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**The “Spiritual” Israel within “Ethnic” Israel  
(Part 2)  
Romans 9:10-13**

**Introduction:**

The story of **Jacob** and **Esau** is fascinating. We read about their **conception** and **birth** in **Genesis 25:19-26** which says: Now these are the records of the generations of **Isaac**, Abraham’s son: Abraham became the father of **Isaac**; and **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. **Isaac** prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was **barren**; and the LORD answered him and **Rebekah** his wife **conceived**. But the children **struggled** together within her; and she said, “If it is so, why then am I this way?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. 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**.” When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were **twins** in her womb. Now the **first** came forth **red**, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him **Esau**. Afterward his brother came forth with his **hand** holding on to Esau’s **heel**, so his name was called **Jacob**; and **Isaac** was **sixty years old** when she gave birth to them.” It is God’s **sovereign choice** of Jacob over Esau that we are going to be looking at in our passage this morning. Turn in your Bible to **Romans 9**.

As we continue on in our study of **Romans 9:6-13**, we are looking at one of the **most difficult** theological portions of Romans that deals with

the **sovereignty of God**, which **William Newell** rightly said, “...**perplexes** many, **disturbs** others, and some take occasion to **stumble** at it.” (pg. 362)

Now last time I began this passage by saying that in **Romans 9:6-13**, after Paul presents his *thesis*, he then gives two historical examples to prove it. Thus far, we have seen: Paul’s thesis **stated** and **explained**, and the *first historical example*: Abraham’s sons **Ishmael** and **Isaac**. This morning we are going to see the *second historical example*, which is about:

### I. Isaac’s sons Jacob and Esau

- A. Look at **v. 10**: **And not only this**, but there was **Rebekah** also, when she had conceived **twins** by one man, our father **Isaac**;
  - 1. The introductory words “**And not only this**” show that **vv. 10-13** is a **more conclusive argument** than the previous one in **vv. 6-9**. Remember that Paul had just demonstrated from the **first generation** of Jewish ancestry, **God’s sovereign choice** of **Isaac** over **Ishmael** the firstborn, to **prove** that God’s saving promises to Israel have not failed due to Israel’s unbelief and rejection of the Messiah because He **never promised** that every ethnic Israelite would be **saved** (v. 6b).
  - 2. But knowing that someone might **object** since **Ishmael** was not “**fully Jew**” because he was not born to **Sarah**, like **Isaac**, but to Sarah’s **Egyptian** maid **Hagar**, Paul now turns to the **second generation** Jewish ancestry, **Isaac’s sons Jacob** and **Esau**, to make an even **clearer** and **more convincing** case for the **principle of sovereign election**.

3. Concerning **Rebekah**, **Douglas Moo** states, “Since Paul highlighted **Sarah’s role** in giving birth to the **heir** of the covenant promises in **v. 9b**, it is natural that the **next step** of this argument focuses on the **matriarch** of the next generation: **Rebekah**. Paul sees an important similarity between **Sarah** and **Rebekah**. The point of comparison is obvious: **Rebekah**, like **Sarah**, was **barren**; **Rebekah’s** barrenness, like **Sarah’s**, was **overcome** by **divine intervention** (Gen. 25:21); and, especially important for Paul’s argument, **Rebekah’s son**, like **Sarah’s**, was **called by God** to become the **heir** of the covenant promises.” (pg. 579)
  4. Now **Rebekah** also received a **promise** from God about how He **sovereignly choose** Jacob over Esau, and therefore, the **older** (Esau) would **serve** the **younger** (Jacob), but Paul doesn’t state this promise until the end of **v. 12**. But before he gets there he discusses various **features** about God’s sovereign choice.
  5. In **vv. 10-13** we see **four features** that powerfully demonstrate God sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau. But as we go through this passage an **important question** that I would like you to **think** about and **answer** is this: When Paul speaks about God’s **sovereign choice** of Jacob over Esau, is he talking about **individual election** to eternal salvation or merely **corporate election** to temporal blessing, which means God’s choosing the **nation** of Israel to have a special place in salvation history?
- B. Let’s look at these **four features**. The **first feature** is this: **The Circumstances surrounding God’s sovereign choice**. Look

again at v. 10: And **not only this**, but there was **Rebekah** also, when she had **conceived twins** by **one man**, our father **Isaac**;

