

God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen: The translation, along with most interpreters, sees here a doxology piously added after the long list of all God's gifts to Israel, rather than a qualification attributing to Christ as Messiah a divine status unparalleled in the New Testament before John 1:1, 18; 20:28 (cf. also Titus 2:13) and somewhat at odds with other christological statements in Paul, who accords Christ divine status but always in subordination to God the Father (cf. Phil 2:11; 1 Cor 8:6). See further Cranfield 2.464–70; Ziesler 238–39 (concise summary).

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ii. The Elective Pattern of God's Working (9:6–29)

Introduction to Rom 9:6–29. This first stage of Paul's consideration of Israel's failure with respect to the gospel amounts to a theodicy. Can the present situation according to Paul's gospel—the inclusion of the Gentiles and apparent exclusion of Israel from the community of salvation—be squared with God's ancient assurances to Israel? Does not it imply that God has not been faithful to his "word." Paul's task is to explore God's "word," as recorded in scripture, in such a way as to show that the present—"mixed"—composition of the eschatological people of God responds to the way God has acted all along and manifests the sovereign freedom that must always attend the action of the Creator. In dealings with key figures of Israel's past, along with further statements and explanations recorded in scripture, God gave sufficient indication of the way things would go in the final age. The present composition of the People of God does not mean that God's "word" to Israel has "fallen through" (v 6a).

The structure of the long scriptural argument is best discerned by working "backwards," so to speak. Vv 22–29 declare *what* God has done: calling into being an eschatological people of God, made up of Gentiles and the Jewish-Christian "remnant." Vv 6b–21 prepare the way for this by

tracing in scripture God's declared intention to proceed in this "elective" way, exercising the sovereign freedom of the Creator. The opening thematic question in v 6a, "Has God's word (to Israel) fallen through?" thus receives a resounding negative response—though one that is, in fact, left unstated because of the anacolouthon occurring at the end of v 23.

Within the first main section, vv 6b-21, Paul pursues the elective pattern of God's operation towards Israel in four stages, the first three (vv 6b-9; vv 10-13; vv 15-18) centering in turn upon a key phase of biblical history, the fourth (vv 19-21) employing a stock biblical image (potter and clay) designed to counter any possible human objection to God's freedom of action; v 14 serves to give fresh impetus to the argument with an objection about God's "fairness."

The second main section, vv 22-29, falls into two parts. In vv 22-23 Paul begins to apply what has been established concerning the freedom of God's action in the past to the present situation. In vv 24-29 he cites texts from Hosea and Isaiah to show how the present make up of the believing community is in accordance both with what God had promised and the exercise of freedom.

We can set it all out as follows:

Introductory Thematic Question: v 6a: "Has God's word fallen through?"

I. The "Elective/Promise" pattern of God's action in the *past*: vv 6b-21.

1. God's free mode of forming a People shown in Isaac: vv 6b-9.
2. God's free mode of forming a People shown in Jacob and Esau: vv 10-13.

Objection: Can we charge God with unfairness?: v 14.

3. God's freedom shown in Exodus figures (Moses and Pharaoh): vv 15-18.
4. God's freedom defended against human complaint: vv 19-21.

II. Application to what God has done in the *present*: vv 22-29.

1. God's right to act in this way: vv 23-23.
2. The "calling" of the mixed community "pre-announced" in scripture: vv 24-29:

General statement of the call: v 24:

- a) Gentiles: vv 25-26.
- b) Jewish-Christian "remnant": vv 27-29.

The section as a whole displays an "inclusive" structure in that both at its beginning (vv 7b-8a) and end (vv 24-29) the issue is that of who constitutes the "people" ("Israel") "called" in the eschatological era by God to enjoy the privilege of "divine sonship" (cf. the first two privileges named in the list of vv 4-5).

a) The Elective Pattern Shown in the Patriarchs (9:6-13)

6. But it is not as if the word of God has fallen through.

For not all those who belong to Israel by descent are "Israel,"

7. nor because they are descendants of Abraham are all children (of God). But (the principle runs) "in the line of Isaac shall descendants be called into being for you."

8. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants. 9. For the word of the promise runs as follows: "At the right time I shall come and Sarah will have a son."

10. And the same principle can be seen also in the case of Rebecca, when she was with child as a result of one single act of intercourse with Isaac, our father. 11. While the boys were as yet unborn and had had no chance to do anything good or bad, in order that the elective purpose of God might stand 12. and rest not on human achievement but solely on God's call, she was told, "The elder will serve the younger," 13. as it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

INTERPRETATION

God's mode of forming a people shown in Isaac (vv 6-9). As a first stage in his defense of God's faithfulness, Paul makes (v 6b) a key distinction, casting it in terms of the first two of the privileges listed in vv 4-5—"Israelites" and "divine filiation." With respect to the privilege of belonging to the "people" of God as "Israelites," those who bear this title are not simply coextensive with Israel nationally defined nor (v 7a) are all "descendants of Abraham" (*sperma Abraam*, here understood in a neutral "ethnic" sense) "children (of God)" (*tekna*; see Note). With respect to the eschatological realization of these privileges, as far as God is concerned, some other criterion—other, that is, than ethnic descent—is operative.

What this criterion is Paul finds in the scriptural account of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Abraham's son Isaac. This set a pattern indicative and determinative for the future. Abraham originally had not been able to have a child by Sarah, though he had a child, Ishmael, by her Egyptian maid, Hagar (Genesis 16). The mysterious visitors who come to the tent in Mamre (Gen 18:1-15) assure him that he will have a son by Sarah (v 10, quoted in Rom 9:9). Later, when Isaac is born in fulfillment of this promise (Genesis 21), Abraham is prevailed upon by God (and Sarah) to cast out Hagar and the older boy. God assures Abraham: "It is through the line of Isaac that your descendants (*sperma*) shall be called (*klēthēsetai*)" (v 12). Paul finds (v 7b) in this restriction of the "descendants" to Isaac a justification for making the distinction just formulated between wider (ethnically defined) "descendants" of Abraham

("children of the flesh") and a special line of descent, running through Isaac and "called" into being in response to a divine promise. In this sense scripture provides an indication of God's intention to "call" into being non-ethnically defined "descendants of Abraham," who will enjoy the privilege of divine filiation in the last days (*kata ton kairon*; cf. the quotation of Hos 1:10 [LXX 2:1] in v 26).

It is important to note that Paul has not at this point identified the "true" (Isaac-line) "descendants of Abraham" with any particular community—Christian or otherwise. He has not defined a "(true) Israel within Israel," from which Jews who have not come to faith in the gospel would be excluded. The focus remains upon God and the indications given in scripture that "promise" and "calling," rather than ethnic belonging, mark the pattern of divine action.

God's mode of forming a people shown in Jacob and Esau (vv 10-13). The second stage of Paul's analysis of scripture moves to the next patriarchal generation. Here God has given an even stronger indication that his eschatological design runs solely by free choice and the exercise of creative power. The indication comes in the divine attitude taken towards Rebecca's twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Before the twins were born and therefore before either had a chance to do good or evil and so merit one way or the other (vv 10-11a), God reversed the natural order by telling their mother that the "elder" was to serve the "younger" (v 12b, quoting Gen 25:23). This, comments Paul, (vv 11b-12a), safeguards the principle that God's "purpose" (*prothesis*; cf. 8:28) proceeds upon a wholly "elective" (*kat' eklogēn*) basis. It was not to depend in any sense upon human "works" (*ex ergōn*) but solely upon the "calling" (*kalountos*) of God. A later scriptural passage, Mal 1:2-3, is cited (v 13) to clinch the matter with its bald statement of divine preference (lit. "love") for Jacob as against "hatred" for Esau (on the Semitic idiom involved, see Note).

