

God's Promises to Israel Have Not Failed
Romans 9:6-29

Introduction

1. Last week we began our study of Romans 9-11 which is a look at God's plan for Israel
2. We began with Paul's lament over Israel and the anguish he felt over their disobedience
3. They were God's very own people, chosen by Him to receive His promises and blessing
4. But, their disobedience, and rejection of their Messiah, appear to put God's plan for Israel in jeopardy.
5. However, as we will see over these next few weeks, God is not done with Israel
6. This week Paul answers the question: "Has God's Word regarding Israel failed?"

A. God's Word has not failed (9:6-13):

1. What is the Word to which Paul is referring? **"But it is not as though the word of God has failed."**
 - a. The simple answer is, All the things Paul just discussed in vs. 4-6
 - b. It's the calling of Abraham, the promise to make him into a great nation, all the blessings and promises made to Israel, and ultimately the establishment of Israel as His very Own people
 - c. So, God's Word here is a reference to God's plan for Israel
 - d. But, Israel has rejected God, and so it **appears** that He has rejected His people and will not fulfill His promises
 - e. However, such is not the case
2. The fulfilment of God's plan for Israel is based on His sovereignty, not on genealogy or works (6b-13):
 - a. It's not based upon genealogy (6b-7): **"For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;**
 - 1) The first **"Israel"** refers to the nation of Israel
 - 2) The second **"Israel"** refers to Jacob
 - 3) So, Paul is saying that it's not genealogy (e.g. simply being a descendent of Jacob) that determines or constitutes the real Israel
 - 4) The example of Isaac and Ishmael (7b-9): **"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.'"**
 - a) Abraham had two children: Ishmael and Isaac
 - b) God promised Abraham that his **"seed"** would only be named through Isaac, the son He promised him through a miraculous birth
 - c) So, not all of Abraham's descendants (**"children of the flesh"**)—which would include those from Ishmael and Isaac—can claim to be **"children of God"** (a reference to being God's chosen people and having claim to the promises)
 - d) Only those descended from Isaac can be considered Abraham's **"seed"**, and potentially children of God (e.g. God's chosen people)

- b. It's not based upon works (10-13):
 1. Obedience was important because it secured God's temporal blessings upon Israel
 2. Works don't determine the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan for Israel
 3. The example of Jacob and Esau (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 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.'"**
 - a) They were twins, with the same father and mother
 - b) They had not had the opportunity to do good or bad
 - c) Esau was the first born which means he should have been favored
 - d) Yet, God divinely chose Jacob over Esau to receive His blessings and be the one through whom He would fulfill his promises to Abraham and Isaac
 - e) He "loved" Jacob and "hated" Esau—quote from Malachi 1:2-3 indicating God's blessing of Jacob but his ultimate judgment of Esau

- c. So, if it's not based upon genealogy or works, what is it based upon?
 1. The two examples above have something in common
 2. They both serve to illustrate God's sovereignty (11): **"so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,"**
 - a) Define sovereignty: it essentially means that because God is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful) and omnipresent (present everywhere all the time), He has the power, wisdom and authority to do anything He chooses within His creation and is not hindered or limited by anyone or anything.
 - b) God sovereignly promised Isaac and chose Him over Ishmael
 - c) He sovereignly chose Jacob over Esau, before they were ever born
 - d) He did this to ensure that His **"purpose according to His choice would stand"** (be fulfilled)
 - e) God's plan for Israel will come to fulfillment **"not because of works but because of Him who calls"**
 - f) His plan is guaranteed because it is based on one thing: His sovereign plan and purpose
 - g) This means that even Israel's temporal disobedience will not thwart His plan to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Israel

B. Paul addresses two objections to God's actions (9:14-26)

1. Paul anticipates and answers two objections
2. The first objection is that if Israel's fate (if you will) is determined completely by God's sovereignty then He is somehow unfair or unjust: (14-18): **"What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?"** (All other English Translation render this better: **"Is there injustice (or unrighteousness with God?)"**)
 - a. Paul responds in the negative: **"May it never be!"**
 - b. At this point we might expect Paul to provide evidence as to why it's not unjust for God to determine Israel's fate purely by His own will but he doesn't do that. Instead, he ASSUMES God's right to do what He pleases by providing two examples:

