

The burst of exhilaration ending the marvelous summing up of God's complete provision for us, first justification by faith as lost sinners and then, once saved, freeing us by faith and the power of the indwelling Spirit from the dominating power of sin in the flesh inherited from Adam by birth. But before giving us instructions for living a godly life in light of all of these mercies bestowed upon the believer he has some encouragement for us. Not content to inform us of all the blessings of salvation thus far enumerated, he begins to engage our hearts with God Himself, His nature and His sovereignty while unfolding His Purpose, His Plan and His Ways for blessing. This is intermeshed in with the well known story of His chosen people, Israel, presented in the Old Testament. Their history up to the writing of Paul's epistles would naturally reinforce assurances and also raise questions in the believer's mind about God's faithfulness. We depend totally upon His loving faithfulness for fulfillment of His promises to the believers just presented in Romans. Can we really depend upon Him? What about Israel? Hasn't He professed to love them and preserved them and glorified them as a nation, then seemingly abandoned them? But didn't they deserve to be forsaken after their adultery with idols and with surrounding nations? Doesn't even God's patience have limits? But what if we Gentiles who now have been brought into a close relationship with God fail Him? Are we really SAFE? In the next three chapters Paul uses the scripturally revealed facts of Israel's past history, its present state and its prophetic future to address these issues for us in a marvelous integration of history and revelation. Chapter 9 draws from Israel's past as a nation chosen sovereignly and blessed by God. Chapter 10 considers Israel's present national status, at odds with God. Deprived for centuries of recognizable existence as a nation, yet they have been Providentially preserved. (Even now, recently restored to their land, they have no better claim to God's blessing [and support by Christians] than any other nation. Nevertheless in His merciful grace individual Jews have the same opportunities for personal salvation as Gentiles.) Chapter 11 shows us Israel's future national restoration to God, receiving the glorious position of head of the nations under its King of Glory, the One whom they first rejected and crucified. All this is revealed as part of God's original plan to His glory, not an emergency afterthought..

Paul first cites his love for his nation Israel having energetically presented the gospel of Christ in every Jewish synagogue he encountered after his miraculous salvation.

Each place they disputed with him, though a few were saved, and finally physically drove him out. He loved them as Christ loved them. He loved them so much he could

wish he himself could be accursed if it would mean their eternal salvation. Only three men that I can think of, have loved Israel that much. Moses, Paul and Jesus Christ. Jesus was indeed cursed for them, hung on a tree.

Galatians 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

The Acts and his epistles document Paul's assertive (aggressive?) prosecution of the gospel to his countrymen and "kinsmen in the flesh," the Jews. To them he was a traitor, and they relentlessly persecuted him to his imprisonments and eventual martyr's execution at the hands of the Emperor of Rome a few years after this epistle to the Romans was written.

In earlier chapters He has already called attention to the remarkable privileges God gave the descendants of Abraham and particularly to the children of Israel (Jacob). One could construct a long list of these blessings and promises. Blessings, totally undeserved, unasked for, unexpected, graciously given Abram as a reward for his faith when He believed God who graciously, unlooked for, appeared to him.. Faith that was counted to him personally as righteousness before God. They were given the adoption (the pronouncement of the nation's settled secure relationship as son), glory and the covenants, the giving of the Law and custody of it, the various religious services of God in the rituals, the tabernacle (and later, temple), the very house of God in their midst, and the fathers, the priesthood, the judges, the kings and prophets. Greatest of all, God chose that Christ would be born through this elite nation. Christ came on behalf of God to be set over all and to establish a dominion of righteousness. Overwhelmed, Paul bursts forth here with praise to God as One adored forever.

All this was indeed carried out as promised by God as documented in His word. And despite appearances God's promises have not been without effect. Despite the obvious repeated and then the seemingly final failure of the nation to believe and receive the blessings promised to Abram and to his successors, **individual Jews are still being saved**. Paul himself was an obvious example of one so blessed. Not because they deserve it more than others, for those, like Saul, were special candidates for judgement, not blessing. He calls himself "chief of sinners", one who persecuted the church of God.