What this highly dense stage of the argument particularly brings out is the sovereign freedom of God to pursue a creative purpose quite independently of any contribution from the human side. Human behavior ("works") in no sense determines the path God chooses to pursue. The language of "works" immediately calls to mind the polemic against "works of the law" in the earlier part of the letter. Paul briefly recycles this polemic in order to prepare the ground for his subsequent (9:30-33) explanation of why it is that Israel, despite her pursuit of righteousness, has failed to attain the long-sought goal. The truth is that no amount of "works righteousness" on the part of Israel can condition the operation of God's eschatological purpose or limit its scope to one people alone. God's free, creative mode of operation leaves open the possibility of including within the final "Israel" those (believers—Jewish and Gentile) who have no "works" to show whatsoever.

NOTES

6. *But it is not as if the word of God has fallen through:* By "word of God" here Paul means the whole complex of God's address to Israel, recorded in the scriptures and grounding the privileges just listed; cf. 3:2. The idea of God's (or a prophet's) word "not falling" reflects a common idiom of the biblical and post-biblical tradition (cf. Josh 21:45; 23:14; Ruth 3:18; 1 Sam 3:19; 2 Kgs 10:10; Tob 14:1 [SJ]).

For not all those who belong to Israel by descent are "Israel": Distinguishing a "true Israel" within the wider mass of the people is not totally unparalleled in the Jewish tradition: cf., for example, at Qumran: CD 4:2-12; 4QFlor 1:14-19; also (presuming that "the wicked" includes unfaithful Jews) 1 Enoch 1:8-9. Cranfield's neat phrase, "an Israel within Israel" (2.474) is not quite accurate, since it restricts the "Israel" which comes about as a result of God's elective purpose simply to Jews. Paul has not yet defined this "Israel"; it is better to see him as stating simply that the two "Israel's" are not coextensive. This leaves open the possibility that the "(true, called) Israel" can include Gentile believers—a possibility which Paul depicts as a reality in vv 24-29. L. Gaston ("Israel's Enemies" 94) argues that what Paul is asserting here is the inclusion of Gentiles within the true Israel, rather than the exclusion of certain Jews: not all who belong to the (true) Israel are Israel (= Jews). But it is far more natural to refer the first "Israel" phrase (*hoi ex Israēl*) to those of Jewish descent, rather than the second; cf. the telling critique of E. E. Johnson, *Functions of Apocalyptic* 139n, 194.

7. *nor because they are descendants of Abraham are all children (of God):* "Descendants (seed) of Abraham" (*sperma Abraam*) occurs elsewhere in Paul (Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22) and the wider Jewish and Christian tradition (cf. *Pss. Sol.* 9:17; 18:4; John 8:33, 37) as an honorific title for Israelites, with the specific connotation, in virtue of the promises to the patriarchs, of destiny to "inherit" the blessings of salvation (cf. esp. Gal 3:29). Here Paul seems to use the phrase in a neutral, "secular" sense, simply indicating natural descent. Some preserve the honorific sense by understanding the phrase here as predicative: "Nor is it as though all his children are Abraham's seed" (Dunn 2.540). But this destroys the parallelism with the preceding statement concerning "Israel." The true predicative phrase "children" (*tekna*) is normally taken to mean "children (of Abraham)," as though Paul were distinguishing (mere) "descendants" of Abraham from his "children." But v 8, which gives an explanation of the scriptural text cited in v 7b and which stands in parallel with v 7a, speaks in terms of divine filiation: "children of God" (*tekna tou theou*). This argues strongly that the simple *tekna* in 7a should be understood in the same way. Paul is then taking up the first two of the privileges in the list of vv 4-5: the "people" ("Israel") privilege and the "divine filiation" privilege; the recurrence of the same two at the end of the sequence, in vv 25-26, forms a typical Pauline "inclusion."

But (the principle runs) "in the line of Isaac shall descendants be called into being for you": The quotation agrees exactly with the LXX of Gen 21:12. Paul understands

it in a restrictive sense ("only in Isaac") and takes the verb *klēthēsetai* very emphatically ("will be [that is, in the eschatological age] called into being").

