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Israel: A Proud People

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

As we look at Romans chapter 9, remember one thing—observation, interpretation, application. When you are studying scripture, keep the light right on your feet and take one step at a time. The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. That is what we are going to be looking at in [Romans 9:6-13](#).

Israel is the focus of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11. We are going to see them here as a proud people. We have already seen them as a privileged people in verses 4-5 of chapter 9. But you see, they missed the whole promise that God had given to [Abraham \(or here\)](#) Oh, many Jews saw it, but as a nation, as a whole, they missed it. Now, Paul is going to show in verses [6-13](#) how they became a very proud people. They were proud in the fact that Israel felt, since they were blood kin to [Abraham \(or here\)](#), that gave them a security and a guarantee of sonship. Of course, that is nowhere in Scripture. This pride blinded them to the reality that Paul has been teaching in chapters 1-8. Paul, himself being a converted Jew, knew that the only way to salvation, the only way to be justified, was by faith alone in Christ alone. Now that will never change. That was the way of salvation in the Old Testament. That is the way of salvation in the New Testament. It will always be centered in Jesus Christ by our faith in Him and what He did for us on the cross.

So not only were they a privileged people, they became a very proud people. I want you to know, folks, this pride still exists today. We recently got back from Israel. While we were there we had the opportunity to watch the Hasidic Jew. They are ones who are the more orthodox. They wear the hats and the coats and the prayer shawls and all the different things. You watch them and you begin

to sense that they think, "We are somebody. We are Jews. We are Israel." My heart goes out to them because there is a pride there and a blindness there. They think their kinship to [Abraham \(or here\)](#) is going to insure sonship in His Kingdom and it will not.

This is the dilemma Paul has in [Romans 9](#). You see, God has not changed His way of salvation. He is not going to change it for the Jew, and He is not going to change it for the Gentile. He is the one who initiates salvation. He is the one who sees to it that it takes place. He is the one who brings the fulfillment to all of this.

Well, I want you to look at two problems that Israel had that caused their pride. Perhaps you can apply this in your own life. First of all, Israel had a problem as to who they thought they were. The more they thought of the bloodline back to [Abraham \(or here\)](#), the fact that they could track themselves back to [Abraham \(or here\)](#) or to Israel or Jacob, they felt like this somehow guaranteed their sonship with God. But now listen; God's choice is never based on physical descent. Look at Romans 9:6: "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel."

Paul says, "But it is not as though the word of God has failed." The word "not" means not in any way, shape or form. "The word of God" there refers to the divine promises that God has made to Israel. In [Jeremiah 31](#) and [Jeremiah 34](#) and on through, God promised salvation to Israel. It is not as though His promise has failed. In other words, Paul is saying, "I am not in any way saying God's word has failed." The word for "failed" means that it has stumbled and fallen and now is useless. Oh, no. God's word is still there. God's word has not failed. The problem is not with God's word. The problem is with Israel's understanding of what God's word has said.

It goes on to say in verse 6, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." Again, they thought a physical relationship to [Abraham \(or here\)](#), a physical descent, a bloodline back to him somehow insured their standing with God. But that was not true. They are proud of their physical birth. But physical birth has never saved anybody. That is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again."

Now Paul continues to explain in verse 7: "Neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: 'through Isaac your descendants will be named.'" What an important verse. The first part of it says, "Neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants."

Now I want to ask you a question. Does this remind you of a discussion that Jesus had with the Pharisees back in John 8? You see, the Pharisees were the most religious of all of them. The Pharisees would have been the Hasidic Jew of today. They were the ones who had the 613 laws. They were the religious ones. They came to Jesus with a situation trying to trap Him, but Jesus turns it back on them. Look at John 8. I want you to see that Jesus says exactly the same thing that Paul is saying. Just because you are born a Jew means absolutely nothing when it comes to sonship and eternal life. Your faith must be Christ Jesus, the Messiah. You must put your faith in Him and what He did for us on the cross. That is the way a man is justified. That is the way a person is saved, whether Jew or Gentile. It doesn't matter if you are born a Jew. That has nothing to do with it.

