



Chapter 9 – The Sovereignty of God and Israel's Past

Paul has been talking about theology from chapters 1-8, but now he switches subjects and talks about Israel for the next three chapters. He may have done this because at this time the Romans may have started to turn against the Jews. All the original believers in Rome were probably Jews, but by the time Paul wrote this letter to the church there, the church was mainly gentile. Paul wanted to assure Jewish believers that were left in Rome and all over the empire that they still had an important place in the kingdom of God.

There are many of God's promises to the Jews in the Old Testament that are still unfulfilled. So God is not through with Israel – He will fulfill all of those promises. But if Paul's message of salvation by faith was true, then why didn't his own people receive that message? Paul takes a break from discussing salvation and sanctification to deal with the question of Jewish unbelief. The only way to understand and reconcile Jewish belief with God's promises is to see that God is sovereign over history. Paul sees everything that happens as part of the eternal purpose of God.

Romans 9:1 I am telling the truth because I belong to the Messiah – I am not lying, and my conscience confirms it by means of the Holy Spirit.

What an interesting way to start this off. Paul is basically saying, "I am a Christian – a believer in the church age, so pay attention to what I'm about to say". This is important stuff to Paul – it's not a minor discussion. Notice the three ways he confirms that he is telling the truth.

Romans 9:2-4 I have deep sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, (3) for I could wish that I myself were condemned and cut off from the Messiah for the sake of my brothers, my own people, (4) who are Israelites. To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. (5) To the Israelites belong the patriarchs, and from them, the Messiah descended, who is God over all, the one who is forever blessed. Amen.

Just in case you might be one of those people who believe that the church replaced Israel, Paul makes it crystal clear that he is not talking about the church here. This is the nation of Israel, the Jewish race. All of these things were given to the Jews – not the Chinese, the Arabs, the Swedish people, or any other ethnic group.

Paul wants his people to be saved so badly that he is willing to go to hell for their sakes. He then lists eight spiritual privileges which belong to the people of Israel as God's chosen nation. Be sure and look up the accompanying verses:

1. **Their adoption as sons** (Exodus 4:22) – God's election of Israel as His chosen nation is absolute and eternal, as it says in Isaiah 66:22.
2. **The divine glory** (Exodus 16:10; 24:17; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11) - We all know how God's presence accompanied Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night through the sea and

through the wilderness, and then filled the tabernacle. No other nation has had or will have God's presence like this.

3. **The covenants** (Genesis 15:18; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 31:31-34) – In these verses you have contracts God made with Israel – the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenant. We gentiles have the amazing privilege of sharing in that new covenant.
4. **The receiving of the Law** (Deuteronomy 5:1-22) - It was a great thing to be entrusted with God's holy Law. No other nation has ever been directly spoken to, as a nation, by God: except to be warned, as were Egypt by Moses, and Nineveh by Jonah.
5. **The temple worship** - The Greek word here (*latreia*), refers to those religious regulations given to Israel by God in connection with the tabernacle-worship, and afterwards the temple-worship. It's important to understand that this kind of outward form of worship belongs to the nation of Israel, and not to Christianity. To introduce it into Christianity is to return to paganism. Paul plainly describes the forms and ceremonies of Judaism as now belonging with "the weak and worthless elemental things" which pagan Gentiles practice! (Galatians 4:9, 10.)
6. **The promises** (especially of the coming Messiah) – God's promises of salvation were given to Abraham, His promises of an eternal kingdom were given to David. There are thousands of promises in the Old Testament given to Israel. No other nation or people group have ever been given promises by God. The church is given a sure hope, an inheritance which we just simply have to accept.
7. **The patriarchs** (or the fathers - Matthew 1:1-16; Romans 1:3) – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to in this chapter, and then there are Jacob's 12 sons. We also tend to think of men like Moses, Samuel, David, and the prophets as "the fathers".
8. **The Messiah** – of course, the greatest honor given to Israel is that Jesus Christ was born an Israelite!

