

# **Examining Romans 9:1-24:**

There are a few helpful pieces of background information that everyone needs to know before we get into Romans chapter 9.

1. As an essential issue for understanding Paul's narrative at Romans chapter 9, in what two ways do orthodox Jews perceive their assurance of salvation, and how does that underlying belief-system affect a Christian's opportunity to present them with the gospel?
2. What did God say in the Book of Genesis about the two unborn babies, Jacob and Esau?
3. Does the Book of Genesis ever say that God hated the individual "Esau"?
4. Why is it important to understand the Old Testament style of writing which references

the nation of “Israel” and “Edom” through their tribal heads, “Jacob” and “Esau”?

5. Does the Old Testament ever tell us anything about God’s feelings toward the Edomites, and how is that relevant to Romans chapter 9?

If we get these five questions correct, then we’ll be in a great position to understand the narrative at Romans chapter 9.

For the first point, the two ways in which orthodox Jews perceive their assurance of salvation is tied to “works” and “bloodlines,” and which for the Jew, makes belief in the Messiah, Jesus Christ totally unnecessary, and hence robbing the Christian of any meaningful basis to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the orthodox Jews. In other words, if I was essentially born saved, by virtue of being a descendant of the “child of promise,” namely Isaac, then why would I need your Jesus?

Moreover, if the Old Testament testifies that “righteousness” comes through our performance under “the Law,” then again, why would I need your Jesus? Simply put, Paul would not be in a position to effectively share the gospel of Jesus Christ with his fellow Jews without first addressing the prevailing views of Jewish assurance, and that’s exactly what Paul does in Romans chapter 9.

In terms of “works,” orthodox Jews do not believe that the Scripture ever establishes “righteousness” through believing in a future, coming Messiah, but rather that “righteousness” comes through walking humbly with our God. Micah 6:8 states: “**He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**” “Nowhere,” the orthodox Jews claim, “does the Scripture point to belief in a future Messiah for salvation.” In the Book of Romans, Paul goes to great length to challenge that very point, arguing that

Abraham, their father, was declared righteous and, ever a friend of God, simply by believing in God. Orthodox Jews challenge this point but arguing the Abraham already had a “Law,” and passed on this “Law,” and was declared righteous by it. Paul counters that “righteousness” does not come from our own efforts because no one is good, and all have fallen short of God’s holy standard of perfection. Moreover, if “righteousness” was obtained through works and bloodlines, then what need would there be of the atonement of animal sacrifices? The animal sacrifices stopped because we now have a more perfect atonement in the death of Christ on the Cross. Moreover, if “righteousness” is obtained by my performance under the Law, then I must ultimately say to God on Judgment Day: “God, I am good enough as I am.” However, God’s “mercy” is not shown toward the one who claims they are good enough as they are, but rather for the one who claims they are not good enough, and needs God as their “Savior.” God’s “mercy” is shown

towards those who come to Him, confessing their sinful inadequacy, and “righteousness” is given to them on that account. Hence, “righteousness” is not obtained by self-righteousness, but instead by looking outward to a Savior. Paul summarized this point in Romans 9:30-32. The “righteousness” that the Jews were seeking, they did not obtain, because they erroneously believed that they could obtain it through self-righteousness, effectively telling God that they were good enough as they were, whereas the Gentile believers obtained “righteousness” because they were seeking it from someone other than themselves, namely from a Savior. That’s the argument against Jewish assurance through “works,” addressed primarily in Romans chapter 9 at verses 15-18. At Romans chapter 9, verses 6-14, Paul is addressing Jewish assurance through “bloodlines.” In the preface of Paul’s remarks at Romans chapter 9, verses 1-5, Paul assures his fellow Jews that he is not against them, but

rather has their best interests at heart, when he shares these matters with them.

**Romans 9:1-5:** “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

Before proceeding with Romans chapter 9, we now need to address points 2-5 from the Outline. Point 2 is fairly simple: What did God

say in the Book of Genesis about the two unborn babies, Jacob and Esau? This is answered at Genesis 25:23: “The Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.’” Saying that the “older” shall serve the “younger,” did not mean that the individual, Esau, would serve the individual, Jacob, but rather that “one people” of one of the “two nations” would serve the other “people,” fulfilled at 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 8:14: “He put garrisons in Edom. In all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became servants to David. And the LORD helped David wherever he went.” So, the important take-away is the fact that God’s prophecy of the “older” serving the “younger” had nothing whatsoever to do with the individuals. It was made \*about\* the individuals, but was \*fulfilled\* exclusively in regard to the descendants, which will be one of a few essential points later on when we get to Romans 9:12-13.

