The Potter’s Fashioning and Re-Fashioning of Israel

Romans 9 Intro



A VW repurposed as a chicken coop.



A briefcase made to be a bathroom vanity.



Kitchen chairs cut into dog dish holders.



A clawfoot tub made into matching love seats.

Wise and resourceful people can make really cool things out of things that have outlived, been too damaged, or failed to be useful in their original purpose. As we move forward in our study of Romans, keep this idea in mind. Our Sovereign God, in all His wisdom, will purpose and repurpose as necessary to achieve His goal of offering salvation, by faith, through Jesus Christ, every nation, every tribe and every tongue. The book of Romans, which we have been studying lately, was a letter that was written to the early church in Rome. Many of the Apostle Paul’s contemporary listeners and readers were still confused on how God was dealing with the nation of Israel. The predominate view among Jews was that their nationality (connection to Abraham and Jacob) and their righteous law keeping were reasons for boasting of God’s favor. Romans 9 says otherwise. Israel was chosen (favored) because of God’s decision alone. And God’s decision to show favor to Israel was so that they would serve as His messenger of salvation to the rest of the nations. Some readers deterministic interpretations of Romans 9-11 turn God into a puppeteer who picks some people to be saved and others to go on being lost. But, if we understand the context, I believe the opposite is true. Instead, Romans 9 shows a God who chooses our beginnings, gives us freedom, desires that everyone would seek Him, and won’t let anything or anyone stop Him from offering His salvation to all. Please join me in reading, beginning with Romans 9 verse 1:

**Romans 9 New Living Translation (NLT)**

9 With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. 2 My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief 3 for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them. 4 They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God’s adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. 5 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.

6 Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God’s people! 7 Being descendants of Abraham doesn’t make them truly Abraham’s children. For the Scriptures say, “Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,” though Abraham had other children, too. 8 This means that Abraham’s physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham’s children. 9 For God had promised, “I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

10 This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. 11 But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes; 12 he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.) She was told, “Your older son will serve your younger son.” 13 In the words of the Scriptures, “I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.”

14 Are we saying, then, that God was unfair? Of course not! 15 For God said to Moses,

“I will show mercy to anyone I choose,

 and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.”

16 So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it.

17 For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, “I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth.” 18 So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen.

19 Well then, you might say, “Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven’t they simply done what he makes them do?”

20 No, don’t say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? 22 In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction. 23 He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory. 24 And we are among those whom he selected, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.

25 Concerning the Gentiles, God says in the prophecy of Hosea,

“Those who were not my people,

 I will now call my people.

And I will love those

 whom I did not love before.”

26 And,

“Then, at the place where they were told,

 ‘You are not my people,’

there they will be called

 ‘children of the living God.’”

27 And concerning Israel, Isaiah the prophet cried out,

“Though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand of the seashore,

 only a remnant will be saved.

28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth

 quickly and with finality.”

29 And Isaiah said the same thing in another place:

“If the Lord of Heaven’s Armies

 had not spared a few of our children,

we would have been wiped out like Sodom,

 destroyed like Gomorrah.”

30 What does all this mean? Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God’s standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place. 31 But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. 32 Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path. 33 God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said,

“I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble,

 a rock that makes them fall.

But anyone who trusts in him

 will never be disgraced.”

Please understand that this text is not about God arbitrarily choosing to save Jacob who He loved and send Esau to Hell because He didn’t love him.

This is about how God chose Israel as a nation for a specific vocation (calling, job). Remember a couple of weeks ago I shared these verses from Acts:

**24**“He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, **25**and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. **26**From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

**27**“His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us.”

God made all kinds of choices when setting up His plans for us to seek Him.

And now, even though, generally speaking, the nation of Israel had failed, God’s plan for the **NATIONS** (Israel included) didn’t fail. Let’s try to piece this together a bit.

The first 5 verses of Romans 9 confirm Paul’s love for Israel, God’s adoption of Israel, and the special blessings and promises that were associated with being in a close relationship with God.

But, as we continue, we learn that even though Israel hadn’t embraced Jesus as their Prophet, Priest, King, and Messiah, God’s plan had not failed. Let’s again read verses 6-13:

6 Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God’s people! 7 Being descendants of Abraham doesn’t make them truly Abraham’s children. For the Scriptures say, “Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,” though Abraham had other children, too. 8 This means that Abraham’s physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham’s children. 9 For God had promised, “I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

10 This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. 11 But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes; 12 he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.) She was told, “Your older son will serve your younger son.” 13 In the words of the Scriptures, “I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.”