"I say, for God to do all this, and then publicly set this nation aside, and send a Paul to all nations without distinction of Jew or Gentile, preaching salvation apart from the Law, and by simple faith, instead of by "the Jews' religion"; promising blessings, and that even heavenly blessings, inconceivably beyond those promised to Israel,—this was an astounding thing! The trouble with us Gentiles is, that we have become accustomed to it, we take it for granted. God's plans and ways with Israel do not concern most Christians.

One has only to look about Christendom to see at once the evidence of this fateful delusion. Behold the "state" churches, the great cathedrals, the vested choirs and magnificent music; and the "church calendars" with their man-invented feast days, "holy" days, "Christmas-tides," "Lenten" periods, "Easter" services,—all that goes to make up the so-called "Christian religion"! And the high talk of the Gentiles about Israel as God's "ancient people": whereas God has never had and never will have any elect nation, but earthly Israel!" William Newell

Now, just from these verses alone, does it seem to you that God is through with Israel? This is not an indictment against the Jews, but a statement of blessing, and notice it is in present tense. Paul is writing this after Jesus was rejected by the nation of Israel, but he says in verse 4 that they still have all these things. They are still the chosen nation, and all the promises given to Israel in the Old Testament will be fulfilled – not in the Church, but for Israel.

The church is also called "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people to be his very own" in 1 Peter 2:9. Peter says this because the church is like Israel in some ways. Like Israel, the church was chosen by God and, like Israel, their task is to "proclaim the wonderful deeds of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light".

But the church is not a political or ethnic entity, but a spiritual and heavenly people. We in the Church are adopted in Christ, and are chosen individually in Him, but Israel is and always will be the chosen earthly nation, even into the coming kingdom. Today, a Jewish person who has accepted Jesus as Messiah is part of both people groups.

The promises have to do with the Abrahamic Covenant, and they have to do with the land of Israel and the coming of the King, the Messiah. So many things that we have today as Christians came through the Jews, most importantly the Scripture and the Messiah Himself.

Romans 9:6 Now it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel,

It may look like God's promises have failed. But they have not. To explain why, Paul will now explain three examples of God's sovereignty. Israel's failure did not surprise God. His overall purpose and plan was never frustrated.

Paul is saying that all Jews are not believers. A true Israelite has always been a Jew that has faith in the God of Abraham like Abraham did. Those Jewish believers had their righteousness credited to them because of their faith, like Abraham (Romans 4:3). So it is not God that has failed, but unbelieving Jews that have failed the God of their fathers.

"In the coming kingdom, the nation of Israel will be the leading nation of the world (Zechariah 14:16), with the twelve apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29, 30), but the Israelites who participate in the kingdom will only be those who have acknowledged the returning Christ as their Messiah and Redeemer (Zechariah 12:10-11). In the meantime, Israelites who accept Christ in this age are also part of true Israel, while simultaneously being part of the Christian church, in practice being no different from Gentile Christians (Colossians 3:11)." Henry Morris

Romans 9:7 and not all of Abraham's descendants are his true descendants. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that descendants will be named for you."

Paul is going to keep narrowing down the definition of what a real Israelite is. He reminds us that not all descendants of Abraham are children of the promises – true descendants. Only people descended from Isaac are Israelites, not his other children, including Ishmael. The Arab peoples primarily come from Ishmael, Esau, the six sons of Keturah, Abraham's 2nd wife, and other children from Abraham's concubines. These peoples are not children of the promise. And remember that Isaac was a miracle child. There's no way, humanly speaking, that a child could have been born to Sarah as old as she was. So the birth of Israel was a miracle, totally brought about by God.

Romans 9:8 That is, it is not merely the children born through natural descent who were regarded as God's children, but it is the children born through the promise who were regarded as descendants.

So Paul is making the point that blood relation to Abraham is not what makes a Jew a Jew. It is only those that came through God's promise that are considered descendants, and that means only children of Isaac. But he doesn't stop there.

