise, Romans 9:7 has a specific context which we cannot read in from another context. The *child*

¹⁹ “Abraham had many children besides Isaac, their number running perhaps into the hundreds, since he had a plurality of concubines, besides Hagar; and after Sarah’s death he was married to Keturah, thought by many to have already borne the sons attributed to her, during the period of her concubinage. From whatever source, the Bible states that 318 servants were born in his house (see more on this in my Commentary on Hebrews, p. 271). At the very least, all of the sons of Keturah and Hagar were among the “sons of Abraham” but were not so reckoned among the Jews, hence the validity of Paul’s reasoning here to the effect that mere fleshly connection with Abraham did not make one an Israelite.” Coffman, James Burton. “Commentary on Romans 9:7”. “Coffman’s Commentaries on the Bible”. <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/bcc/romans-9.html>. Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

²⁰ “But there is a second distinction made in the sovereignty of God with regard to His promises. “Neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants” (v. 7). Has Paul lost his mind? Weren’t the promises of Jehovah made to all the descendants of Abraham? No. God has always worked on the principle of divine sovereignty. Sovereignly God made a distinction between Abraham’s descendants. “Through Isaac your descendants will be named.” Being of the seed of Abraham does not make one an Israelite, for Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Only “the children of the promise are regarded as descendants” (v. 8). We must always keep these two distinctions in mind when reading Paul. One wasn’t a Jew and heir to God’s promises just because he could trace his ancestry to Abraham; only through Abraham’s son Isaac were the promises made. And even then one wasn’t a faithful Jew and heir to God’s promises just because he could trace his ancestry to Abraham through Isaac. He had to have faith in Jehovah, as Abraham did, and have that faith reckoned as righteousness. If it appears that the Word of God has failed the Jews, it is because the Jews have failed the God of their fathers. God still sovereignly declares righteous all who put their faith in Him for salvation.” Woodrow Kroll, *The Book of Romans: Righteousness in Christ*, (Tennessee: AMG Publishers 2002), 156.

of promise in Romans 9:7 is Isaac (cf. Genesis 21:12).²¹ Paul is using an Old Testament quotation to make his point regarding *Isaac* not the Gentiles. The blessings would come in and through Isaac, since he was named the seed. Constable says, “God’s special elective purpose applied only to Isaac and his line of descendants. This reference to God’s choice of Isaac over Ishmael is the first of three Old Testament illustrations of God’s sovereignty. The other two are Jacob and Esau (Romans 9:10-13), and Pharaoh (Romans 9:14-18).”²² This does not mean that Gentiles are not heirs according to the promises (Ephesians 2:11-16; 3:6-9), or that we aren’t “children of God,” this isn’t Paul’s point here. Paul’s *narrowing* of his terms must be accepted; he’s not expanding Israel to include Gentiles but dealing with elective issues *within* Israel. Paul wants to showcase God’s elective grace in choosing particulars of the whole (Israel I). Paul’s argument is that God’s elective grace is specific, he has displayed this through the *child of promise* (Isaac), because they are reckoned (declared as) God’s children. This harks back toward Paul’s argument in Romans 4. Proper relationship with God is grounded upon God’s declaration that one is right in His eyes, not on ethnic grounds. Justification by faith alone and Christ’s imputed righteousness allow one to partake of this salvation (Romans 4-5). Therefore, Paul’s grounding for soteriological blessing is found in and through God’s elective purposes and relationship to Christ.

In vs. 8, Paul says that it was not *all* the natural/physical descendants of Israel that God had in mind when He spoke of blessing Abraham’s *seed*. It was specific elective grace seen through the child of promise. Again, the contrast should be obvious here in the text:

God’s Sovereign Two-Fold Election (9:7-8)

<i>Of the Flesh</i>	<i>Of Promise</i>
- Ishmael	- Isaac
- Not a Child of Promise	- Child of Promise
- Not tied to Abraham’s Covenant	- Tied to Abraham’s Covenant
- Not considered “seed”	- Considered “seed” ²³

²¹ 7.] Nor, because they are (physically) the seed of Abraham, are all children (so as to inherit the promise), but (we read), “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (i.e. those only shall be called truly and properly, for the purposes of the covenant, thy seed, who are descended from Isaac, not those from Ishmael or any other son. Thol. renders *καλέειν* here by *erwecken*, ‘to raise up’): Alford, Henry. “Commentary on Romans 9”. Alford’s Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary. <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/hac/romans-9.html>. 1863-1878.

