

Romans 9-11

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores God's sovereignty in salvation, emphasizing the inclusion of Gentiles and the future restoration of Israel.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:1-3, Isaiah 53:1, Romans 9:6-8, Romans 10:3-4, Romans 11:1-2, Romans 11:5-6, Romans 11:11-12, Romans 11:25-26, Romans 11:30-36

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "Grace and Salvation"

Description

John Nelson Darby explores the promises made to the Jews in Romans 9-11, emphasizing God's unwavering faithfulness despite Israel's disobedience. He highlights that not all who are of Israel are true heirs of the promises, as God's sovereignty and grace extend to both Jews and Gentiles. Darby explains that Israel's rejection is not final, and there remains hope for their restoration as a nation. He underscores the importance of faith over works, illustrating that salvation is a gift of grace available to all who believe. Ultimately, he concludes that God's plans encompass both the Jewish people and the Gentiles, affirming His mercy and the fulfillment of His promises.

Transcript

What about the promises made to the Jews, that is, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? That the Jews had broken the law, and were guilty, was plain enough - guilty beyond the Gentiles: their mouth was stopped. But God's mouth had spoken: what about His promises? "No difference" could not be said there; faithfulness could not be wanting on His part. This subject is now treated: how to reconcile the "no difference" doctrine, and special promises on God's part to the Jews. Chapter 9, beginning with the deepest expression of heart interest in God's people, of whom he was himself one, treats the question of Israel's hereditary claim, and the admission of the Gentiles to blessing. Chapter 10 tells how Israel lost the blessing, and the plain testimonies of the prophets as to it. Chapter 11 presents the question: is their present rejection final? and shews it is not, and that they will be re-established as a nation.

In the beginning of chapter 9 the apostle recalls carefully all the privileges of the beloved people. Far from him was the wish to diminish their importance, or deny God's delight in them; so far from indifference, in his ardent heart he had loved them as much as Moses, who would have been blotted out of God's book rather than not see them forgiven. All divinely conferred privileges were really theirs: and it was not that the word of God had taken none effect; but all were not Israel who were of Israel; nor, because they were the natural seed of Abraham, were they all children, that is, according to promise. And here he has just

glided, in admitting their privileges, into the heart of his whole argument. The natural seed were not heirs, because they were the natural seed. If that were so, the question was really solved. And this he goes on to prove. Ishmael was the natural seed, but sovereign grace maintained its prerogative. In Isaac shall thy seed be called; but the Jewish objector might say, Yes, but Hagar was a slave, and Ishmael slave-born. Well, but take Esau and Jacob of one mother, that is an unexceptionable case. Yet Jacob was chosen, not Esau, and it was of pure grace, before they had done good or evil. The circumstances were natural, but the principle, pure sovereign grace, is to set aside the national pretensions of the Jews. They must let in Ishmaelites and Edomites, or allow God to be sovereign.

106 Then they would, as now, accuse God of unrighteousness. His answer is, sovereign mercy alone has spared you. If God had not retreated into His own sovereignty, and said, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, all Israel, save Moses or Joshua, would have been cut off at Sinai. They existed as a people only by virtue of this sovereignty. That sovereignty God would now use in favour of Gentiles, whom He called along with Jews. As to the general question, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. He hardened, when He saw fit to display judgment, those who despised Him. And if one demanded, why He yet then found fault? The answer is, You judge God! Who are you, a man, to reply to Him, and find fault with God?

There is, then, the unqualified assertion of God's power to make vessels of dishonour, if He pleased, but careful avoidance of the thought that He had made any. What if He had borne with vessels fitted to destruction, all ready for it; but made known the riches of His glory to vessels He had afore prepared for mercy? There is the maintenance of God's absolute prerogative. No reasoning allowed to weaken, or even call in question, the patience of God, with vessels fitted for destruction; and purposes of glory, for which God prepares the vessels of mercy. Thus the claim of Israel to hereditary privileges - to the exclusion of the Gentiles, was barred. It involved the admission of those He would not hear of, races forbidden to enter to the tenth generation; and shewing also, that they were excluded themselves, if they did not admit the absolute sovereignty of God. The apostle applies this sovereignty to the call of the Gentiles along with the remnant of Israel, confirming his doctrine.

107 From verse 27 he confirms this reasoning by positive quotations from the prophets. Esaias declared that a remnant should be saved, that, if a very small one had not been left, Israel would have been as Sodom and Gomorrah; and shews the real cause of this. They had sought indeed righteousness, but it was by their own works, and rejected Christ, stumbling at the stumbling-stone, as it was written: while the Gentiles, who sought it not, had come in under mercy, for whosoever believed in Him would not be ashamed. Into this subject, in respect of Israel, and God's ways with them, and His testimony to those ways, he enters more fully in chapter 10.

