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God's Word Has Not Failed, For Not All Israel Are Israel

Romans 9:6-9

I. Romans 9: A Magnificent Vision of God Serves a Pastoral Purpose

A. Solid Meat Difficult to Swallow

B. Not for Academic Sport or Intellectual Puzzling

C. Still Less for Division and Controversy

D. Hierarchy of Spiritual Priorities

1. Top Level Priority: A Magnificent Vision of God Enthroned

2. Second Level Priority: God's Word Has Not Failed

3. Third Level Priorities: Personal Assurance and Deep Humility

E. Why God Yearns for These Things in Our Hearts

II. A Crisis of Confidence: Has God's Word Failed?

vs. 6 It is not as though God's word had failed.

A. What Is the Crisis?

1. Simply put: God's promises to Israel seem to have failed

2. This puts the very truthfulness of God Himself on the line

3. Paul has begun this chapter with a statement of his immense agony in considering his countrymen, his brothers in the flesh, his kinsmen, the people of Israel

4. As we noted over the last two weeks, these Jews were almost universally rejecting the gospel of salvation in Christ

5. Everywhere Paul went, he faced incredible Jewish hostility

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6. BUT as Paul pointed out, these are the same people whom God had chosen to be His special people

Deuteronomy 7:6 The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

7. Paul listed their spiritual blessings:

Romans 9:4-5 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

8. YET they are rejecting Christ

9. KEY QUESTION: **Has God's word failed**

- a. "word of God" = God's promises in general

Lloyd-Jones: "The 'word of God' at this point means the declared purpose of God; whether it be promise or threat or decree or whatever it is; that is, the word of God – something God has stated or proposed to do."

- b. More specifically, God's promises in the gospel of eternal life

- c. "failed" = fallen, failed, been rendered of no effect, not been worth the paper they were printed on

Illus. Like the worthless Deutschmarks in Germany during their Great Depression after World War I; like a certificate of ownership to the Brooklyn Bridge; like counterfeit stock certificates... worthless promises of blessing and wealth amounting to nothing

B. Why It Is a Crisis

1. God's word is central to everything

Genesis 1:3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Isaiah 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from

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my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Matthew 4:4 “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

2. God had promised us eternal life through faith in Christ

a. Romans 3: Justification by faith alone; told we would be forgiven of all our sins if we simply believed the word of God

b. John 11: Christ’s astonishing promise of eternal life

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

c. Even more dramatically, Romans 8

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. If God’s word toward Israel has failed, why won’t His word toward us fail?

4. How can God make promises to Israel that come to nothing, then expect us to believe Him when He makes additional promises to us

5. THIS IS A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE OF THE FIRST MAGNITUDE!!!

6. If we can’t trust the promises of God, where then is hope?

C. Remember What Saved Abraham

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1. Abraham was justified by simple faith in a promise made by God

Genesis 15:5-8 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. ⁷ He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." ⁸ But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

2. Abraham wanted to know how he could be certain of receiving the land
3. God gave him a solemn ceremony, but at the core were more words
4. If God is not as good as His word, our faith is worthless and hope is lost forever

Hebrews 6:13-15 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." ¹⁵ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

D. If God's Word Can Fail, Where Then is Hope?

Hebrews 6:17-19 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

E. Three Chapters of Paul's Answer

1. Romans 9:6-9 is just the beginning of Paul's answer to the crisis of confidence
2. It is an elaborate and thorough answer
3. We look at just the beginning today

III. Paul Answers the Crisis Three Times Over

vs. 6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel;

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A. Paul's First Assertion: God's Word Has Not Failed

GOD'S WORD HAS NOT FAILED!!!!

1. Paul Makes a Clear Assertion
2. He will prove it with two examples from the Old Testament
3. He will also support it with further insights
4. This is the central truth Paul is seeking to defend through three chapters of the deepest theology imaginable
5. But why, Paul? Why can you say God's word has not failed??