In Point 3 from the Outline, does the Book of Genesis ever say that God hated the individual “Esau”? No, but rather in the Book of Malachi we do find a reference to this. Malachi 2:-5 states: “‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have You loved us?’ ‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares the Lord. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.’ Though Edom says, ‘We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins’; thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.’ Your eyes will see this and you will say, ‘The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!’” There are a number of key points here, and which ties into Point 4 of the Outline: Why is it important to understand the Old Testament style of writing which references the nation of “Israel” and “Edom” through their tribal heads, “Jacob” and

“Esau”? The answer is because in Jewish writing, sometimes references to Jacob did not mean the individual, and in the same way, sometimes references to Esau did not mean the individual. In Jewish writing, it was common for the nation of Israel to be referenced by their tribal head, Jacob, just as it was also common for the nation of Edom to be referenced by their tribal head, Esau, both of which we see in Malachi 1:2-5. Notice how in v.3 it references “**Esau**” and how in v.4 it transitions to “**Edom,**” as one of the “**two nations**” of Genesis, whose inheritance is cursed, in terms—not of the ancestor—but of “**the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.**” (Malachi 1:4) This is perhaps one of the two most confusing aspects of Romans chapter 9, that is, saying “**Esau**” but meaning the nation of Edom. However, that’s simply a common aspect of Jewish writing. For instance, Jeremiah 30:7 speaks of “**the time of Jacob’s distress**” which actually refers to the nation of Israel, not the individual, Jacob. Just as Malachi 1:3 references “Esau” and in v.4

transitions to “Edom,” so too we will find that Romans 9:11 references the individuals and in Romans 9:12 transitions to Edom, particularly regarding the \*fulfillment\* of the prophecy for the nation of Edom, and again also at Romans 9:13, both of which pertaining \*exclusively\* to the descendants, thus resolving the earlier point about the descendants in Romans 9:6-7, and serving as Paul’s climax to refuting Jewish false assurance through “bloodlines,” because if Edom was condemned, and if Edom shared a common ancestry with Israel, then relying on assurance of bloodlines becomes immediately problematic, and hence Paul’s anticipated Jewish pushback at Romans 9:14.

For Point 5, yes, the Old Testament does tell us about God’s feelings toward the Edomites, not just as Malachi 1:3-5, but also at Ezekiel 35:15: “As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you. You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they

will know that I am the LORD.’” So, God really was angry with Edom, though we should also understand from the Book of Jonah that God’s judgment is \*conditional\*. The Book of Obadiah also contains a narrative of God’s judgment against Edom.

Now with this background information in place, we are ready to proceed with Romans chapter 9:

**Romans 9:6a: “But it is not as though the word of God has failed.”**

Paul says this because the orthodox Jews will suppose that the “**word of God**” indeed has “**failed**” if they are not assured of a birthright assurance through their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Paul is trying to correct the matter by showing that no such birthright assurance exists.

**Romans 9:6b-8:** “For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: ‘through Isaac your descendants will be named.’ 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.”

Notice the dichotomy between the “children of the flesh” vs. “the children of God.” Paul is doing exactly what John the Baptist did: “And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.” (Matthew 3:9) If the orthodox Jews have a birthright assurance, what need do they have for John’s baptism, or the coming Messiah? Refuting false assurance is the only path forward to presenting true assurance.

**Romans 9:9-13:** “For this is the word of promise: ‘At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.’ 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,** so that **God’s purpose according to His choice would 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.**’”

What was “God’s purpose” and “choice” concerning “the twins”? Answer: That the “older” would serve the “younger.” In whom was that prophecy fulfilled? Answer: Edom serving Israel: “He put garrisons in Edom. In all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became servants to David. And the LORD helped David wherever he went.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 8:14) At the same time, God warned Israel not

to mistreat their brother-nation: ““You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not detest an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land.”” (Deuteronomy 23:7)

Romans 9:12 and 9:13 are both Old Testament passages that deal \*exclusively\* with the descendants, paired together relationally with “**just as.**” Ask Calvinists when the individual Esau ever served the individual, Jacob. There is no record of this, but we do have record of Edom being placed in servitude to Israel. Likewise, there is no record of God ever saying that He hated the individual, Esau, either before or after his birth, but we do have record in the Books of Ezekiel, Obadiah and Malachi of God’s judgment and wrath upon the Edomites. So, the Old Testament passage of Genesis 25:23 quoted at Romans 9:12 and the Old Testament passage of Malachi 1:2-5 quoted at Romans 9:13 \*exclusively\* relate to the descendants, and for what point? Why would Paul wish to cite these two Old Testament

passages about the \*descendants\* to the orthodox Jews, in relation to his earlier point about the true identity of Abraham's "descendants" mentioned at Romans 9:6-7?