We must always remember this – God always made a distinction between Abraham's descendants. Not all of his descendants were "children of the promise", but only those born through Isaac and then Jacob. But there is even a distinction with descendants of Jacob. Only Jews with the faith of

Abraham are true Israelites (Galatians 3:7). Though this is true, it is not the point Paul is trying to make. His point is that God sovereignly chooses His children as he goes on to explain further:

Romans 9:9-13 For this is the language of the promise: "At this time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." (10) Not only that, but Rebecca became pregnant by our ancestor Isaac. (11) Yet before their children had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's plan of election might continue to operate (12) according to his calling and not by actions), Rebecca was told, "The older child will serve the younger one." (13) So it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Sarah's son was Isaac, and remember that Isaac's wife Rebecca had twins – Jacob and Esau. And God chose Jacob according to His plan before they were born, not because he was a good guy and Esau was a bad guy. Jacob wasn't a good guy at all. This is predestination, folks! He chose the descendants of Jacob to be the children of promise. God is the one who did all this, according to His purpose. It is no difference today with Christians. We are chosen by Him according to His purpose, not because of anything we have done, good or bad. We just don't get that. In everything that happens in our world, our nation, and in our individual lives, God is in charge. Sometimes we don't like that, but it is true.

Some people trip over verse 13. This is actually a quote from Malachi 1:2-3. You mean God hated someone? I thought God was a God of love! Well, you'll find people trying to explain this verse away, but you can't escape it. It's not hate as we think of hate, but a rejection and judgment of people who rejected Him. I believe God hated Esau because of what his descendants would become – haters and persecutors of Israel. (Genesis 25:19-23) This isn't describing a lack of love towards Esau's descendants, but an active judgment of them, as you can see in the rest of the passage:

Malachi 1:1-5 A declaration: the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. (2) "I've loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD, "yet I loved Jacob, (3) rejected Esau, turned his mountains into a wasteland, and gave his inheritance to desert jackals. (4) Even though Edom may claim, 'We were crushed, but we will return and rebuild the ruins,' this is what the LORD of the Heavenly Armies says: "They may rebuild, but I'll demolish. People will call them 'The Wicked Land,' and 'The People With Whom the LORD is Forever Angry.' (5) Your own eyes will see this, and you will say 'Great is the LORD even beyond the borders of Israel!'"

This is only one place in the Old Testament where God declares His righteous anger against a group of people who refuse to repent. He does the same with some individuals who sin and do not repent.

Romans 9:14-15 What can we say, then? God is not unrighteous, is he? Of course not! (15) For he says to Moses, "I will be merciful to the person I want to be merciful to, and I will be kind to the person I want to be kind to."

As usual, Paul answers a question he knows his readers may ask. Lots of people can't accept this. It's a hard truth. God is not merciful to everyone. He chooses who He will be merciful to. Paul quotes this from Exodus 33:19. This was said to Moses in response to Moses' request to see the glory of God (Exodus 33:18-19). Since there are none who deserve salvation, there are none who are fit (or who can make themselves fit) to be in God's immediate presence.

Some say God is capricious – that He just "rolls the dice" and lets things happen as they may. But

that's not what the Bible teaches us about God. He does everything according to His good plan. We don't see very much of it – only what has been revealed to us. To us, His choice of Jacob over Esau seems arbitrary and maybe unfair. But that's because we have limited knowledge. We must trust that God is just, and knows what He is doing.

Romans 9:16 *Therefore, God's choice does not depend on a person's will or effort, but on God himself, who shows mercy.*

“Oh, that this great verse might sink into our ears, into our very hearts! Perhaps no statement of all Scripture so completely brings man to an utter end. Man thinks he can “will” and “decide,” God-ward, and that after he has so “decided” and “willed,” he has the ability to “run,” or, as he says, to “hold out.” But these two things, deciding and holding out, are in this verse utterly rejected as the source of salvation,—which is declared to be God that hath MERCY. Human responsibility is not at all denied here: man ought to will, and ought to run. But we are all nothing but sinners, and can do,—will do, neither: unless God come forth to us in sovereign mercy.” William Newell

Wow, what a huge verse. Our will does not affect God's choices. God does things for His purposes. The Bible does not teach “free” will. We have a will, but it is not truly free. My life is completely in God's hands. He is working His plan in my life, not my plan. It's not about what I want, or what I will to do. Nothing in my life has happened by accident. God is in control of my history. Nothing I have done, good or bad, has thwarted His plan one bit. What an amazing truth!

