

God's Strategy for Blessing Apart From Merit

📖 Romans 9:10-13

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We are studying Romans 9-11. These chapters and their content grow out of the climax of Romans 8. Romans 8 teaches that God is for us and since that is so then no one of any substance can be against us. But if that is true then what about Israel? God was for Israel and yet it seemed at the time with so much Gentile salvation that God was through with Israel. What had happened? Why had God's covenant plan for Israel of a kingdom not precipitated? Had the covenants of God been cancelled? Romans 9-11 is Paul's *Explanation* of God's covenant plan for Israel.

In 9:1-2 Paul testified that he had continual mental frustration over the fact that his nation Israel had not received their Messiah. In 9:3 he notes that he was on the verge of praying that he could be separated from Christ for their sake. In 9:4-5 he notes the many advantages they had over all the other nations and pre-eminent among them was that the Messiah had come from Israel. All these advantages and yet they had not received their Messiah and Gentiles who did not have these advantages had received Him. Paul's answer to why the covenanted kingdom had not come is Israel had rejected their Messiah.

In 9:6, while it may have appeared that the plan of God had gone off course it had not. Paul explained that not all who carried the name Israel had faith like the original man Jacob who was renamed Israel. This answered to the Jewish idea that simply being a descendant of the elect nation of Israel guaranteed a share in the world to come. In 9:7, nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants since God had said, it is through Isaac that your seed will be named. God's choice of Abraham and Isaac was not a choice to be saved but rather to be the seed line through whom the Messiah would come and bring blessing to all who believe. In 9:8 we learn that the seed line was a supernaturally produced line. "That is, it is not the children of the flesh," that is of works of the flesh, "who are the children of God, but the children of the promise," that is of faith, "who are regarded" as the seed line. The promise that Abraham trusted is found in 9:9, "At this time I will come," said the Lord, "and Sarah shall have a son." This teaching countered the Jewish idea that all who were descended from Abraham would ultimately have a share in the blessings of the world to come. Paul shows this was false because in the Genesis narrative Isaac alone was chosen to be the son through whom the Messianic seed would come and that

blessing would depend upon faith in the Messiah. The blessing was always acquired by faith alone and never by simply being of the elect nation or being Abraham's physical descendant.

We come today to 9:10 and here we find a further example proving that to simply be Abraham's physical descendant was enough to be guaranteed blessing in the world to come. **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."** The key to these verses is noticing Paul's emphasis on the lack of works or merit. This directly counters a common Jewish belief. Jews at the time of Christ believed that apart from merit nothing could be achieved. In this way "God's actions were often determined by men."¹ Their doctrine stated that "Every good deed was thought to have a certain quantity of merit attached to its performance."² The merit was calculated by God and stored in a treasury. When God wanted to do a work in history He merely took some of the merit from the treasury. As Mamorstein writes, "Without work nothing can be achieved."³ The Jews believed that many works of God required merit; the choice of the fathers, the selection of Israel from all the nations, the redemption from Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, the provision of manna, the crossing of the Jordan and even the creation of the world. If one asks, what merit could be there before the creation of the world? The common answer was that the Torah preexisted the world and God foresaw the study of the Torah by the patriarchs. On the basis of foreseen merit God created the world and did many other works. Read against this background the Apostle Paul's statements in 9:11 are stunning, **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.** Paul's point is that the Jewish belief that God had chosen Jacob on the basis of merit done or foreseen was contrary to Scripture. God had chosen Jacob rather than Esau on the basis of His own wise choice. And what had he chosen him for? Not for salvation but for being the seed line through whom would come the Messiah.