B. Paul's Second Assertion: Not All Israel Are Israel

1. God's promises to Abraham were not intended for every single physical descendent of Abraham
2. There is a physical Israel and within it, a spiritual Israel
3. God never promised all of physical Israel eternal life, eternal salvation
4. The fact that many individual Jews were rejecting Christ does not invalidate the promises of God
5. God's word has not failed because there has always been a remnant, a spiritual Israel within the larger nation of Israel for whom the promises of God were intended

C. Same Answer Stated Three Times

1. Ethnic Israel vs. True Israel (vs. 6b)

vs. 6 For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel

There was within ethnic Israel generally, that mass of humanity known as the Jews, a true spiritual nation... spiritual Israel. Later in this section, Paul will call them the remnant... the true believers. To them the promises were made, not to all of the nation generally.

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Romans 9:27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

Romans 11:5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

2. Descendents of Abraham vs. Children of Abraham (vs. 7a)

vs. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.

Again, supporting this assertion, Paul restates it. He delineates a difference between Abraham's "seed" (physically) and his "children" spiritually. Just because you were Abraham's descendent didn't make you his child in the spiritual sense. It didn't guarantee you forgiveness of sins and a place with Abraham at the eternal banquet of God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. Children of the Flesh vs. Children of God (vs. 8)

vs. 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Here Paul contrasts "natural children" with "children of God." Literally, it is "children of the flesh" vs. "children of God." Abraham could give birth to the flesh, but only God could give birth to spiritual children.

D. Principle Stated Before... Many Times

1. Forerunner: John the Baptist

Matthew 3:9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

2. Jesus Christ

John 8:37-44 I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." ³⁹ "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹ You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we

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have is God himself." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.

3. Stephen

Acts 7:51-53 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him-- ⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

4. The true Jew of Romans 2

Romans 2:28-29 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Consistent lesson of Israel's history: being one of Abraham's physical descendents did not automatically make you right with God.

That is Paul's assertion... how does he prove it?

IV. First Old Testament Example: Isaac and Ishmael

vs. 7-8 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

A. "What Does the Scripture Say?"

1. Paul's assertion would be shocking to ethnic Israel
2. If he can't prove it from Scripture, it's worthless

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3. Key principle: when in doubt, ask one simple question: “What does the Scripture say?”

B. The First of Two Examples

1. Isaac and Ishmael this week
2. Jacob and Esau next week
3. Together they prove Paul’s point: just because Abraham is your physical father doesn’t mean that God is your spiritual father
4. Deeper point: God’s children are unconditionally chosen by God, and supernaturally born of God

C. The Case of Isaac and Ishmael

1. The Child of the Flesh: Ishmael

- a. God had made an astounding promise to Abram right from the start

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

- b. Later, he clarified that his physical descendents would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky
- c. BUT it seemed God wasn’t keeping his promise... so Abram and Sarai decided to help God out... Genesis 16 recounts the sad tale of a faithless and fleshly effort to “help God out of His predicament”
- d. They felt that God had made a promise He couldn’t keep... so Sarai took her maidservant Hagar and gave her to Abram as a wife to sleep with her
- e. Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael; and Abram thought the matter was settled... Ishmael would be the heir of Abram

2. The Child of the Promise: Isaac

- a. But God had a different plan... a plan that could only have been achieved by the supernatural power of God

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- b. He revealed it first to Abraham in Genesis 17, and even then Abraham had a very hard time accepting it

Genesis 17:15-19 ***And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." ¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" ¹⁹ God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.***

- c. Genesis 18: God restates the promise, and this is what Paul quotes

Genesis 18:10-14 ***The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."***

- d. Genesis 21: God keeps His promise to Abraham and Sarah by supernatural power

Genesis 21:1-3 ***The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. ² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.***

Notice the phrase, "The Lord visited Sarah as he had said and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised."

The "visitation" to Sarah is a miracle, a direct act of intervention by the power of God, similar to what He did with Mary in the virgin birth, but of course, different in that it happened through marital relations... Abraham lay with his wife

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But the miracle-working power of God is emphasized here

Luke 1:34-35 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy- the Son of God.