How had all this come about then? Not because of any human merit or human ancestry. He illustrates his point by referring back to a very familiar story in the Book of Genesis ch. 25. Though there were others that rightly claimed to be natural descendants of Abraham, only Isaac's through Jacob were chosen for blessing and as channels of blessing. Those from Ishmael and later Esau

were passed over even though both were firstborn and eligible for special blessing humanly speaking. Ishmael was son of Sarah's handmaid, a result of their failure to persevere in faith in God's promise. While Esau was legitimately (and technically) eligible for the honors of the firstborn, God chose in His sovereignty to bless Jacob above his brother while her twins were yet unborn in Rebecca's womb. Neither child had sinned to deserve judgement nor done anything meritorious to deserve blessing. But God, for His own reasons to accomplish His purpose, prophesied to Rebecca (not directly to Isaac) that the elder would serve the younger. Was this fair? Shouldn't each person born on this earth be given fair chance to prove himself before God, to earn His blessing? Wasn't God a bit arbitrary here? Yes. Doesn't He have the right to be arbitrary? Of course. Does He condemn some to perish? No. All have sinned and (do) come short of the Glory of God. They condemn themselves. Does God, despite this, save some and not others? Yes! Does He have the sovereign right to do so? Of course! If He didn't sovereignly save some not one would be saved. Do those whom He created and allowed to be born and to enjoy His blessings while alive here on His earth owe Him worship? Yes! Do they willingly offer the sacrifice of praise to their Creator? No. Does He pick and save some despite that? Yes, praise and glory to His Name. Is He obligated to save any? No. Does He offer all the opportunity to come to Him and submit and be saved? Yes, everyone.

Was Esau given that opportunity? Yes. All he had to do was submit to the prophesy God gave his mother. All he had to do was forego some earthly blessing in deference and obedience to God. His forecast destiny was simply that the elder twin shall serve the younger. All he had to do was accept that prophetic destiny as from God and submit himself to it and to his (technically) younger brother (who had literally grabbed his heel while being born behind him). The elder son of Rebecca was not inexorably, irretrievably consigned to eternal punishment with no chance for repentance while he lived. Not even a hint that he would be deprived of at least some earthly blessing (even though undeserved by anyone and given generously to each). There was certainly no conditional proviso or notable work commanded which unless he accomplished he would be condemned. No.

But ESAU WOULD NOT BOW when offered an opportunity to humbly submit to God's will He WOULD NOT BE SECOND! He would not give up even some of "his rights" in order to please God. God has high regard for any child of Adam who is content to be second. He has a special blessing for those who accept the place he has given them. Why? Because Jesus humbled himself, Philippians 2:5-10. And because Jesus is the Second Man,

the last Adam, 1Corinthians 15:22, 45, 47; also Romans 5:12-21. Note as you read the Bible how many second (or later-born) are chosen for God's use and blessing. Abel, Shem, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Joseph, Moses, David, etc. Esau, in his pride and selfishness, missed a wonderful opportunity to live and display the humility of Christ before all on earth then and yet to come. He had his opportunity and blew it! God gave him a chance to repent but he could not bring himself to that, Hebrews 12:15-17. But he wanted the blessing enough to wail for it like a spoiled child, which he was. And he perpetuated his frustration, passing it on to his descendants who repeatedly oppressed the children of Israel, his brother, for centuries. Finally in the last book of the Old Testament the prophet quotes God: Malachi 1:2-4 cited here in Romans 9.13, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Don't misunderstand, God did not hate Esau from his birth nor from his youth nor in his old age nor in his sons.. But it was fourteen centuries later when God finally lets loose and declares His hatred for Esau. By then hadn't Esau (Edom) earned God's hatred? As you read watch for the occasions when the Edomites (Idumeans) that persecuted the seed, God's chosen people, Israel, down through history capping with the dynasty of the Herod's who sought to kill Jesus and later his apostles. (Isn't it ironically significant that the names "Adam" and "Edom" are essentially the same?)

So Paul states the challenge. Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid! God reserves His right to have mercy upon whosoever He will. If He didn't not one would enter eternity on God's side. No one deserves it and no one even lowers themselves to ask for it. It is not of man but of God. "Not of him that wills." "Not of him that runs" but of God that shows mercy.

What about Pharaoh, that willful, proud, stubborn god-king of the powerful nation Egypt, who God allowed to enslave its guests, the Children of Israel, God's chosen people? Does God show mercy to Pharaoh and Egypt? One at first might say no, He sent plagues on it. How many plagues? How many times did God relent at Pharaoh's plea for mercy? How many times did Pharaoh harden his heart when he saw God relented? Plague -- relent, plague -- relent, on and on. Finally God in judgement ("judicially") hardened Pharaoh's heart. How? By being good, continually relenting in mercy to Egypt. Why? So He could demonstrate His superiority as God to Pharaoh the powerful god-king of Egypt. Is God sovereign? Yes! Is He good? Yes! Merciful and good. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Have you bowed to Him?

By Ron Canner, November 28, 2007