Now, that God had chosen Jacob apart from any merit, foreseen or otherwise, should be obvious from the Scriptural record. In fact, if He had chosen on the basis of merit He would have more likely chosen Esau than Jacob. Jacob was a chronic liar and deceiver of the worst sort. There are three stories that describe Jacob's lies and deception. First, Jacob's deception of his father Isaac in order to steal Esau's blessing. Turn to Gen 27. Isaac was near death and so he called Esau and commissioned him to go out and hunt some game and prepare his favorite dish so he might eat it and bless him before he died. Rebekah overheard the conversation and since she loved Jacob she told Jacob to bring two choice goats and she would prepare Isaac his favorite dish so that Jacob would get the blessing. So we see Rebekah and Jacob in collusion. In verse 11 we read, "Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man." By the way, that was the primary distinction between the two brothers. I mentioned they were identical twins a few weeks ago and people challenge that because of this difference. But actually, what the text is doing is highlighting the primary

distinction by which you could tell them apart, which is what is always done to distinguish identical twins. There are usually one or two traits in identical twins that people detect and everything else is the same. So I'd argue that this difference noted in Scripture is actually proving they are identical and not the other way around as most people assume. In verse 12 Jacob is concerned that this primary difference will be noticed by his father and he'll be detected as a deceiver. He says, "Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing." It points up that other distinguishing characteristics, such as vocal patterns, were similar enough to possibly result in a mistaken identity, but the one thing that he had to do something about was cover his smooth skin, that could not be mistaken. So he agrees to deceive, he learned to deceive from his mother, and so he's going to deceive in order to get the blessing and the way he does it is put the skins of a young goat on his hands and the smooth part of his neck and then he goes in with the food. Isaac was skeptical because the food arrived so quickly and so in verse 21 "Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you," again you see the skin was the distinguishing mark." Verse 22, "So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." So there was a difference in the vocal patterns but it was not definitive. What was definitive was the feel of the skin. But still Isaac was skeptical and so verse 24, "And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." And so Isaac goes on and gives him the blessing. Jacob is a liar and a deceiver. It's impossible to argue from the Scriptural record that God chose Jacob because of Jacob's merit, foreseen or otherwise. God must have chosen him simply because it was His choice.

Now Esau got angry about this and he held a grudge and wanted to kill Jacob and so Rebekah told Jacob to go away to her brother Laban's home in Haran and stay there for a few days and she made up a good story to tell Isaac so he would comply (she's a manipulator, great family!) and so Isaac sent Jacob away to Laban's in order to get a wife. Along the way in Gen 28:12 is where Jacob has the dream of a ladder going from earth into heaven and angels ascending and descending and this is where God gives him the covenant promise. Verse 13, "And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Now the story goes on and surely after this we might expect to find that Jacob is no longer a liar and deceiver. But that is not what we find. He continues to lie and deceive.

Second, Jacob's deception of his father-in-law Laban in order to get away from him. In chapter 29 God helps Jacob providentially find Rachel. So God is blessing Jacob regardless of his works. Jacob sees Rachel, he loves Rachel and he wants to marry her but Laban deceives Jacob and says if he works seven years he can have Rachel but after the seven years he tricks him into marrying Leah. This was God teaching Jacob what it's like to be deceived. God is trying to build character into Jacob and you'd think he learned the lesson but he never does. Finally after he does marry Rachel he ends up working for Laban for another 13 years and finally he's had it with

Laban and so we come to Gen 31 and Jacob lies to Leah and Rachel to get them to want to leave secretly. In verse 17, "Jacob arose and put his children and wives upon camels and drove away all his livestock, etc...to go to the land of Canaan." And verse 20 reports, "And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing." On the third day Laban finds out and starts to pursue them and on the seventh day, verse 25 says, "Laban caught up with Jacob..." and in verse 26, "Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre..." The point I'm trying to make is the Scriptural point; Jacob was a deceiver. He clearly did not have merit with God. Therefore did God choose him because of merit, foreseen or otherwise? No way. But that's not all.