- e. Once the child of the promise, Isaac, is born, Ishmael persecutes him and God makes His judgment clear

Genesis 21:9-12 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."¹¹ And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.¹² But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

Note again how much Abraham wanted Ishmael to be the child of promise... the chosen heir; or at least included in the blessing

Amazing... in both cases of Ishmael and Esau, their human fathers preferred them and would have chosen them!!

But "God's ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts!"

God was choosing His children based on His plans and His miracle-working power

So the account states in Genesis 21: "Through Isaac your offspring will be named"

- f. This is the background to Paul's statement

D. Details of Paul's statement

1. "Called"

- a. Paul uses a very significant theological term in verse 7

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b. KJV alone among modern translations catches it

^{KJV} Romans 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

c. The word “called” has immense spiritual significance in the book of Romans

Romans 4:17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." [Abraham] is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-- the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Clear message: God called Isaac to exist in the same way He called the universe into existence... by sheer, creative power

Without the word of power, the universe would never have existed

And without the word of God’s power, Isaac would never have existed

In the same way, all the spiritual descendents of Abraham are directly created that way by God’s word of power... He CALLS us to exist; He calls us to be born again

Romans 8:30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 9:10-12 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

Romans 9:24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

We are the called, like Isaac... and it is in Isaac that all of these spiritual descendents of Abraham will be called... called into existence physically, called into saving faith spiritually, called into glory eternally

d. Natural, fleshly children like Ishmael are not the “called”

2. “Reckoned” verse 8

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- a. Another immensely significant word
 - i) Used 39 times in the New Testament
 - ii) Paul alone uses it 19 times in Romans
 - iii) It means to consider, to count, to put to someone's account
- b. Same word spoke of Abraham's justification

Romans 4:3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

This is our central and only hope in the gospel... that God will consider Christ's righteousness to be ours; that His righteousness will be reckoned, considered, accounted to us in God's ledger book... really in God's outlook or disposition toward us

- c. Same word speaks here of how God regards people

Romans 9:8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Summary: Paul asserts that God's word has not failed, because not all Israel are actually Israel; God never spoke His promises of eternal life to every physical descendent of Abraham

He proves it by considering first the case of Isaac and Ishmael

Both had Abraham as their father... but only Isaac was called to be and reckoned as a child of Abraham, ultimately as a child of God

V. Children of the Flesh Vs. Children of God

- A. Paul in Galatians 4: Isaac and Ishmael

Galatians 4:21-31 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. ²⁴ These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children

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who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." ²⁸ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." ³¹ Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

B. John Identical Doctrine

John 1:11-13 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

C. Lasting Lesson Today: Two Manner of People

D. Children of the Flesh Are Born and Live in the Natural Way

1. Their parents have relations and they are conceived
2. They are born, they breathe, they eat, they sleep, they dream
3. BUT they have no faith; they are without hope and without God in this world
4. They live for earthly goals and aspirations, or for false idols and false promises

E. Children of the Promise Are Born and Live in a Supernatural Way

1. Born physically, just as the natural children are
2. BUT at some point in the future, they hear the precious promises of God in Christ, and they receive them, they believe them, they cherish them
3. From that point forward, they live by faith and by the power of the Spirit in the pattern of righteousness
4. They live for heavenly goals, not earthly

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5. They are the children of the promise, of faith, of the Spirit of God

VI. Application

A. Assess Yourself: What About You?

B. Children of God: Understand Your Origin in Awe

C. Children of God: Understand Your Origin in Humility

D. Confidence in the Word of God: God's Word Has Not Failed, and it Never Will!

The Jewish rejection of Christ does not prove that God's promises have failed!

For not all Israel are Israel... there is a spiritual Israel within the biological race of Jews

And God has mysteriously opened up the family of God to Gentiles who are born again by faith in the promise... they are like Isaac, children of God by the promise of God and His electing purpose.

Are you one of them?