[John 8:1-7](#) gives us the setting:

"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?' And they were saying this, testing Him, in order that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.'"

Now what is He saying? These are the Pharisees. These are the religious ones. He is saying, "I know you are kin to Abraham. I know you are religious. If you don't have any sin, then you throw the first stone." In other words, just because you are born from Abraham, you are still a sinner and you continue to be on the same level as other sinners. This is what He was trying to get across.

Drop down to verse 30. He wants to nail the point down. Physical birth does not guarantee eternal sonship. Faith in Christ is what guarantees it: "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever. The son does remain forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.' They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.'"

He is trying to show them something here. Physical descent is not what He is talking about back in [Genesis 15](#). Verse 40 of John 8 goes on, "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.' They said to Him, 'We were not born of fornication; we have One Father, even God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?'"

Now look at verse 47: "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." In other words, you can track it back to Abraham, but you are not a child of God. You have nothing to do with Him. You are strictly depending on physical descent and physical descent has nothing to do with the choice of God in salvation.

Well, if you will turn back to Romans 9, we will pick up again in verse 7. To me, Paul is saying the very same thing that Jesus said back in John 8. He says in Verse 7, "But: 'Through Isaac your descendants will be named.'" Now, how many sons did Abraham have? He had two sons. One was named Ishmael, who we are dealing with here, and the other was named Isaac. "Do you mean to tell me it was going through Isaac? Why wouldn't it have been through Ishmael?" You see, he is trying to show them that physical descent from Abraham does not qualify you to be spiritual Israel. Israel was to be something beyond just physical descent. Ishmael was of Abraham, but he wasn't an Israelite. Isaac was of Abraham and he was an Israelite. What is the difference? Well, Ishmael was of the flesh, but Isaac was of faith.

You see, when Abraham and [Sarah](#) couldn't have a child, Ishmael was born of Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah. But then God came to them and said, "I want the child to be born through Sarah." So it was at old age when he came. It was by faith that Isaac was born. So you see the flesh with Ishmael, and you see faith and the spiritual part of this with Isaac.

The quote that Paul refers to in 9:7 is from [Genesis 21:12](#). The context is just after Sarah has told Abraham to cast out Ishmael who was his son with her handmaiden, Hagar: "But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named.'" Now listen, when He talks about descendants, He is talking about spiritual descendants. There are fleshly descendants of Abraham, yes, but there are spiritual descendants also. This spiritual seed from Abraham, not only Christ, but those who would be blessed because of Christ, would come through Isaac, not Ishmael. It is not of the flesh; it is by faith.

Salvation does not depend on anyone's physical descent. Verse 8 makes it so clear. Paul says, "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." That to me is as clear as a bell. Ishmael was the result of the flesh. Isaac was a result of Abraham's faith. The spiritual seed of Abraham was to come through Isaac. Salvation is by faith. This is why Galatians 3:7 says, "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." That is his point. You can't depend on the fact that you are born physically in the right line. You have got to be born again. It is by faith. Salvation is by faith. It is not by any physical descent. God's choice is not ever conditioned by physical descent.

Verse 9 says, "For this is a word of promise: 'At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.'" Oh, to miss the surroundings of this event. Every time you hear about Abraham being the father of faith, it tracks it back to [Genesis 17](#). It doesn't take you back to chapter 12 or 15. It takes you back to chapter 17. That is so significant. Why? Go back to the history of it a little bit. For ten years Abraham and Sarah tried to have a child. God spoke to him, covenanted with him and told him that one day a seed would come through his race: the Lord Jesus Christ. He would have a bloodline. It would be through Abraham, Isaac, [Jacob](#), through Judah, through David and on down through Mary. He promised him that. He said you will have a nation through which the bloodline will come. You will even have a land to live in.