Third, Jacob's deception of his brother Esau by not going to his home. By this time all the deception had caught up with him such that after being gone for twenty years he was living on edge. It's not an easy life when you deceive your family members. Now he was going back and surely his brother Esau would know about his coming and may kill him and so in Gen 32 we have this great caravan and Jacob puts together a huge gift for Esau in verse 14, "two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys." This is to pacify Esau's anger and save his skin. He sends the gift by way of some servants and they finally meet in 32:4. It says, "Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept." Esau tells him that he doesn't need the gift but Jacob insists he take it and in verse 12 Esau suggests that Jacob and his caravan come to his land, "Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you." But then in verse 13 Jacob lies again. "But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir." So his intent was to go to Seir, Esau's home. In verse 15 Esau does a nice thing, "Esau said, "Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me," But Jacob said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." Jacob rejected the help. Why? Because Jacob never intended to go to Esau's house. Then we see in verse 16, "Esau returned that day on his way to Seir," which was south, but look which way Jacob went in verse 17, "Jacob journeyed to Succoth," which was north. So he deceived his brother. Do you see any good works in Jacob that merited God choosing him over Esau? Not a thing. The only good work we see is that he obeyed his mother and father when they told him to go to Laban's to get a wife. But as far as the overall picture of Jacob, if we weighed his good deeds against his bad deeds, as Judaism at the time of Christ insisted, there is no way the good outweighed the bad. And therefore, in no uncertain terms, could God have chosen Jacob because of his merit, whether foreseen or otherwise as 1st century Judaism attests. And this is why Romans 9:11 was written the way it was. It is answering definitively the Jewish idea that Jacob had merit with God and on that basis God chose him. That cannot be Paul says, **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 God's purpose alone that stood behind God's choice of Jacob. And what was Jacob chosen for? What role was he selected to play in history? To be the recipient of the covenant such that the seed who brings blessing to the world would come through him.

In Rom 9:12 Paul picks up on the concept at the end of verse 11, that God **calls** and says, **it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."** The word **calls** in this context means that God calls the shots in history. He was the one who called it that the older would serve the younger. To see where the LORD called it turn to Gen 25:20. In verse 20 note that "Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife." In verse 21, "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived." It was a supernatural conception. Verse 22, "But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" It's a strange question but apparently what she is asking is "What is wrong with me?" because the pregnancy was not a normal pregnancy. All women who are pregnant feel movement in the womb but this was extraordinary movement. And by the way note that they are called "children" within her womb and not just biological tissue. Some people have tried to argue that life does not begin until the baby comes forth out of the womb. That argument was advanced by Bruce Waltke in the late 1960's and it gained some influence. But the irony of the situation is that in 1977 he changed his view and said he was wrong, there is life in the womb. But there are still lots of people that believe that the fetus in the womb is not soul life. That view does not hold up to scriptural scrutiny. There are lots of passages that show there are persons in the womb and not just fetal tissue. I just point this one out because it's clear that they are called "children" in the womb (masculine gender) and are therefore people. Here are two people, full human beings, struggling within the womb and the movement was extraordinary and so she's asking, "What is going on inside of me?" At the end of verse 22 "she went to inquire of the LORD." In verse 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." It's the last part that is quoted by Paul in Romans 9, **"THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."** But look at the structure of these statements. There are four statements. One is in the present tense, "Two nations are in your womb." Of course they are individuals but what is being said is that the two individuals are the heads of two nations. The three following statements are future tense, "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." There's no timetable put on when these will be fulfilled, they may be fulfilled in their lifetimes or they may be fulfilled beyond their lifetimes. We can't tell from the future tense alone. So what we have to do is look at their lifetimes and see if these three things took place. Clearly the first of the three did take place at the birth, "And two peoples will be separated from your body." That happens in verses 24-26. The second one, "And one people shall be stronger than the other" does not show up in their lifetime. Both of them become wealthy and strong during their lifetime so the fulfillment of that takes place beyond their lifetimes. The

last one, of course, is the one Paul quotes in Rom 9:12 as indicating God's choice of Jacob over Esau. "The older will serve the younger." This was not culturally normal. Always the younger served the older but God said that He was going to reverse what was normal to prove it was His choice behind it.

Who was the older? Esau, he was born "first" in verse 25 and then the younger was Jacob, he was born "afterward" in verse 26 "with his hand holding on to Esau's heel," which is a prophetic foreshadowing of Jacob supplanting Esau. Jacob means "one who holds the heel" or "one who supplants," and our English name James is from the Latin translation of Jacob and so both Jacob and James have the same meaning, "one who supplants." Did Jacob supplant Esau? Jacob supplanted Esau in two areas. First, his inheritance and second his blessing. As we've already seen, Jacob was a scoundrel, and on one occasion he maliciously took Esau's inheritance and on a second occasion he deceptively took Esau's blessing. So Jacob supplanted Esau and therefore did live up to his name within their lifetimes in that he supplanted Esau in those two ways.