Answer: Because if the orthodox Jews are relying on birthright assurance as physical children of Abraham, or even as physical children of the "child of promise" Isaac, then they would have to concede that their brother-nation, the Edomites, who shared a common, if not superior ancestry, would share the same birthright assurance, and yet they instead fell under God's judgment, thus conclusively disproving simple birthright assurance, and hence Paul anticipates the Jewish pushback that God has broken His promise and that God's word has "failed." So, Paul next addresses the pushback.

**Romans 9:14-15:** "What shall we say then? **There is no injustice with God,** is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses,

**‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,**  
and I will have compassion on whom I have  
compassion.’”

In other words, God decides true assurance, and is not necessarily tied to “works and bloodlines.” Besides, one who thinks that they are good enough as they are, having become “righteous” themselves through “works and bloodlines” need no “mercy.” But if as condemned sinners, we would need “mercy” from the coming judgment. “Mercy” would be for those who forsake attempting to build a case for their own “righteousness” and instead turn to God, and in doing so, receive both God’s “mercy” and God’s “righteousness.”

**Romans 9:16-18:** “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”

In other words, God's "mercy" does not depend upon our own performance under the Law to perfect ourselves, but upon turning to someone other than ourselves, namely God, in repentance who becomes our Savior.

**Romans 9:17-18:** "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' So then **He has mercy on whom He desires**, and **He hardens whom He desires**."

God shows "mercy" to those who turn to Him in faith and repentance, and "hardens" those who "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:10)

**Romans 9:19-20:** "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists

His will?’ **On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?** The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?’”

Paul anticipated the response of the orthodox Jews upon hearing of their own Pharaoh-like hardening, in which he perceives an answer rooted in self-justification, attempting to avoid responsibility for their actions stemming from God’s judicial hardening. Paul is not saying that unbelieving Israel is disallowed from asking God about the ramifications of their hardening, but rather is rebuking them for asking the sort of things that immediately and automatically doubt God’s justice, in particular His right of enforcement as a divine parent in having determined the punishment for their disobedience, especially since God had been patient with them and kept warning them.

As an analogy, a father may say to his children, “Kids, make sure to eat your vegetables!” The children may respond: “But we don’t like it. Why do we have to eat our vegetables?” A mother may respond, “Because your father told you to.” Well-disciplined children would certainly understand the authority of their father, and so in that case, the mother would have appealed to the highest reason. However, secondarily, she could add, “What if your father wishes that you kids grow up healthy? You’ll need your vegetables to do so.” Both answers are true, and the second answer provides the underlying basis for the original answer, which is similar to what we find next. The only point of the analogy is to help understand the two-fold nature of Paul’s answer. Paul first appeals to the strongest answer and then follows with the supporting reason, which is what you find in vv.20-21 about God’s authority and in v.22 about God’s “[patience.](#)”

**Romans 9:21-24:** “Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? **What if** God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.”

So, after having appealed to the strongest principle of God’s authority, much like the aforementioned parental analogy, now comes the underlying basis for God’s morality in His judicial hardening of Israel, which is His patience, in giving them time and opportunity to repent: “**What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known** [on unrepentant Israel, consigned to

“common use” as “vessels of wrath”], **endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?**” So, the judicial hardening of Israel came only after God’s “**patience**” with Israel had been exhausted (or could no longer rightly be excused), and yet is still not fixed and permanent. In other words, can the unbelieving Jews who were judicially hardened by God still become saved? Yes, according to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:14-16: “**But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.**” So, in other words, the veil is not taken away and then afterwards a person turns to the Lord, but the other way around. The hardened person must first turn their own heart to the Lord before the veil is taken away. Moreover, the same people who are hardened at Romans chapter 9 are the same people who Paul holds out will be grafted

back in at Romans chapter 11, by being provoked to envy, when possibly they leave their unbelief.