Abraham knew that the seed was to come through the loins of his own body and that would start it, so he and Sarah tried. For ten years they tried and she couldn't have a child. She came to him and said, "Listen, take Hagar, my handmaid. Have a child with her." He did, because that was the only thing he could think of to do. Well, Ishmael was the result. Ishmael grew up to be 13 years old. By this time, Abraham was 99 years old. That is not the time that you think about painting the nursery. He is 99 years old. Sarah is 89 years old, and God just appears in chapter 17. Thirteen years He has been quiet and now He just appears and ruins Abraham's day.

Look at verse 1 of [Genesis 17](#): "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.'" He simply restates the covenant that He had told him before. But He does something else. Verse 11 goes on, "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you."

Sometimes you read right on by that. We don't like to talk about it. But I want to tell you something, folks, don't just read past that. Grow up, be adult in your thinking, understand what He is saying here. He was going to be circumcised on the part of his body that would pass the seed on down for generations. Now what does that mean? It meant that God was about to do something in his life. Ishmael was not going to be the bearer of that seed. It was going to be a miracle child born to him and Sarah. The next time he was intimate with Sarah was not based on what he thought he could do, but based on what God had said would take place. Hebrews even says that Sarah was given the ability to bear a child past the child-bearing age because she, by faith, believed God. It is the same thing. So Isaac was strictly a supernatural, miracle child as a result of faith that Abraham had in what God had said to him.

But before He even tells him that he is going to have a son by Sarah, He tells him to be circumcised. Circumcision was never meant to be just a mark on a man's flesh. It was meant to be a mark of an attitude of one's heart who totally and wholly trusted God. These are the people who are the spiritual seed of Abraham, not the people of the flesh who can do it on their own. They are the people who trust God and believe in the promise that God has given. In [Genesis 17:21](#) He breaks the news, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year." Now Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. Genesis 21:1 says, "Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him."

As a matter of fact, when God said to Abraham, "You are going to have a child by Sarah," he laughed and Sarah laughed. God said, "Okay, I will name him Isaac." Isaac in Hebrew means laughter. God got the last laugh. "Abraham, you don't understand. The people born out of your flesh are not it." Israel is the people of the promise. Israel are those who put their faith into the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what He intended Israel to be. So, not all who are descendants of Abraham are truly Israel. You see, it doesn't work that way. Physical descent is never the basis of God's choice. So all the spiritual seed then would come through Isaac. The seed and the seeds of all the nation, those who are descendant, have put their faith into the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel had a problem with who they thought they were. They thought that physical descent would qualify them for God's choice.

Let me ask you a question. You say, "I am not the Israel you are talking about there. He is pretty much reprimanding a proud people." Now, wait a minute. What are you putting your faith in that you think will get you into heaven? "Well, I've got the best Grandma and Granddaddy you have ever been around in your life. They just love Jesus. They just took me to church. They taught me Scripture. I can quote the New Testament." Well, being born in a garage doesn't make you a car. What are you putting your faith in? What are you basing it on? What is your salvation based on? There is only one way and that is through Jesus Christ.

That is the dilemma Paul has. He is a converted Jew. He knows what he is talking about. He was the very one who persecuted the people called Christians. But the Christ of all Christianity arrested him on the Damascus Road, stopped him in his tracks, saved him and now he has a glorious message. His heart is broken because his kinsmen are as proud as he was, depending on their physical heritage to somehow guarantee spiritual sonship with God. That won't work. It will not work. That is what the Word of God says.

Well, they were proud of who they thought they were. Are you proud of who you think you are? But secondly, they were proud of what they thought they could do for God. This is not my word, this is what is written in Romans 9:10: "And not only this, but there was [Rebekah](#) also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

Now listen, God's choice is not based on who we think we are and it is not based on what we think we can do for Him. Verse 10 says, "But not only this, but there was [Rebekah](#) also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac." This is an entirely different situation. This is not like Abraham. Abraham had a son by Hagar. Then he had a son by Sarah, and God chose to put the line through Sarah's son, Isaac. Here is a different situation. This is one man and one woman, Isaac and his wife, [Rebekah](#), and she had twins. They were yet unborn. Neither twin had done anything, bad or good. God said the line would pass through one of those twins, which would be Jacob, not Esau.

