



The Book of
ROMANS

Small Group Study 3: Romans 9-11

Week One: Romans 9:1–13

Key Verse

- “Now it is not as though the word of God has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” - Romans 9:6 (CSB)

Key Principles

- We are saved according to God’s purpose and his work in us. Nothing about our salvation is determined by us.
- Not all ethnic Jews are included as the chosen people of God because we all enter into God’s family by grace and through faith.
- Despite what we may believe when times are difficult and circumstances are dark, God’s Word has not failed, nor will it ever fail.
- God is unswerving in his faithfulness to his Word, and he is absolutely sovereign in the salvation of sinners.

Read

Life is complex, isn’t it? Even with God, it remains so. There are days when we feel like God is for us and there are other days where God seems to be absent, unconcerned with us. Does he not care? Does he not see us? We live with a constant challenge to trust. After all, it’s one thing to believe *in* God, it’s another thing to *believe* God. Will God make good on his promises? Is he faithful to complete what he has started? How can we know he is trustworthy? These questions are Paul’s main concern in Romans 9–11.

In Romans 1–8, Paul proclaimed and defended God’s righteousness by highlighting God’s faithfulness and truthfulness. Romans 9, however, addresses an important objection to God’s faithfulness. What makes trusting and resting difficult is that God’s faithfulness doesn’t always look like faithfulness to us. His goodness doesn’t always feel good. In the days before Christ, God made promises with the people of Israel. The promises of God in the Old Testament established a covenant with Israel, as God’s chosen people. And yet, somewhat surprisingly,

Paul shows that some Israelites are not experiencing the salvation available to them in Christ (9:2–3). Instead, these Israelites are cut off from Christ and their hearts are hardened (9:2–4, 11:5–7). So, the question becomes: Is God still faithful to his Word?

Paul's answer to this objection is a relevant one, not only for the Israelites in his day but for any person who hopes in God's Word. After all, if God has been unreliable in his promises to Israel, what hope is there that he will be faithful in his promises to us? This is an important tension because just a few verses earlier, Romans 8 ends with some magnificent promises for the people of God. For instance, God promised in Romans 8 that no amount of suffering, nor even death, could ever separate us from his unending love! What a promise for God's people!

Romans 9:1–13 helps us better understand God's faithfulness to his Word and his faithfulness to Israel. In Romans 9:1–5, Paul is grieving. His heart is full of "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" (9:2). Paul mourns because fellow Israelites—his own kinsmen—continue to reject Christ and remain outside God's family of promise, because "not all who are descended from Israel" are actually God's people. This is difficult for Paul because he knows all the ways Israel enjoyed God's privileges (9:4–5). Think of the Red Sea. Think of the Promise Land. Paul even mentions the law, the temple, the fact that the Messiah came from their family tree. How could Israel, of all people, not trust God? Were God's promises to Israel ineffective?

Paul's wrestling can cause us to reflect on our own times of wrestling with God. We might wonder why God hasn't moved in the lives of our neighbors. We mourn over the reality that our family members remain far from Christ and uninterested in the gospel. We wonder how people who have seen God work fail to trust him for salvation. We fight to continue on believing that God knows what he's doing. In our prayers we exclaim, "God, why haven't you saved them yet?" But we must look at how Paul wrestles with God. In Paul's emotional wrestling over the salvation of his kinsmen, he moves to the question, "Is God's Word trustworthy?" Paul's concerns start with God's character, not a felt need or a perception of how God should act. As believers, our focus should—like Paul—be on God's righteous character and his ever-faithful Word. We should begin, in short, by answering the same question Paul asks: Is God's Word trustworthy?

Paul doesn't leave his struggles open-ended. He knows the lack of Israel's belief doesn't negate God's covenant or tarnish his character. What could be seen as an unfulfilled promise is far from it. The answer to Paul's wrestling appears in Romans 9:6, where Paul explains with confidence that God's Word has not failed, "because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." Paul shows that being an ethnic Israelite does not automatically make someone a part of God's chosen people. There is ethnic Israel, and there is chosen Israel. Not every ethnic Israelite is a chosen Israelite. Paul makes sense of this reality using two Old Testament accounts.