In verses 6-9 the apostle confirms that natural descent does not guarantee being a spiritual child of God. Remember verse 6 clearly says: “Not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God’s people.” To those who had believed the plan had failed, it was because they misunderstood God’s purposes. God’s plan was never about saving certain people just because of their nationality. Instead, when God chose Israel, He chose them to be ministers of Christ to **every** nationality and some who believed would be from the blood line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But as we move on to verses 10-13, many have decided that these verses are about God’s choice to elect Jacob to salvation and confine Esau to eternal doom. But the context does not warrant God’s individual choosing of some to salvation and others to hell.

As One Commentator wrote:

“…the passage has nothing to do with the eternal destiny of Jacob or Esau, and it has nothing to do with the eternal destiny of any of their offspring. Some individuals of Israel were saved, and some were not (Rom 2:28–29; 9:6b). Also, some of Edom were saved (Amos 9:12) as well as some of Moab (Ruth 1:1–18), and some were not. Just as there will be people saved from every tribe, kindred, nation, and tongue (Revelation 7:9) and some people from every tribe, kindred, nation and tongue who will not.

As is described in this passage, God chooses to work in certain ways through certain people to accomplish his will and plan of salvation. But Scriptures that describe God choosing certain individuals to be used by him in a certain way are not describing an unconditional election to salvation or predestining some to reprobation. Even John Calvin admits that it is the posterity of Jacob and Esau in view. “The words, ‘Jacob have I loved’, refer to the whole progeny of the patriarch, which the prophet there opposes to the posterity of Esau.”[[6]](https://ronniewrogers.com/2019/06/04/does-god-hate-esau-well-no-romans-910-13/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn6) Calvin says in his commentary on this verse, “I therefore chose you for my people, that I might show the same kindness to the seed of Jacob; but I rejected the Edomites, the progeny of Esau.”[[7]](https://ronniewrogers.com/2019/06/04/does-god-hate-esau-well-no-romans-910-13/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn7) Again, it cannot mean the rejection, hatred, equals reprobation since some of the progeny of Esau were saved, and some of the progeny of Israel were not…”

Genesis 25:23 helps us understand that it was nations that were in view:

**23**And the Lord told her (Rebekah), “The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son.”

When Paul quoted “Jacob I loved and Esau I hated.” He was focused on the nations that came from Jacob and Esau. Also, it doesn’t mean God hated the nation of Edom, it is probably the typical hyperbole like Luke 14:26 where Jesus says:

**26**“If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.”

There is no doubt that some people are born into the world with a head start on getting to know God. Being born into the nation of Israel from the lineage of Abraham was a special honor. But it meant nothing if the individual didn’t seek God. There really is such a thing as differential life chances, but no matter where you are born and no matter what time period you live in God’s ultimate plan for His creation will not be thwarted. He wants us to seek Him. Remember Acts 17…

“…He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

**27**“His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us.”

So why is this important?

1. It is important because it helps us to understand that though salvation, through Jesus, came through Jewish lineage, it is not only for the people of Israel. And, in fact, a true is one who is a Jew inwardly.
2. It is also important to understand that being from a certain place on the map or a certain family does not guarantee a saving relationship with God.
3. It is important for us to understand that being chosen by God to serve a certain purpose in His plan, does not take away our responsibility to put our faith in Him.
4. It reminds us that even if we fail at our call to lead others to Jesus, The Master Potter will not fail at fashioning ministers to carry out His plan. Jesus as Savior, God, and Messiah will be proclaimed…

As Jesus was riding into Jerusalem (on what we call Palm Sunday) the crowds were cheering and praising God. The book of Luke, in chapter 19 records…

“Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord!
    Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!”

**39**But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”

**40**He replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!”

**41**But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. **42**“How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. **43**Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. **44**They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you.”

This is what Romans 9 is about. This is why Paul started out the chapter by saying:

“2 My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief 3 for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them. 4 They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God’s adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises.”

His Jewish brothers and sisters had all this, so that they could be a city on a Hill, but as a nation they rejected Jesus. So now Paul is telling them that God has chosen to re-purpose the clay and clearly include Gentiles in His plan to know Jesus and make Him known to the rest of the world.

Today if you hear God speaking to your heart respond to Him with trust and obedience. Sitting in church doesn’t save you, being born a Jew doesn’t save you, being good compared to other people doesn’t save you, being baptized back in 1982 doesn’t save you. Even the benefits of being born into a Christian family won’t save you. It was not Jacob and Esau’s birthright that saved them. It was only after Jacob wrestled with God and clung to Him that he was blessed and called Israel.

So really wrestle with the things of God. Ask all the questions you have seek to know and understand who you are and who He is. This is why we are born when we are and where we are so that we might…

“…seek after God and perhaps feel (our) way toward Him and find Him—"