²² Constable, Thomas. DD. “Commentary on Romans 9”. “Dr. Constable’s Expository Notes”. <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/romans-9.html>. 2012.

²³ An excellent resource on the four seeds of Abraham: Michael Riccardi, “The Seed of Abraham: A Theological Analysis of Galatians 3 and Its Implications for Israel,” MSJ 25/1 (Spring 2014) 51-64. <https://tms.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/tmsj25d.pdf>

It is paramount that we understand the implications of this. God's sovereign election is over all things, He has bestowed His grace upon whom He chooses, He has every right to make this determination *unconditionally*. Ishmael was not a child of promise, he was a child of flesh. Constable notes, "It was not all the natural children of Abraham that God had in mind when He spoke of blessing Abraham's seed uniquely. It was only of the children born supernaturally in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham about seed that He was speaking, namely, Isaac's descendants."²⁴

In vs. 9, we are told that Abraham was going to be blessed with a son (Isaac) through Sarah, and this was promised with the covenant (cf. Genesis 17:19-21). The patriarch was going to be blessed supernaturally by God. "His unusual birth confirmed God's choice of Isaac, as the channel of special blessing, to his parents."²⁵

In summary, it is important to point out what we are seeing here. Paul has been doing a lot of *narrowing* down in terms of how he views Israel in relation to the promises and blessings.

[1] Ethnic National Territorial (ENT) Israel is the large body, the first Israel that is mentioned in 9:6b. This includes *all* descendants of Jacob (Israel I). This was a mixed multitude; not all were saved within this entity, but some were (Israel II).

[2] Within this ENT entity, there are two elections that are important to Paul. The first election is one to salvation (9:6b), these are the *true* Jews that are circumcised in the flesh and the heart. These Jews are believers in the Lord Jesus, justified and in union with Christ, the remnant, through whom God is faithfully preserving His people. The second election is between Abraham's physical offspring (child of promise vs. child of flesh). The child of promise is Isaac, since he was counted as *seed*. Ishmael was not recognized as a child of promise, and therefore had no relationship to the covenant promises made to Abraham.

Again, for the sake of stressing a point, the Gentiles are *not* mentioned here whatsoever. To bring in the Gentiles completely undercuts Paul's point. Paul must help his audience understand what has happened to his kinsmen according to the flesh (vs.3). In doing so, Paul is bridging a gap of God's sovereign election, where He chooses the *stream* of blessing. One could not simply appeal to Abraham or the patriarchs—which was a thing that was commonly done by the Jews (cf. John 8)—and hope that God was going to bless them. God has divinely chosen to bless (a) those Jews who are called into a soteriological relationship through Christ, and (b) those who are offspring of Isaac and Jacob, and not

²⁴ Constable, Thomas. DD. "Commentary on Romans 9". "Dr. Constable's Expository Notes". <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/romans-9.html>. 2012.

²⁵ Ibid.

all of Abraham’s offspring (seed). Two elections are spoken of up until vs.10 and none of them have anything to do with Gentiles. It is an egregious reading of these texts to superimpose what is not mentioned in the text—as Covenantalists do.

10-13 — 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 the purpose of God according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, [12] it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” [13] Just as it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (10. οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ῥεβέκκα ἐξ ἑνὸς κοίτην ἔχουσα, Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν· 11. μήπω γὰρ γεννηθέντων μηδὲ πραξάντων τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαῦλον, ἵνα ἡ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ Θεοῦ μένη, 12. οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος, ἐρρέθη αὐτῇ ὅτι Ὁ μείζων δουλεύσει τῷ ἐλάσσονι· 13. καθάπερ γέγραπται Ἐὐὸν Ἰακῶβ ἠγάπησα, τὸν δὲ Ἡσαῦ ἐμίσησα.)