If you read the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25-33, you'll see that both Jacob and Esau had the wills to make their own choices, and some of the choices of both boys were not good ones, many of them were just selfish. But everything they did somehow fit in with God's plan. I don't understand how that works, but it's true in all of our lives.

Paul adds “God, who shows mercy” to the end of this verse. You might say, “How is it right for God to show mercy to some and not others, and it's not based on anything they do or don't do?” Well, do you remember the first few chapters of this book? Paul spent a lot of time telling us how depraved the whole human race is. He said in chapter three, quoting Psalm 14, that “Not even one person is righteous. No one understands. No one searches for God. All have turned away. They have become completely worthless. No one shows kindness, not even one person!” So what we have is that the entire human race has rebelled against God, and He would be right to exterminate all of us – we would deserve it. But He has chosen, in His mercy, to call out some for His purpose, again, as verse 16 says, not because of our will or effort.

This is why each of us whom God has chosen need to fall on our faces in humility and ask God, “Why me? Who am I that you would choose me?” God has mercy on people for His own reasons, not through any human activity or worth (Isaiah 48:3).

So, if you think God is unfair, remember who is in charge, and remember that we do not have the right to question our creator. Who do we think we are, anyway? It is ridiculous to think that we could accuse God of any unrighteousness. That would mean that we think we are wiser than God! God is not answerable to humans for what He does, but we are answerable to our creator for what we do. God is only answerable to His own nature, which is unchangeable. He cannot be anything other than just and righteous. He must act consistent with His own character, and that's why we can trust what He does, even if we don't understand it.

Romans 9:17-18 For the Scripture says about Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for this very purpose, to demonstrate my power through you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (18) Therefore, God has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.

Now Paul quotes Exodus 9:16. Notice Paul considers the story of Moses and the Pharaoh in Exodus to be real historical events, and He calls the words of God that Moses wrote to be "Scripture".

You remember the story of Moses and the Pharaoh. Moses kept telling Pharaoh to let Israel go, and Pharaoh kept refusing and "hardening his heart". Paul is pointing out that, even though Pharaoh was responsible for his actions, God was behind it all. He was in charge of everything that happened. Pharaoh made the choice to harden his own heart in rebellion against God, but eventually God permanently cemented his heart. If you are determined to fight against God and will not repent and submit to Him, God will ultimately give you what you want, an eternity away from Him.

Verse 18 is another hard truth. Again we have to keep in mind that all of humanity is sinful and rebellious against God. We should all, by rights, be thrown into the trashcan and God should start over. Paul is about to compare us to clay that He can mold for His use. He chooses to break off some of the clay and mold it and harden it, use it for His purpose, and then judge it – throw it away. Does that mean that God is making some people sin? No, they are already sinful. They are responsible for their sinful choices, and so He just hardens them in that sin and uses them and judges them. Some pieces of clay He chooses to mold and make into something beautiful.

Now, I have to tell you, my flesh does not like this. Growing up as I did in a very humanistic culture, my ego really hates the very idea of this. I want to reject it. I want to be in charge of my own life. How dare God do something like this! I'll tell you something – Romans chapter 9 is not taught in churches these days. Nobody likes it, and no one wants to talk about it. But I know that we can't be Christians completely yielded to God until we can accept verse 18 without question.

Well, the bottom line is this. I know God is merciful. I can look back on so many examples of that in my own life. But I fear Him and have to tremble before Him. Why was I born into a family that believed God and made sure I was brought up to fear Him? Why wasn't I born into a family in India that brought me up in Hinduism? Why has God provided for me throughout my life? Why did he heal me from cancer and a bone-marrow transplant when others that I went through that journey with did not survive? All I know is I don't deserve any of it.