However, did Esau, the older, serve Jacob, the younger, in their lifetimes? The evidence says no. Forster and Marston comment, "Esau the individual never did serve Jacob; in fact it was, if anything, the other way around." First, Jacob bowed down to Esau. Turn to Gen 33:3. This is the occasion where Jacob and his caravan had left Laban and were returning home and so he knew he was going to meet Esau again and so he sent a big gift ahead. In verse 3 we read, "But he (Jacob) himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him..." Jacob bowing down to Esau is hardly the older serving the younger. It is quite the other way around. This is the younger serving the older. Second, Jacob addressed Esau as "my lord." Scan down to Gen 33:8. Here is Esau and he says, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met? And he said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." Jacob addressing Esau as "my lord" is again, hardly the older serving the younger. It is quite the other way around. Third, Jacob said that Esau's face was to him as the face of God. Scan down to 33:10. "Jacob said, "No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably," In verse 11 he is begging him to take the gift. This is hardly the older serving the younger. This is the younger serving the older. What I'm getting at is that the prophecy that "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER" is not a prophecy of the two individuals but of the two nations that would come out of the individuals. Clearly it was not to be fulfilled in their own individual lives. If anyone served anyone it was Jacob who served Esau. So the prophecy is that the older nation would come to serve the younger nation in time. This is supported strongly by the emphasis in the other prophecies in Gen 25:23, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other." The emphasis is not the individuals, though they are in view, but the emphasis is on the two nations that these two individuals would stand at the head of.

That being said, what were the two nations that came out of the two individuals? What nation came from Jacob? That one's easy. Israel. Jacob was renamed Israel. Why was he renamed Israel? What was the event? The

wrestling match. Jacob was renamed Israel because he strove with God in the wrestling match. Thus Israel became the name of that nation. But what nation came from Esau? Edom. Why was Esau renamed Edom? This also came out of an event in his life so let's turn to it, Gen 25:27. "When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field," that is, a wandering nomad, "but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents," that is, a stable man." Verse 28, "Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob." We'll get to the love/hate relationship more in a moment but obviously you can already tell that the sense of it is favoritism. Mom and dad were playing favorites with the kids. This was a great family. They had a ton of problems. They have marital problems and sibling rivalry. Isaac and Rebekah paid for it dearly because whatsoever a man sows, that will he also reap. Verse 29 is the origin of the name Edom. "When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom." Edom is from 'adom' which means "red." He wanted some of that red stuff more than he wanted his birthright and so he was renamed "red." And it's from this event that we interpret that Esau despised his birthright. And so that's how he got his name Edom and Edom is the name of the nation that came from Esau.

Where is Edom? Edom is in modern day Jordan. It's where Petra is for those of us who went to Jordan a few weeks ago. That was Edom's inheritance. God gave it to him. God said his inheritance would be a rocky wilderness and for those of you who went or saw pictures, is it a rocky wilderness? Absolutely. So they were given an inheritance but it wasn't exactly the Promised Land.

And these two nations began to struggle just as the two individuals had struggled. For example, when Moses was leading the Israelites up through modern day Jordan to make the Eastern approach by crossing the Jordan River they needed to go through Edom. So they requested passage but the Edomites denied passage. That was not very brotherly-like conduct. Then there was Balak who paid Balaam to prophecy against Israel but every time he opened his mouth he blessed Israel. Then there was the time when Judah was under the threat of the Babylonians and the Edomites said, "raze it to the ground, raze it" (Ps 137:7) and they joined in the fighting (Amos 1:6, 9, 11). That was not very brotherly-like. It was a continual, bitter rivalry between these two nations. Obadiah is God's warnings to Edom against their cursing of Israel and yet they did not pay attention to the warnings and therefore Obadiah concludes saying that all Edom will be totally annihilated down to the last man at the Second Coming of the Messiah and then the whole of Edom will be possessed by Israel. So this is a prophecy that is still playing out or to be played out in the future. The older will serve the younger.