The focus here in these two verses has got to be seen very clearly. The focus I think Paul is bringing out is in the middle of the verse. He says, "in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls." Now the word "purpose" caught my attention. It is not the normal word for "purpose", *teleos*. It is the word [prothesis](#). *Pro* means before and *tithemai* means to set. So *prothesis* means to set something before, to openly display something. You see, you have to understand something. God had openly displayed what His purpose was in His choosing, that He chooses to save on the basis of faith, not any other way. That purpose is going to stand because of who He is. Nothing is going to change that. Therefore,

he chose Jacob instead of choosing Esau.

Now why would He do that? Well, remember we studied the attributes of God. God is omnipresent, He is omniscient and He is omnipotent. Those are the three main attributes of God. Along with that, He is loving, kind, merciful, just and long-suffering. All of these are the attributes of God. Now think with me for a second. When God acts, He doesn't act in one of those attributes and then the next day act in another attribute. No way! Whenever He does whatever He does, He acts out of all of them at the same time. That is hard for our minds to grasp. When God does something that we think is bad, we have to remember that He also acted out of His mercy, He also acted out of His long-suffering, He acted out of His kindness, He acted out of His love. Even though He may be judging, He is still acting out of all of His attributes. So when God chose Jacob to be the one through which the Seed would pass, the spiritual Seed, the true Israel would pass, He was a sovereign God who could do that.

But something else goes along with that. He was also a sovereign God who knew what you and I could never know. He is not only omnipotent, it is His right to make the choice, but He is omniscient. He knows things that you and I would never know. If you don't look at it that way, then God looks like some vindictive God who just says, "I'll choose him, but I won't choose him." That is exactly the way some people have hammered this doctrine. No, I don't buy it. When God chose, as a sovereign God, He knew what no man could ever know.

What did He know? He chose Jacob instead of [Esau](#). He knew what we now know. He knew it then. He knew that Esau would be an immoral man. Esau would grow up with no heart towards Him whatsoever. He knew that from Esau would come the Edomites. Obadiah would prophesy God's judgment against the Edomites. He knew that. But He also knew that Jacob, even though he was a deceiver and a conniver, would strive with Him. He looks upon the hearts of man. Man looks on the outside, but God looks upon the heart. I do not think that you can take that piece out of this puzzle. Even though it is going to continue to be a puzzle, we have to remember when God acts, He acts out of all of His attributes. He chose Jacob instead of Esau.

Now, if you can't see that, then you are going to really struggle with verse 13. It says, "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" Now hold on. I thought God loved everybody. I thought God is love. Isn't that what it says? Is there a contradiction here in Scripture somewhere? You have to understand something. The contrast is that He loved something else about David. What was David? David was a man after God's own heart. Was David a sinner? I imagine. Didn't David commit adultery with Bethsheba? You have got the whole story there. But what did he do? He repented and came back. There was something about the heart of David. God looks upon the heart.

God also knew the heart of Esau. You won't understand this as much now, but when we get to verse 15 the balance will start setting in. In verse 15 it says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." There is a difference in those two words. They are not the same word. A very significant difference. One is "mercy." That's when somebody has done something wrong and God realizes in their heart they are sorry, God says, "I will show you mercy." The other word is used to describe one who does it out of arrogance and spite and rebellion. Then God says, "I care about you. I have pity for you. I will do nothing for you." That is the difference in the two words. When you understand the difference in those two words, you understand that God knew the heart of Jacob and God knew the heart of Esau. He showed pity to Esau, but mercy to Jacob because God knows what man does not know.

God knew something. What has Paul been teaching from chapter 1 through chapter 8? He has been teaching the fact that salvation is by faith according to grace. That is it. There is no other way. Faith alone in Christ alone. It has never changed. That is His purpose. His purpose will stand. Why did He use Jacob? Because He knew something about Jacob that you and I didn't know. It was not what Jacob did or didn't do. He just knew the heart of Jacob. They were twins. They hadn't done anything good or bad. But He is God. Remember this. We are looking at salvation from His eyes, not from man's eyes.