8. *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God:* Paul does not mean to exclude the possibility of "children of flesh" (that is, the Jews) being "children of God" but simply denies that being the one necessarily means being the other. On the privilege of divine filiation expressed in the phrase, "children of God," see Interpretation of 8:14-15.

are reckoned as descendants: "Reckoned" (*logizetai*) recalls Paul's sustained use of Gen 15:6 (God's "reckoning" of righteousness to Abraham) in chapter 4 to argue that righteousness is not brought about by human works but through God's gracious, creative action on behalf of believers. The use of the term here implies that the privilege of divine filiation accrues to the "children of the promise" not on the basis of natural descent but solely on that of God's creative "reckoning" of them to be "descendants of Abraham." Cutting the tie with natural (ethnic) descent allows for Gentile believers to be "reckoned" among the "descendants of Abraham"—*sperma* here apparently having the honorific sense. In Gal 4:28 Paul dubs the Gentile Galatians "children of the promise."

9. *For the word of the promise runs as follows:* "At the right time I shall come and Sarah will have a son": The quotation is basically from Gen 18:14 (LXX) with some influence from Gen 18:10 (*kata ton kairon*), with the reference to "in the spring" omitted and with "I shall come" (*eleusomai*) instead of "I shall return." The modifications make the text convey a sense of the divine intent for the eschatological era; cf. the use of *kairos* with respect to God's saving eschatological intervention in 5:6.

10. *And the same principle can be seen:* The translation draws from the opening phrase (*ou monon de, alla kai*) the main verb otherwise lacking in the very imperfect sentence making up v 10.

when she was with child as a result of one single act of intercourse with Isaac, our father: The Greek word *koiṓtē* literally means "bed" but has extended, euphemistic meanings in the sense of "marriage bed," "sexual intercourse" and even "seminal emission" (cf. BAGD 440). Paul probably wants to underline the equality between the twins, Esau and Jacob, by stressing not simply that Rebecca had intercourse with one man (*ex henos* = Isaac; the reference is to Gen 25:21) but that they were conceived from one and the same sexual act.

11. *While the boys were as yet unborn and had had no chance to do anything good or bad:* This clause appears as a genitive absolute, lacking a subject and beginning a long rambling sentence making up vv 11-13. Paul introduces the steps of his argument in an order that is virtually the opposite of the logical. In particular, the introduction of the idea of human merit is unprepared for—unless Paul is confident that it remains a continuing issue.

the elective purpose of God: Paul's use of *prothesis* to express the divine purpose in regard to the eschatological salvation and glorification of human beings

emerges very clearly in 8:28. *Kat' eklogēn* means "operating by selection"; cf. also 11:5.

12. *and rest not on human achievement:* The phrase *ouk ex ergōn* expresses in a form appropriate for the epoch before the giving of the law the principle more regularly stated as "not from works of the law" (*ouk ex ergōn nomou*); on this see Note on 3:20.

God's call: On the distinctive Pauline sense of God's "calling," see Note on 8:30. *she was told, "The elder will serve the younger":* The quotation agrees exactly with LXX Gen 25:23.

13. *as it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.":* The quotation of this text, Mal 1:2-3 (LXX, with slight word-order variation), means that, as in 3:21 and 4:3-8, the scriptural testimony comes from both the "Law" and the "Prophets." Malachi assured Israel ("Jacob") of God's persevering love by pointing to God's equally constant repression of Israel's adversary, Edom ("Esau"). Paul simply takes the oracle as a confirmation of the preference for Jacob expressed in Gen 25:23. "Hating" in this context simply reflects a Semitic way of expressing a choice made for one party over another. There are no grounds for erecting a theory of "double predestination" on the slender scriptural base provided by Paul's quotation of this text. He is simply pointing to this text as an indication of the divine intent to proceed in a sovereignly free, "elective" way, which human qualities or claims cannot touch or determine; nothing is said about the ultimate fate of Esau.

FOR REFERENCE AND FURTHER STUDY

(See list following commentary on 9:22-29)

b) The Elective Pattern Shown in Moses and Pharaoh (9:14-18)

14. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?

By no means!

15. For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomsoever I have mercy, and I will show pity to whomsoever I show pity."

16. So then it is not a matter of human willing or achieving, but of God exercising mercy.

17. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up: to display through you my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

18. So then he has mercy upon whomsoever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he wills.