Continuing Paul’s examples of God’s unconditional sovereign election, he finishes this important section off by comparing two more of Abraham’s offspring (Jacob & Esau). As was stated before, it was Isaac who was the *child* of promise, and through Isaac that seed would be declared, which means that we need to see who is also deemed a sovereign choice by God through Isaac. The Old Testament made it clear that it was Jacob that was the one through whom the promise would come. It might have seemed like the promise would have gone to the older, but here God’s sovereign election is bought to bear on the text. God chose Jacob, through Rebekah, to be the seed through whom the promise would come, not Esau. This decision was not made on account of something that either of them had done (vs. 11), it was always on account of God’s free decision. God chose to bless Jacob, just as He had chosen to bless Isaac.

God’s Sovereign Two-Fold Election (9:10-13)

<i>Of the Flesh</i>	<i>Of Promise</i>
- Esau	- Jacob
- Twin brother	- Twin brother
- Older	- Younger
- Not a Child of Promise	- Child of Promise
- Not tied to Abraham’s Covenant	- Tied to Abraham’s Covenant
- Not considered “seed”	- Considered “seed”

Constable is helpful here, “God’s special election of one portion of Abraham’s descendants for special blessing is further evident in His choice of Jacob rather than Esau. Someone might say that Isaac was obviously the natural son through whom blessing would come since he was the first son born to

Abraham and Sarah. That was not true of Jacob. Furthermore Esau and Jacob both had the same mother as well as the same father, so that was not a factor, as an objector might claim it was in Isaac and Ishmael's case. Jacob and Esau might have shared the firstborn privilege since they were twins. One conception produced both. However, God chose Jacob even though Rebekah bore Esau before Jacob. As in the case of Isaac, God made a choice between them before their birth. Their birth was also supernatural since their mother was barren. God chose Jacob before he had done any deeds or manifested a character worthy of God's special blessing. The fact that Jacob became a less admirable person in some respects than Esau shows that God's choice was not due to Jacob but to Himself."²⁶

Regarding vs. 13, Paul makes it clear that Jacob has been loved, but Esau was hated. What does this mean? For the sake of brevity, I will simply quote the conclusion made by John Murray in his commentary *The Epistle of the Romans*. He says, "The appeal to the electing purpose of God, to the oracle spoken to Rebecca in pursuance of that purpose, and to the word "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" is for the purpose of confirming this same distinction between those who are partakers of the promise and those who are not. To suppose that the final word of differentiation in this passage is not intended to bear out the distinction between salvation and the coming short of the same is to suppose something that would make this word irrelevant to the apostle's thesis. We are compelled, therefore, to find in this word a declaration of the sovereign counsel of God as it is concerned with the ultimate destinies of men."²⁷

For an extended discussion on vs.10-13 see John Murray *The Epistle of the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprint 1980, 12-24.

In conclusion I have created this diagram below to show Paul's narrowing in on the doctrine of election for the people of Israel, to demonstrate for who the *promise* and *blessings* have come. Paul shows that within each category there is a refinement

- All of Israel → Refined → True Israel (Romans 9:6)
- All Seeds → Refined → True Seed – Isaac (Romans 9:7)
- All Children → Refined → Children of Promise – Isaac → Jacob (Romans 9:8-12)

Within Israel, God's promises are being presently fulfilled by the *remnant*, the true Israelites. God's Word has not failed; He has been faithful to preserve a remnant who are circumcised in the heart and the flesh. This is how God continues to bring about the fulfillment of His Word. His unconditional and unilateral election proves this; it also proves that the Israelites could not solely rely on their

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John Murray *The Epistle of the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprint 1980, 24.

ethnicity to assure them of receiving blessings. At present, the ENT Israelites are hardened and cut-off from the promises, due to their unbelief. Believing Jews and Gentiles are experiencing the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant—as indicated through the Olive Tree in Romans 11. To experience the blessings of the covenant, God has declared that Israelites will need to repent and believe in their Messiah, but the covenants and promises still belong to them even though they are at enmity with God and the gospel, the calling (election) and gifts (cf. Romans 9:3-5) are irrevocable (Romans 11:28-29).