But a few remarks remain to be made on chapter 9, besides the general view I have taken of it. There is progress in the assertion of God's prerogative, though the object of the assertion of it be His title to have mercy on the Gentiles. In Ishmael and Isaac it is the simple denial of hereditary right. All are not Israel who are of Israel; but it goes no farther than promise. It is not the children after the flesh, but according to promise - Isaac, not Ishmael. But in Esau and Jacob the principle of simple sovereignty comes in. Both were children of Isaac, and alike so, but the elder was to serve the younger. Jacob was chosen according to the purpose of God. And thereupon the principle of sovereignty is asserted in verse 15, still only in view of mercy. It is not of him that wills, nor him that runs, but of God that shews mercy. And this applies to hardening (not to making evil), so that He has mercy on whom He will, and hardens, to display His righteous judgment, whom He will. And the reply to objections is, not first, explanation, but putting man in

his place, and God in His.

It is not man's place to judge God: none can say to Him, What doest Thou? He is the potter, with power over the clay to make what He pleases. But once man is silenced, then there is explanation. What if He bears, with great longsuffering, with vessels fitted for destruction, as He did with Pharaoh; as He did with the Amorites and Canaanites; and prepared, as He had to do, if He would have any, vessels of mercy for glory? And so He called from among lost Gentiles, for that is the key to the exercise of His sovereignty, and Jews were really the same, to be His children in grace. Such is the unfolding of this principle of sovereign grace, without which not one soul would be saved, for none understand, none seek after God, not one of himself will come that he might have life. Judgment is according to works; salvation and glory are the fruit of grace.

108 But to return to God's ways with Israel: chapter 10. The apostle now declares, not merely the privileges of Israel, but his earnest desire that they might be saved; they have zeal towards God, but not the knowledge of His ways. Their fall lay in this: they sought to establish their own righteousness by works, and did not submit to the righteousness of God. How strange, yet how fitting a word! If we are to go up, as responsible, to judgment, it must be by our works. We are judged according to them. But we are sinners, and there is no possibility of our standing on this ground; yet this our pride will not admit; it will hope to bring it about, if it does not possess it. Grace provides righteousness for us. We have it not for God, He has it for us, and gratuitously in Christ; and we have to own that we cannot in any way make good our own case with God, and must submit to His righteousness. This, neither the Jew, nor man in any age, by his own spirit will do. He will blame it as a way of sin, as if he really cared for holiness; but finds he must come down, and confession come in.

Now the apostle shews that the ruin of Israel was supposed in their own law. The law gave the intelligible principle - "do and live"; but after having done that, and shewn ruin and judgment on failure, it speaks of the return of the heart to God, when under the effects of the judgment, and when the plainly revealed ground of legal righteousness was over (Deut. 30). And the apostle then introduces Christ, as the true object, when once this was the case; the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Just as all hope of righteousness by doing was over in the case put in Deuteronomy, so in every heart, when honestly given up, as it must be by everyone that knows himself, instead of judgment, we have in grace, on the part of God, Christ for righteousness, and the law done with, an end to it; while its judgment was sanctioned, righteousness introduced by grace, on another ground, and as to this, an end of the law. And in fact, Christ is the end of the law, and another ground of relationship with God. So it is believing on, and confessing Him, the Lord Jesus, and we are saved. But then this lets in everyone that does so, and the national relationship drops. "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." And now, as before, we had "no difference," in that all have sinned, now we have "no difference," in that the same Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him. Sin had levelled all alike before God. Grace raises up all alike through faith. And so it is written, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved," and so, a Gentile, if he call.

109 And this brings in the testimony and belief through the word, with the question of the bearing of this on Jew and Gentile. They must believe, to call; and hear, to believe. It is a report, a testimony, to the Jew as to the Gentile; and so their scriptures spoke of Him who brought good tidings, and hailed them. All had not believed; and this proved it was a report even to the Jew, and it was gone out into all the world. This is the general thought. Then, specifically applying it to Israel, Moses had plainly declared they would be provoked to anger by them that were no people, and God would be found of the Gentile who sought Him not. And as to Israel, there was no want of grace, but grace they had rejected. God had stretched out His

hands all the day to a disobedient and gainsaying people.

We now come in chapter 11 to the assurance, that, in spite of all this, God has not cast away His people. All Israel, that is, Israel as a people, will be saved. In shewing this, the apostle gives most solemn instruction, and urgent warning to the Gentiles. The apostle's own heart answers the question, and he is himself a proof that God had not cast away Israel; just as in Elias's time, when he interceded against Israel, as wholly gone, God had an election out of it: so now the apostle was the proof of it, and there were others too, besides him. Only it was by grace, not works - the theme he ever insists on. The election had obtained what Israel was seeking for; the rest were blinded, as the prophets had said they would be. Was then this stumbling at the stumbling-stone, which brought in judicial blindness on the people, in order that they should fall, and be finally rejected? In nowise. Moses had told of old in Deuteronomy 32, that it would so happen, for the letting in of the Gentiles, to provoke Israel to jealousy. But if to provoke to jealousy, it was not to reject. This was second proof of his thesis - that God's people Israel were not cast off. And if being brought low was for the blessing of the world, what would the future restoration and fulness be, but as life from the dead for this poor dark sin-stricken world?