1. Right from the start Paul makes it clear that the **circumstances** surrounding Jacob and Esau were **much different** than that of **Ishmael** and **Isaac**. Notice that the **twins, Jacob** and **Esau**, had the **same father (Isaac)** and the **same mother (Rebekah)**, who in **one act** of sexual intimacy with “**one man**” (Isaac) **conceived** them at the **same moment** in time.
  2. This automatically **silenced** the **objection** concerning Ishmael who had a different mother than Isaac. Here both Jacob and Esau were **fully Jews** from the same mother. Nothing in the least was lacking in their **parentage**.
  3. Therefore, according to ordinary human expectation, they should stand on **equal terms** before God in His dealings with them. And yet, God sovereignly chose Jacob over Esau to once again show that God’s saving promises were never **guaranteed** to all ethnic Israelites (6b).
  4. Notice that Paul calls **Isaac** “**our father**,” which he does to associate himself with his Jewish kinsmen according to the flesh (v. 3). Whereas **Abraham** is usually called “**our father**,” not **Isaac**, since the lineage of God’s covenant promises ran from Abraham through Isaac, the expression is fine.
- C. Paul then goes on to give more **circumstances** surrounding God’s choice of Jacob over Esau in v. 11: **for** though the **twins** were **not yet born** and had not done **anything good** or **bad**, (Stop there)
1. Here we see that God’s promise to **Rebekah** of His **choice** of Jacob over Esau did not depend on human beings because it was

given **before** the twins were even **born**. And it was also done **before** the boys had ever “...done anything **good** or **bad**.”

2. In other words, God’s choice had **absolutely nothing** to do with their **character** or **conduct** because they hadn’t had a chance to do anything yet.

D. The **second feature** is this: **The Reason for God’s sovereign Choice**. Look again at **v. 11**: 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**, (Stop there)

1. The word “**purpose**” (prosthesis) here denotes the **determined** plan and will of God. And notice that **God’s purpose** is **characterized** as “according to His **choice**.”

2. The word “**choice**” (eklogen) or **election** means “to pick or choose out from some kind of mass” (Mk. 13:20; Rom. 11:5, 7, 28; Eph. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:4).

3. Jesus taught this **same thing**, for in **John 15:16** He said, “You did not choose Me but I chose you...” (Jn. 13:18; 17:6)

4. Therefore, **biblical election** is God’s **sovereign choice**. No one **debates** whether **election** is **biblical**; the **debate** has to do with whether it is **individual election** to eternal salvation or **corporate election** to temporal blessing.

5. Now although **God’s purpose** is technically the **subject** here, God’s **purpose** and His **choice** (or **election**) inform one another. In other words, this is an **election** with a **determinative purpose**.

6. Therefore, this can be called God’s **electing purpose**, which is absolutely **free from** and not **determined by** the will and

actions of men. This is exactly what happened when God sovereignly chose Jacob over Esau **before** they were even born and had done anything good or bad.

7. Notice again that Paul says, "...God's **purpose** according to His **choice** would **stand**." The word "**stand**" is the **exact opposite** of the word "**failed**" back in v. 6a.
  8. The term "**stand**" (mene) here means "to remain, persist, abide, and continue." And it is in the **present tense**, indicating that God's **electing purpose** keeps on continuing, no matter what!
  9. In other words, it cannot be **thwarted** by anyone, since it is not based on **peoples'** actions, but on **God's** will and intention.
  10. Therefore, the **reason** why Israel's **rejection** of the Messiah does not **nullify** God's saving promises is because God's **electing purpose** guaranteed that there would be a **spiritual** Israel from within **ethnic** Israel.
  11. **Don't forget** that the **substance** of Paul's argument is that salvation was **never** promised to **every** ethnic Israelite (v. 6b). For from the **very beginning** there has always been a **winnowing process**: **Isaac** was chosen, not **Ishmael**; **Jacob** was chosen, not **Esau**.
- E. Paul further stresses the divine initiative in the **third feature**, which is: **The Basis of God's sovereign choice**. Look at the last part of v. 11: **not** because of **works** but because of **Him** who **calls**,
1. Since the Jews had **perverted** God's revelation into a **works-righteousness** system of salvation, notice the **contrast** between **human "works"** and **God's "call."**

2. God's sovereign choice or election is "**not** because of **works**."  
No one can **truly claim** to be **chosen** by God because of his or her **heritage** or **good deeds**.
3. Not only did we see that God's choice of Jacob over Esau was **prior** to their **birth, character** and **conduct** (v. 11a), but here we see that it is also **completely independent** from and not **based** on their **works**. There are **no works** whatsoever that are the **impetus** of God **choosing** anyone, including **human faith**.
4. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, "For by **grace** you have been saved through faith; and **that** not of yourselves, it is the **gift** of God; not as a result of **works**, so that no one may boast."
5. And **Titus 3:5** states, "He saved us, not on the **basis** of **deeds** which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.
6. **Douglas Moo** correctly observes, "Surely, if Paul had **assumed** that **faith** was the **basis** for God's election, he would have pointed this out when he raised the question in **v. 14** about the **fairness** of God's election. All he would have needed to say at that point was "of course God is not **unjust** in **choosing** Jacob and **rejecting** Esau, for his **choosing** took into account the **faith** of one and the **unbelief** of the other." Paul's **silence** on this point is telling." (pg. 583)
7. **Augustine**, who at one point in his life said that **foreseen faith** was the **basis** for God's election, later **denied** that God's election was based on **anything** in the human being. He then said, "God

does not choose us **because** we believe, but that we **may** believe.”