"In some mysterious way, our human decisions (for which we bear full responsibility) have also been God's decisions, and vice versa. This is beyond our finite comprehension and we should not try to rationalize it by some human device of reasoning. What God does is right, by definition (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 33:4) and His ways are "past finding out" (Romans 11:33; Psalm 139:6). We must simply trust Him in whatever He does, knowing that He is accomplishing His own eternal purposes thereby (Romans 9:22-23)." Morris

Romans 9:19-20 You may ask me, "Then why does God still find fault with anybody? For who can resist his will?" (20) On the contrary, who are you – mere man that you are – to talk back to God? Can an object that was molded say to the one who molded it, "Why did you make me like this?"

In verse 20 Paul is quoting from Isaiah 29:16 and Isaiah 45:9. There it is – we are merely pieces of

clay to be molded for various purposes – all of us come from the same lump. And He has the right to do anything He wants with any of those pieces. God can do with us as He pleases. And no matter how I feel about this, like Paul says, who am I to talk back to God? We actually have no right to ask God: “Why?” Remember that when Job asked God why, God just reminded him who created the universe (Job 38–41).

You know we tend to filter our theology through our culture. We live in a democracy, where we are free (for the most part) to live how we want. We’re taught that we can be whatever we want to be, that we’re masters of our own destinies. Freedom has come to mean for many people that they can just live their lives however they please and they think that means apart from God’s interference. When they stand before God they’ll realize that what they thought was freedom was actually slavery.

Romans 9:22-24 Now if God wants to demonstrate his wrath and reveal his power, can't he be extremely patient with the objects of his wrath that are made for destruction? (23) Can't he also reveal his glorious riches to the objects of his mercy that he has prepared ahead of time for glory — (24) including us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but from the gentiles as well?

God will someday “demonstrate his wrath and reveal his power”. God is patient with even those who are “made for destruction”. But God’s patience towards them is meant to lead them to salvation.

Paul says that God is patient with the pieces of clay that are made for destruction. This blows away the theory of “double-predestination”. That is the idea that God predestines some for heaven and He predestines some for hell. Wait, doesn’t it say that they are made for destruction? Actually, it does not say that. The Greek meaning here is that “man fits himself for destruction” We bring it on ourselves – chapter 2 told us all about that.

Well, let me ask this: Will any of those people that are “made for destruction” come to God on their own? No, not one of them. These are the people who have not been chosen. OK, but could any of them potentially come to God? Yes! God’s offer of salvation is for all. Christ died for the whole world (whosoever will may come). And God is patiently waiting for everyone to come to Him, even though He knows in His foreknowledge that none of those will come. Do I understand this? No, that’s something beyond our comprehension.

Also, the objects of wrath are called that because they are destined for wrath because they will not accept Christ. They will experience the wrath of God, and God is just and right in His wrath, and will even receive glory for it.

Notice the predestination of believers clearly stated in verse 23. The objects of mercy were prepared ahead of time for glory. It doesn’t say that about the objects made for destruction. Only people who have been chosen by God are predestined to heaven. No one is predestined to hell.

Common Objections to God's Sovereignty

If God is sovereign, how can He find fault with people?

Answer: A potter has the right to do what he wants to with his clay, doesn't he? (Romans 9:21)

People are masters of their own lives and destiny.

Answer: Instead you should say, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live — and do this or that. (James 4:15)

People just die by accident.

Answer: Since man's days are determined, the number of his months is under your control; you have set his limit and he cannot pass it. (Job 14:5)

God does not force Himself on people; He lets them do what they want to do.

Answer: I am God. From this day forward I am he; no one can deliver from my power; I will act, and who can prevent it?" Isaiah 43:14)

Mother Nature controls natural events, not God.

Answer: He set in place ordinances for the rain; and determined the pathway for thunder that accompanies lightning. (Job 28:26)

God doesn't involve Himself in the events of history.

Answer: He makes nations great, and then destroys them; he enlarges nations, but then sends them away to captivity. (Job 12:23)

God does not determine future events.

Answer: I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all My will. (Isaiah 46:10)

God does not see everything people do. Their actions and thoughts are hidden from Him.

Answer: The eyes of the LORD are in every place, observing both the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3)

Romans 9:25-26 As the Scripture says in Hosea, "Those who are not my people I will call my people, and the one who was not loved I will call my loved one. (26) In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called children of the living God."