First, Paul points to the story of Isaac and Ishmael (Genesis 15–21). Though both were Abraham's sons, Paul shows that it was Isaac who was the child of promise (Romans 9:8), while Ishmael was merely a physical descendant. As such, Isaac is a part of God's people and Ishmael is not. Genesis 15–21 warns us to not take matters into our own hands, as this passage demonstrates that God alone is capable of fulfilling his promises. No other story in the Old Testament illustrates these truths so clearly. Likewise, in Romans 9:8–9, Paul affirms that *God's* initiative, efforts, and promises determine those who are truly "Israel."

As a second example, Paul cites Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25–35). In Old Testament times, the firstborn son received the blessing, marked by privilege, prestige, and prominence. According to Genesis 25:23, God chose to bless the younger son Jacob, rather than the older son Esau. Paul reiterates this truth in Romans 9:11–13, emphasizing that God made this decision of unlikely and unearned blessing for Jacob *before* the sons were even born. Romans

9:13 then states God's choice in the most shocking terms, quoting Malachi 1:2–3, "I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau." The emphasis in these verses is on *God's* initiative and *his* choice, not on human lineage or good works.

From these Old Testament stories, Paul shows that the issue of Israel's unbelief does not nullify God's faithfulness to his promises. **Not all ethnic Jews are included as the chosen people of God because we all enter into God's family by grace and through faith.** More importantly, God's plans and his promises rest solely on his work. **Despite what we may believe when times are difficult and circumstances are dark, God's Word has not failed, nor will it ever fail.** We cannot disrupt or dismantle God's purposes and promises. **Whatever God**

promises and determines, he always brings to pass. He is righteous in all his ways and in every choice he makes, even when we disagree or have difficulty with what he chooses. As the prophet Isaiah describes, God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9).

In wrestling with the text of Romans 9, we must remember these two truths: **God is unswerving in his faithfulness to his Word, and he is absolutely sovereign in the salvation of sinners.** May we rest in the fact that our salvation— and the salvation of our friends, family, and neighbors—does not depend on us, but on *God*. It is not determined by anything we do. It is not our family tree. It is not what we achieve. God saves us according to his purpose and his choice. Thank God for your salvation and continue to ask him for the salvation of those who have yet to believe. We can have great hope knowing that God's promises of salvation in Christ are trustworthy. As the old hymn exclaims, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!"¹

Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God's righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question *before* your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 9:1–13 in preparation for this week's study.

1 Attributed to George Keith and Robert Keen, "How Firm a Foundation (Ye Saints of the Lord)," Public Domain.

Highlight

Underline the list of things that Paul says are true about Israel in Romans 9:1–5.

Circle the names of all the individuals from the Old Testament Paul mentions in Romans 9:6–13.

Highlight all the quotations from the Old Testament stories referenced in Romans 9:6–13.

Find any purpose clauses in this section. (Purpose clauses identify the purpose of an action, e.g., “so that.”)

Explain

Why does Paul have “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” in his heart (9:2)?

Why does Paul feel the need to emphasize that the Word of God has not failed (9:6)?

What point Paul is trying to make through the stories of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau?

Rewrite Romans 9:11–12 in your own words.

Apply

What are some ways in which you struggle to trust God's Word? How does Romans 9:1–13 speak to your doubts about God's faithfulness to do what he has promised?

What motivates God to save people according to Romans 9:1–13? How does this passage influence how you might explain salvation in your own words?

Romans 9:1–13 teaches us about God's sovereign choice (9:6, 11). What is comforting about this teaching? What questions does it raise for you?

How does Romans 9:1–13 increase your confidence in God as you share the gospel with others?

Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home *and* together with your small group.

This Week's Prayer Passage: Psalm 119:1–24

Read Psalm 119:1–24.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **A**doration: “Lord, may you be blessed” (Psalm 119:12). Praise God for his “righteous judgments”(119:7) and delightful Word (119:16, 24). Reflect on the faithfulness of God in giving and keeping his Word. Praise him for his faithfulness.
- **C**onfession: Acknowledge to God where you have failed to “keep his decrees” (Psalm 119:2). Ask him to forgive you for not seeking him with all your heart (119:2). Plead with him, “Deal generously with your servant” (119:17).
- **T**hanksgiving: Thank God for not being hidden but for revealing his ways and will to us (Psalm 119:14–15, 19). Spend some time thanking him for all the moments where his Word has given you protection and hope (119:9–11). Thank him for his faithfulness in Christ to forgive your sins.
- **S**upplication: Ask the Lord to make you wholly devoted to him and his Word. “Don’t let me wander from your commands” (Psalm 119:10). “Teach me your statutes”(119:12). “Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction” (119:18).