8. Now **please remember** what I’ve continually stated since I began **chapter 9**, Paul’s primary **focus in chapter 9** is on the **sovereignty of God** as the **ultimate reason** for the existence of a **spiritual remnant** among Israel. But **God’s sovereignty** does not **negate** our **human responsibility**, which Paul will clearly lay out in **chapter 10**.
  9. Now since God’s sovereign choice or election is “**not** because of **works**,” notice that Paul goes on to say that the **true basis** is **God Himself**— “...but because of **Him** who **calls**.”
  10. This is why **v. 16** states, “So then it does not depend on the man who **wills** or the man who **runs**, but on **God** who has **mercy**.”
  11. As we already saw in **8:28** and **30**, the word “**calls**” (kalountos) here is not the **general**, external call or invitation to everyone to believe the gospel. It is the **special** (or particular), inward call or summons, known as God’s “**effectual call to salvation**,” by which a person is actually **brought** into relationship with God and **becomes a Christian**.
  12. God’s election is based solely on His own **free** and **sovereign call**. **John MacArthur** describes well the **principle** we learn here when he says, “**Unconditionally**, and **completely apart** from any consideration of **human merit**, God **elects** those who will become His **heirs** of promise.” (pg. 26)
- F. Paul then describes the **fourth feature**, which is: **The Support for God’s sovereign choice**. He does this by referring to **two** Old Testament passages that were very familiar to the Jews. Look at

the **first Old Testament passage** in **v. 12**: it was said to her, “**THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.**”

1. Now we come to the **actual promise** that God gave to Rebekah in **Genesis 25:23** after the twins were conceived and before they were born. In this passage we read: 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.**”
2. Although Jacob and Esau were **twins**, technically Esau was born **slightly ahead** of Jacob, for **v. 26** says that Jacob’s “**hand** (was) holding on to Esau’s **heel.**” Therefore, as the **firstborn** in the ancient Near Eastern culture, Esau should have been the **natural heir** since the **firstborn** gets it all, by what is known as “**primogeniture.**”
3. However, here we see that God purposely **disregarded** that fact and told Rebekah that “...the **older** (Esau) shall **serve** the **younger** (Jacob).” And how this actually got **worked out** is described in **Genesis 25:29-34** and **27:18-29**.
4. In the **first passage** Esau “despised his birthright” (v. 34) and sold it to Jacob for a bowl of pottage. In the **second passage**, listening to the deceptive plan of his mother, Jacob tricks Isaac into giving him the **blessing** of the **firstborn**—a blessing which included the words, “Be **master** of your brothers, and may your mother’s sons **bow down** to you” (27:29).
5. Therefore, in the lives of Jacob and Esau the conditions were met for the **fulfillment** of the promise concerning their **descendants**, which became the nations of **Israel** and **Edom**,

respectively (1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:14; 1 Kgs. 11:15-16; 22:47; 2 Kgs. 14:7; Amos 1:11-12; Obad. 10).

6. Concerning the **deceit** of Rebekah and Jacob, **John**

**MacArthur** accurately states, “God **used** Rebekah and Jacob’s **deception** in order to receive the blessing of the firstborn to **fulfill** His own divine purposes—which He would have accomplished perfectly in any case, without sinful human intervention. Jacob’s sin did not **abrogate** God’s promise in the least degree, but it brought many painful and unnecessary problems to Jacob and others.” (pg. 26)

7. The **same is true** in our own lives as well, for God is always working out His **sovereign** plan. Our **disobedience** will not stop Him, but it will make things a whole lot harder on us and others.

G. Paul then **confirms** God’s promise to Rebekah in a **second Old Testament passage** in v. 13, which is a quote from **Malachi 1:2-3**: Just as it is written, “**JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.**”

1. Here Paul uses the familiar introductory formula “**Just as it is written.**” This means just as it was when it **originally written**, it continues to have the same **binding authority** now.

2. Then he quotes a **portion** from **Malachi 1:2-3**. Listen as I read **vv.1-4** to get the **context**: The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through **Malachi**. “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.”