Verse 25 is from Hosea 2:23. God told the prophet Hosea to give his children symbolic names—one son Lo-Ammi (not my people) and the daughter Lo-Ruhamah (not... loved). These represented God abandoning the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrian Captivity and Exile (Hosea 1:2-9), because they would not repent and turn back to Him. God was not permanently casting away the people of Israel, though. These verses in Hosea are a prophecy that God will restore them as His beloved and as His people. Hosea 3:5 confirms that.

But Paul makes the prophecy also applicable to Gentiles, that Gentiles would someday be adopted as children of God. This was God's plan all along, to choose a people from out of both Jews and Gentiles. It used to be that only Israelites were considered God's people. Now Christian Gentiles are also considered His people, and even children of God. So, clearly, while this is still a prophecy about Israel being restored, it is also a prophecy of the Church Age.

Verse 26 is from Hosea 1:10. That is a prophecy about a remnant of a great number of Jews becoming believers in Christ. Out of all the Jews that have lived since the time of Christ, how many have accepted Christ? Very few. But there are some who have become believers. So this prophecy is being fulfilled in our age. After the nation of Israel rejected their Messiah, they were considered by God "not my people". Now a remnant has become His people again. Most Jews will not survive the Tribulation. Those who do survive will recognize Christ as their Messiah and go on into the Millennial Kingdom. From them will come a "number of the people of Israel like ocean sand" (Hosea 1:10,11).

Romans 9:27-28 Isaiah also calls out concerning Israel, "Although the descendants of Israel are as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore, only a few will be saved. (28) For the Lord will carry out his plan decisively, bringing it to completion on the earth."

From Isaiah 10:22-23, we learn here that, like the gentile races, only a remnant ("a few") of the Jews will be saved. Out of all the millions of Israelites, even though the nation is chosen, relatively few individuals will be saved. And Paul reminds us that God will definitely carry out His plan. He's not going to change it, but we can count on Him to complete it. He's taking the world where He wants it to go.

"The ways of God should be the study of the saints. He waits long,—He forbears—He is silent: then He suddenly puts into execution an eternally-formed purpose! Thus it was at the Flood, and in the destruction of Sodom, and afterwards of the Canaanites. Also now, for a long season, God has been letting the nations go on in comparative quiet, filling up the earth with much the largest population ever known; and despite their various persecutions the Jews have also been relatively secure from that

Divine “indignation” which all students of Scripture know is yet to be brought to a terrible “end” upon them. The awful words of Ezekiel 20:35, 36 are to be fulfilled—“cut short in righteousness.” The expression there “the wilderness of the people,”—where the Jews will have no national friend or refuge whatever, except Palestine; and Jehovah “entering into judgment” with them, “like as He entered into judgment with their fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt” (when he turned them back from Kadesh-barnea to die in the wilderness)—all this remains to be done,—and in “a short work.” Newell

(Newell wrote this before the Holocaust of World War II, but his point remains. The Holocaust will pale in significance compared with the judgment coming upon the nations and upon Israel during the Tribulation.)

“This involves, of course, that the most of the natural children of Israel will be cut off; that it will be only the elect Remnant who will be saved and share in the Millennial Kingdom; which, as the prophecies concerning the “Remnant” abundantly testify, that Remnant will enjoy. (See last nine chapters of Ezekiel; Isa. 10:21, 22; and Chapter 35; Jer. 31:1-14.)” Newell

Romans 9:29 It is just as Isaiah predicted: "If the Lord of the Heavenly Armies had not left us some descendants, we would have become like Sodom and would have been compared to Gomorrah."

If God had not called out some and saved whom He wished, then the whole world would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. There would be nothing good anywhere (Notice again that Paul and Isaiah agree that Sodom and Gomorrah were real places). But God’s Word has gone out, and we still receive the benefits of that in this country. And this is true of the Jews as well. No matter how much the nation rejected God, no matter how many have died, God has always preserved a remnant for Himself.