Now the last expression we need to deal with is Rom 9:13. I dealt with it in part a few weeks ago. **Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."** It's a quote from the LXX version of the OT as is common with the apostle Paul. The quote comes from Mic 1:2 so turn to Micah 1:2. People struggle over this verse because they say, "I thought God loved all people. And here it says God hated some people." Well, you need to keep in mind several things, one of which is that there are nations in view here and not individuals. Jacob stands for the

nation Israel as verse 5 shows and Esau stands for the nation Edom as verse 4 shows. Another thing to keep in mind is that the Hebrew has three words for "love" and what is being said is that God had a particular kind of love for Israel that He did not have for Edom. Let's read, "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have You loved us." The problem was that Israel didn't feel too loved because they were living in sin and under the LORD's discipline. So they questioned His love for them. But the Lord says, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau," the evidence of which is "I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." And "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." In other words, God had made no covenant of blessing with Edom and therefore no matter how much they tried to build up ultimately God was going to destroy them and as verse 5 shows, give their territory to Israel. "Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel." So the difference in this love and hate is that God had a love for Israel that led to Him making a covenant with Israel. God did not have this kind of love for Edom, though He did give them an inheritance, just not a very good one, but it was one that served a role in history. And Paul is saying in Romans 9, this choice by God to enter into a covenant with Israel and not Edom is not based at all on Israel's merits because he didn't have any merit. God chose Israel and not Edom simply because that was His purpose!

Now, another help is to understand that love and hate in the Hebrew is an idiom for priority in relationships. It's not how we would speak but it is how they spoke and they readily understood it without taking offense. Turn to Gen 29:30. This is Jacob and the story of his love for Rachel but how he was tricked into marrying Leah. After he was tricked into marrying Leah he spent one week with her and was then also given Rachel. In verse 30 we read, "So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years. Now the LORD saw that Leah was hated," the translators say "unloved" but the Hebrew word is 'hated.' Now are we to think Jacob despised Leah? Of course not. Verse 30 defined the hate as loved less. He loved her less. He gave priority to Rachel. So it doesn't mean hate in the sense that we might use the word hate but it means in the Hebrew way of speaking, to love less, to give priority to one over the other. Now turn to the NT Luke 14:26 because we see this in the NT too. This is Jesus giving a call to discipleship; not a call to salvation. Salvation is a free gift. Discipleship is costly. The two aren't the same. Note verse 26, "If anyone comes to Me (for discipleship), and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." Now, does Jesus mean you need to hate your parents? I thought, under the Law, which they were under, that one of the Ten Commandments was to honor your father and mother. Now Jesus says they need to hate them? Obviously he's talking in a way that was understood by that culture to mean "give priority too." He's saying to be My disciple you have to give priority to Me even over family loyalties. That is the cost of discipleship. It doesn't at all mean have a malicious attitude toward your parents. Of course they were to love and honor their parents. But when it comes right down to it

who gets the priority? Christ. It's the same thing when it says Jacob I loved, Esau I hated. God gave priority to Jacob and as such he entered into a covenant with Him, a covenant of blessing, through which the Messiah according to the flesh would come and in whom the blessing of salvation comes to all who believe. It was God's sovereign purpose to choose that strategy for working in human history.

Alright, today we have shown two basic things. First, that God did not choose Israel to be the conduit of blessing because of human merit. That was the view of 1st century Jews; that God chose Israel because God foresaw that they would study Torah and build merit with Him. God cannot be manipulated by human merit. We can't do anything to get God to do what we want. God is not a puppet in heaven and He doesn't owe you or me anything. Second, that God chose Israel to be the conduit of blessing because of His own sovereign purposes. I hate to be cliché but history is truly, His-story. It's not some joint product where we enter in to decide which way history is going to go. It's not Hisandourstory. It's His-story alone. He chose to do it this way and He chose to do it this way irrespective of what we do or what He foresaw we would do.

¹ Forster and Marston, p 222.

² Morris, quoted by Forster and Marston, p 213.

³ Quoted by Forster and Marston, p 217.