3. **Confirming** that “The **older** (Esau) will **serve** the **younger** (Jacob)” (v. 12), here Paul quotes God as saying, “JACOB I **LOVED**, BUT ESAU I **HATED**.” This statement is so **shocking** that many Christians say it cannot possibly be taken **literally**.
4. A woman once said to **Charles Spurgeon**, “I cannot understand **why** God should say that He **hated Esau**.” To which **Spurgeon** replied, “That is not **my difficulty**, madam. **My trouble** is to understand how God could **love Jacob!**” If you read their stories both of them were **scoundrels!**
5. Now God saying that He “**hated Esau**” has precipitated a huge amount of **controversy**. To soften this, some say that the term “**hated**” (emisesa) means “**to love less**” (Gen. 29:31, 33; Deut. 21:15-17; 22:13, 16; 24:3; Judg. 14:16; Isa. 60:15; Matt. 6:24; 10:37; Lk. 14:26; Jn. 12:25). Thus making it read, “Jacob I **loved**, but Esau I **loved less**.”
6. However, “**love**” and “**hate**” here are not **emotions** that God **feels** but **actions** that He carries out. And since in **God’s hatred** there is **no sin**, this should be seen as a **holy hatred** that cannot be defined in terms of **loving less**.
7. Also, the mere **lessening of love** can hardly explain the **righteous judgment** that Malachi describes in **v. 3** where God “made his mountains a **desolation** and appointed his

inheritance for the **jackals** of the wilderness.” And in **v. 4** where God will “tear down” their buildings and is “indignant” toward them “forever.”

8. Therefore, I agree with those who say that **love** and **hate** are better translated the **election** of Jacob, by its connection with **v. 12**, to continue the fulfillment of God’s saving promises, and the **rejection** of Esau, although he did receive some blessings from the general love of God.

H. Now remember the **important question** that I asked you to **think** about and **answer** as we went through this passage. It was this: When Paul speaks about God’s **sovereign choice** or **election** of Jacob over Esau, is he talking about **individual election** to eternal salvation or merely corporate election to temporal blessing, which means God’s choosing the nation of Israel to have a special place in salvation history.

1. Although many see **Romans 9-11** as talking about corporate election to temporal blessing, this view does not adequately satisfy the data given in these chapters. Here are just **six quick reasons** why I believe that Paul is talking about **individual election** to eternal salvation:
2. **First**, we must remember that what is **foremost** in Paul’s mind in **chapters 9-11** is the **salvation** of **individual Israelites** (1:1-3; 10:1; 11:14) not the **temporal blessing** of the nations, since Jacob and Esau represent two peoples.
3. **Second**, since the election of Jacob over Esau took place **after** the twins were **conceived** and **before** they were **born** and had

done anything good or bad, as we saw in **vv. 10-11**, Paul was certainly thinking of **two individuals** here.

4. **Third**, several of Paul's key words and phrases in this passage refer to **individual salvation**. When he contrasts "**works**" (4:2-8; 11:6) with God's "**call**" (8:28, 20), and uses the words "**purpose**" (8:28; Eph. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9) and "**choice**" or **election** (11:5, 7, 28; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:10).
5. **Fourth**, while these two Old Testament supporting passages have **corporate** or **national implications**, since Jacob's descendants is **Israel** and Esau's descendants is **Edom**, we should not be **surprised** that Paul applies these in the New Testament to the **individuals** who founded and, in a sense embodied them.
6. **Thomas Schreiner** said about God's judgment of Edom in Malachi, "This is not to suggest that every individual Edomite was **cursed**. The text relates what is generally true regarding the Edomites as a nation. This does not contradict my earlier point that the text relates to **individuals** and not simply to **corporate entities**, for I do not deny that **corporate entities** are in view, only that one can **sever** the logical connection between corporate entities and individuals." (pg. 503) This is because you cannot have one without the other.
7. **Fifth**, the promise to Rebekah in **Genesis 25:23** speaks of individuals, since Jacob (the younger) was chosen over Esau (the older), though it also applies corporately. Paul's whole argument turns on this very point.

8. **Sixth**, the other texts in **chapters 9** and **11** that speak about individual election instead of corporate election, which we will look at later (9:14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 24; 11:1, 4, 5).
9. Now Paul **knew** full well the **implications** and **ramifications** of what he has just said and the **violent thunderstorm** of **questions** and **objections** that this has created. The **first** being in v. 14 “**God isn’t fair!**”
10. This is why he immediately presents in **vv. 14-29** his **defense** against these **objections** concerning the **sovereign calling of God**. We will begin to look at them next time.

### **Conclusion:**

In closing, as we **wrestle** with this difficult issue of the **sovereign election** of God may we not do so merely **theologically**, but allow the **reality** of it to **deeply impact** our hearts. May we recognize that it is only by God’s **sovereign grace** that we who **deserve** God’s wrath have come to personally **know** the **true Messiah**, Jesus Christ, as our **Savior** and **Lord**. May this marvelous reality **fill** our hearts with humble **gratitude** and **praise** to the **glory of God** for all that He had done for us!