These passages in Isaiah make it clear that even in God’s judgment on rebellious Israel, He by sovereign choice preserves and saves a remnant. Those promises were fulfilled in the Captivity and Exile of both Israel and Judah and in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. and will also be fulfilled in the national end-time deliverance of Israel (Romans 11:26-27) at the end of the Tribulation. Even today the same principle is true. Jews who become members of the church, the body of Christ, are what Paul later called “a remnant chosen by grace” (11:5), which included himself (11:1).

Romans 9:30-31 What can we say, then? Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, have attained righteousness, a righteousness that comes through faith. (31) But Israel, who pursued righteousness based on the law, did not achieve the law.

Our gentile ancestors never tried to please God. They didn’t care about achieving righteousness. They never even knew God at all. But now some gentiles have received righteousness, notice through faith, not by works. But Israel tried to please God by works, by obeying the Law.

Romans 9:32-33 Why not? Because they did not pursue it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on achievements. They stumbled over the stone that causes people to stumble. (33) As it is written, "Look! I am placing a stone in Zion over which people will stumble — a large rock that will make them fall — and the one who believes in him will never be ashamed."

Verse 33 is from Isaiah 28:16 and Isaiah 8:14. You should be able to figure out who the stone is. It is

Jesus, whom most of the Jews do not believe is their Messiah. These prophecies of Isaiah are about Jesus. Most of the Jewish people have stumbled over Him. The great tragedy of the Jewish nation was that the Messiah they had waited for so long became a stone that made them stumble instead of a shelter where they could hide.

The Israelites did not admit their inability to keep the Law perfectly and turn by faith to God for forgiveness. Instead some of them kept trying to keep the Law by their own efforts. So they stumbled over the “stumbling Stone.” The Lord Jesus Christ, “the stumbling Stone” (1 Peter 2:4-8), was not who the Jews’ expected as their Messiah, so they rejected Him instead of responding to Him by faith. To show that God anticipated this, Paul quoted from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 (Romans 10:11), combining the two statements to show the two different reactions by men to the Stone that God placed in Zion.

That which was meant for their good, the Law, became their curse. They tried to achieve holiness; they tried to please God, by obeying the Law. And they became proud because of that, and had no real faith. For most Jews, they place their hope in the Law. They think if they just obey the Golden Rule, they will go to heaven. Actually most of them today don’t even try to keep the Law. They just think if they do the best they can, it will all work out all right. This is why the apostle John in 90 AD wrote in his gospel (John 1:11) that Jesus came to His own people, but His own people did not receive Him.

“Were there Divine commands in the Law? Certainly. Were there hopes connected with fully keeping them? Certainly. “The man that doeth the righteousness which is of the Law shall live thereby” (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5). Were there those that professed righteousness by the Law? Yes, on every side: Pharisees, priests, scribes,—who also became the crucifiers of Christ! But what else do we read in the Old Testament? We read from Genesis 3:15 throughout Scripture that there was a Seed, the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of David, through whom alone salvation and blessing would come.

So He, Christ, the meek and lowly One, who went about doing them good, who healed them, loved them, and finally died for them,—became to them the Stone of Stumbling! And it was in Zion, where they had the Law, that this Stone of stumbling was to be laid. Now the only way to have Him is to believe on Him: otherwise, He was a Rock of offence. He offended all the claims of the Jews as “children of Abraham”; He offended all their false claims of righteousness, by the light which He was,—the Holy One. He offended the leaders of Israel, by exposing their sin. He offended the hopes of an immediate, carnal, earthly kingdom, by showing that only those poor in spirit and pure of heart would be in that kingdom. In short, He offended the nation by overthrowing its whole superstructure of works built on sand!

Even so, today, the true gospel of Christ crucified, bringing out our guilt and the danger of Divine wrath, offends men who would like to come and “join the church” in their respectability! Respectability of what? Of filthy rags! It is a humanly incurable delusion of the human heart that salvation is within the natural reach; and that at any time if a man will “make up his mind like a man,” and “hold out to the end,” God will certainly accept him. But this conception leaves out entirely the word “mercy.” The very name of this plan is Vain Confidence. It has doomed and damned its millions. For, salvation being altogether of God, the soul who is bugging the delusion that it is “of him that willeth,” “of him that runneth,” is making God a liar and walking in blind pride.” Newell