110 The apostle magnifies his office of apostle to the Gentiles, by shewing its bearing thus on the Jews to put the Gentiles in their place, and guard them against the pride of supposed superiority in the flesh. And here comes in the solemn warning addressed to them. The stock of promise, beginning with Abraham, was naturally carried out in this world in the Jews; the root bore the branches, the Gentiles had no ground for pride. Abraham was the root of promise, and Israel the natural branches. Some had been broken off; true, because of unbelief, and the Gentiles had been grafted into a root to which they did not naturally belong; and they were grafted in on the principle of faith, contrary to nature, as the old branches had been broken off for unbelief. The Gentiles stood thus only on the ground of faith; if, therefore, as a body they departed from it - did not continue in God's goodness, which, contrary to nature (for the question is not of the body of Christ, but their outward connection with the place of promise in this world) had grafted them into the olive tree of promise, to partake of its root and fatness, they would be in turn broken off.

We have here nothing to do with the church, or union with Christ; but with the tree of promise in this world, beginning with Abraham, to whom and to whose seed the promises were made. Goodness, on the principle of faith, had given Gentiles a part in these, which the Jewish branches had lost, but the stock was not Gentile, but Abrahamic and Jewish, and what the Gentiles had by faith, they would lose by the want of it. And such were God's counsels. God was bringing in by this means a number of Gentiles, and for yet better things, and when by this outward system of Gentile association with the promises their number was complete, the time of the blindness which had come upon Israel as a nation, for that purpose, would be over, and Israel as a whole, as a nation, would be saved. God would give them, not then, as such, the heavenly portion of the church, which is not here in question, but graft them back into the place of promise, the enjoyment of what the root Abraham bore in blessing. And that would be by the coming of Christ, who would turn away ungodliness from Jacob. What is taught here, then, is a tree on the earth with Abraham for its root, who, when God had formed the nations, and all had fallen into idolatry, had been called out from among them, according to election, to be father (or root) of a race blessed with the promises of God.

111 Israel was the natural heir according to the flesh; but when He, in whom the accomplishment of these promises is, came, they rejected Him through unbelief, and were broken off, the election continuing in the place of promise (not added to the church here); Gentiles were grafted in contrary to nature, to enjoy the blessing of Abraham - those very nations out of which Abram had been called. This was by faith, not by

descent of nature. If they left this, they would be cut off, cease to have, as so called, the promises on earth - at any rate, they were not to boast against the branches, for the root bore them, not they the root, and the cut-off branches could and would be grafted in again, that is, Israel restored in its original place in the enjoyment of promise. As regards the gospel, they are enemies as a people, in order to the bringing in of the Gentiles; but as touching the election of the people, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. We see evidently here, it is the election of the people, it is in contrast with blessing by the gospel, and the ground of their being beloved is the fathers, as we find constantly in the Old Testament, as Exodus 32:13; Leviticus 26:42; and other passages. For of His gifts and calling God does not repent.

The Spirit of God shews out, then, the wonderful moral wisdom of God in these counsels. The Gentiles had of old been unbelieving, so now it was pure mercy to them; the Jews had rejected this mercy to the Gentiles, and were themselves in unbelief, so that it had become pure mercy now to them also. Thus God had concluded all in unbelief, that all might be mere objects of mercy. The Jews had promises, and if they had received Christ, faithfulness would have fulfilled them in Him. As is said in this epistle, "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." But the Jews rejected Christ, and so came under mercy like the Gentiles. This it is that makes the apostle cry out as to God's deep wisdom, that this rejection of the Jews brought mercy to the Gentiles; and brought, seeing they rejected Christ in unbelief, the Jews on the footing of mere mercy also, though God only shewed Himself more abundantly true to His promise, which He accomplishes in spite of all. We have to read verse 31, "Even so have these also not believed your mercy, that they also might obtain mercy."

112 This closes, and closes by a full exposition of God's counsels as to His ways on earth, the doctrine of the epistle, and as the previous part had shewn how Jew or Gentile came alike upon a new footing. Justified by God, this shews His plans and counsels, according to which room was left, not only to admit Gentiles individually, but for the chain of promises to take a Gentile form, and withal a distinct system to be set up, the purposes of which being accomplished, the course of God's dealings would flow back into the ancient channel of Jewish promise, and inheritance of blessing, but by grace. The church is not spoken of in teachings, but its existence assumed in practical exhortation in chapter 12. The rest of the epistle, save a verse or two of chapter 15, to which I have referred, is preceptual and hortatory, founded on the mercies revealed; mercy on which we entirely depend.

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