- 1) The FIRST EXAMPLE: Moses (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.'"**
 - a) Read Exodus 33:12-23
 - b) Moses received God's mercy and compassion not because of his own will, but because God chose to have mercy and compassion on him (16): **"So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."**
 - c) This is a good thing for Israel because it means that God can still fulfil His plan for Israel in spite of their disobedience

- 2) The SECOND EXAMPLE: Pharaoh (17-18): **"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.' So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires."**
 - a) This example is much more difficult for us because it suggests that Pharaoh was merely God's pawn without a will of his own, and that God hardened his heart
 - b) What the Bible says about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart:
 - Exodus 7:13: **"Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said."** (five times)
 - Exodus 8:15: **"But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said."** (three times)
 - Exodus 9:12: **"And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses."** (five times)
 - So the issue isn't as simple as just saying God hardened Pharaoh's heart because the text also says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart
 - We need to accept both, that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but that Pharaoh wasn't blameless because he hardened his own heart
 - We might compare **Romans 1:24, 26 & 28**
 - c) There was a divine purpose in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart:
 - To demonstrate God's power
 - And to proclaim God's name throughout the whole earth

- 3) Like the examples in Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau, above, these two examples again reflect upon God's sovereignty—He determines who receives His mercy and compassion
 - a) So while Paul didn't answer the question of God's justice in this directly, he provided two examples that demonstrate that God is indeed just
 - b) He was just in granting mercy and compassion to Moses
 - c) He was just in hardening Pharaoh's heart
 - d) In the same way, He will be just in fulfilling His Word when it comes to Israel

3. The second objection is that if Israel's fate is determined by God's sovereignty then He should not find fault (19-26): **"Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"**(19)
 - a. The *objector* in this case suggests that no one, not even Israel, is responsible for their own sin since God determines one's fate
 - b. Paul rejects that accusation with two questions/assertions of his own

- 1) What right does mankind have to accuse God (of anything)?
 - a) The example of the Potter and the clay (19-21): **“On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?”**
 - b) See Isaiah 29:16 and 45:8-13 for context

- 2) What if God endured disobedience in order to reveal the riches of his glory among those He would mercy upon (22-27)? **“What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,”**
 - a) The **“vessels of wrath”** here is a reference to disobedience Israel (but not all of Israel)
 - b) The **“vessels of mercy”** here refers to all those who receive God’s mercy and are saved, Jews and Gentiles alike (24-25): **“even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. 25 As He says also in Hosea, ‘I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, “MY PEOPLE,” AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, “BELOVED.” 26 AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, “YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,” THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.’”**
 - c) In other words, God **“endured with much patience”** Israel’s disobedience in order that He might **“reveal His power and glory upon”** all of mankind
 - d) When God promised to bless all the nations of the earth through the seed of Abraham, it included Israel’s disobedience whereby God would reveal certain aspects and traits about Himself to the world—including those of patience, compassion, grace, mercy and forgiveness

- 3) 27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, **‘THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; 28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY.’”**

C. God will fulfill His Word to Israel (9:27-29)

1. Paul concludes this section of his letter by reminding his readers of two things:
2. The first is that God has preserved and will save a remnant from among Israel (27): **“Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, ‘THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; 28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY.’”**
3. The second is that if it had been left up to Israel, rather than God’s sovereignty in preserving a remnant, all Israel would have been condemned just like Sodom and Gomorrah (29): **“And just as Isaiah foretold, ‘UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH.’”**

Conclusion

1. I realize this discussion regarding God's sovereignty and His plan and purpose for Israel opens up a can of worms
2. You are all familiar with the debate regarding God's sovereignty and man's free will
3. So, I want to briefly address a few things:
 - a. God's sovereignty is a reality; He is sovereign over His creation and in complete control
 - b. Man's free will is a reality; We are free to make choices and ultimately responsible for making those choices and reap the rewards of those choices, good or bad, temporal and eternal
 - c. It may seem like these two cannot simultaneously co-exist, but the Bible teaches both
 - d. God's sovereignty does not take away our free will, no more than our free will takes away God's sovereignty.
 - e. The reason we struggle with this is because we are finite with limited knowledge and capacity to understand, especially since the Fall
 - f. Scholars have debated this and tried to find a way to explain the conundrum, but there are no genuinely satisfactory answers that don't cause one side or the other to compromise—you either give up a little of man's free will or a little of God's sovereignty
 - g. Therefore, like much about God, we have to live with the tension and simply accept that both are true