So God sovereignly chose that the seed would pass from Abraham in old age, through Isaac and then through Jacob. The spiritual Seed, the spiritual Israel, those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham. Well, here is one thing I want you to remember in all those choices that God made. Even though He knew what their heart would be, not a one of them deserved it. Not a one of them. Abraham didn't deserve it. Isaac didn't deserve it. Jacob didn't deserve it.

This is where I am mixing in something that is going to leave you in a mystery. I have said it as simply as I know how. But what I am trying to tell you is, there is another huge piece of this puzzle that I haven't got a clue about because it just doesn't make any sense in my mind. If it ever starts making that much sense in your mind, be careful. You might be a little too proud. We have taken the mystery out of salvation. Abraham didn't deserve it. "There is none righteous, no, not one." But God sovereignly, as He has a right to do, chose before the foundation of the world, to save His creation. Those whom He foreknew, He entered into a relationship with. Those whom He foreknew He predestined. Those whom He predestined, He called, He justified, He glorified. God did that and not a one of us deserve it.

The illustration is given of a lady who went to Charles Spurgeon and said,

"Mr. Spurgeon, I don't understand how a loving God could say in His word that He hated Esau."

Have you ever struggled with that? She struggled with it. Do you know what Spurgeon said? He said,

"That has never been my problem. My problem has always been, how could God have loved Jacob!"

Now, think. When you get into chapter 9, what are we trying to do? We are trying to figure God out. You won't figure God out. He is a sovereign God. But remember, when He acts sovereignly, He acts in the midst of all of His attributes. That is going to be something that you and I will never figure out because we are not God. But the thing we ought to be overwhelmed by is, how could God have ever loved any of us to start with? It even doesn't bother me too much that He hated Esau because God is who He is and does what He does righteously. I don't see how He loved Jacob.

You see, folks, we have gotten in this mindset that we think we deserve something from God. Do you want to know what your flesh and my flesh is like? Just study Israel. Proud people, blinded to the very truth that God had put right in front of them. Privileged people, but proud. You see, this same sin of Israel, I am telling you is rampant in America. What I think we are seeing happen in these days is that God is bringing us full circle. He is going to start putting things on us that we didn't realize He had put on us to help us realize we are a little bit too proud. God has a way of bringing you down, folks. God has a way of bringing us down. How could God ever love us? I think that is the overall thing that hit me.

Paul goes on in chapter 9 and says, "What is the clay to say anything to the potter?" I mean, God is not only a faithful God, but He is a sovereign God. What can we say? We will never fully grasp it. But there are two things that are main and plain in this text. One is, God's choice does not have anything to do with your physical descent. And number two, God's choice has nothing to do with good or bad works. That is not what His choice is based on. But His purpose has been laid before us of His calling. Remember the word "calling" in the New Testament Epistles not only has to do with what God does, it has to do with a man's response to it. It is the full circle. His calling is all by faith. It is not by any other way. It will stand. God is consistent. He has not changed His way. For the Jew or for the Gentile it is the same.

Now, don't run ahead of me because in chapter 11 he is going to swing all the way around and show you that he still has Israel on his mind and the promises He made to them. We are not there yet. We are just in chapter 9. Israel, a proud, proud people.

When we were over in Israel I got a little upset at some of the attitudes that I sensed, particularly in some of the more religious of the Jewish people. But God dealt with me every time, showing me in my own life how my own flesh is the same way. What I was seeing was myself. Folks, we are proud, aren't we?

Tomorrow when you go to work and things aren't going your way and people aren't doing things like you would have done them if you were them and you start griping and complaining, remember something. A loving God is sending you a message, you deserve nothing but the pits of hell, but He so loved you that He sent His Son to die for you. Maybe it will change your attitude with everybody else. Maybe you might become a little grateful every now and then. Maybe you might become a little more humble and realize you are just like the people who you are criticizing. "For thou that judgest doest the same thing."