

# **INCREDIBLE! ROMANS 9:1-13**

**By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn**

**M.I. IT IS INCREDIBLY WONDERFUL TO KNOW THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN US, AND INCREDIBLY TRAGIC TO THINK THAT SO MANY REFUSE TO RESPOND TO JESUS' OFFER OF SALVATION.**

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## **INCREDIBLE! ROMANS 9:1-13**

**By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn**

This morning, we are starting the next major section in the book of Romans. This section has to do with a topic that Paul introduced in chapter 8. What does it mean to be chosen by God? What do the words election and predestination mean? Paul said that we as believers have been chosen by God, called by God, justified by God, sanctified by God and glorified by God, we are God's chosen people.

Keep in mind that the Apostle Paul was a Jew and in the church it was common knowledge that the Jews were God's chosen people. The questions Paul will address are where do the Jews fit in God's plan now, in what sense are Christians God's chosen people, and have God's promises concerning Israel failed?

I have a lot of Jewish friends and when we talk about the Jews being God's chosen people, many of them tell me, "I wish God would choose somebody else for a while." I think if we look at the history of Israel and Judaism, we can easily understand this sentiment. They have suffered much.

I think the Apostle Paul, a Jew who was proud of his heritage, could feel almost snake bitten. God called him to be an Apostle to the hated and despised Gentiles. He was a member of God's chosen people, the Jews. He was chosen by God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. In obeying God, he was beaten, jailed, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, and he went for days homeless and without food. Is that what it means to be chosen by God?

I think he must feel like this ad I saw in the newspaper.

The Ad said, “Lost – One dog. Brown hair with several bald spots; right leg broken due to an auto accident. Rear left hip injured as well and walks with a hobble. Right eye missing. Left ear bitten off in a dog fight. Answers to the name, ‘Lucky’.”

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I want to go through these three chapters slowly and carefully because there has been much debate surrounding them. The issues are complicated. Since I’m not all that smart, I’m going to try and go through them as simply as I can after all, I don’t think everyone in the early church were scholars.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

**THIS SECTION OF ROMANS DEALS WITH GOD’S CHOOSING PEOPLE, HIS PLAN OF SALVATION, AND HIS BUILDING OF UNITY AMONG HIS PEOPLE.**

In today’s passage, I think we could safely say that its message is this: **IT IS INCREDIBLY WONDERFUL TO KNOW THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN US, AND INCREDIBLY TRAGIC TO THINK THAT SO MANY REFUSE TO RESPOND TO JESUS’ OFFER OF SALVATION.** As we look at all the blessings and provisions God gave Israel, we are immediately reminded that all these blessings have been given to us, the church. This should cause us to rejoice.

On the other hand, when we see how many times the nation of Israel failed to live up to their calling, we should be warned not to take these things for granted.

As I said earlier, this section of Romans is difficult, so please bear with me as we plod through these chapters. I think the sermons will seem more like teaching lectures than they will be like preaching in the traditional sense.

I think it will be important to give an introduction to the whole section before dealing with today’s passage: **THIS SECTION OF ROMANS DEALS WITH GOD’S**

**CHOOSING PEOPLE, HIS PLAN OF SALVATION, AND HIS BUILDING OF UNITY AMONG HIS PEOPLE.** It will deal with how God chooses people, how He provides for them, and what He expects.

A. PLACEMENT OF CHAPTERS (Vs. 9-11)

Bible interpreters have a lot of problems concerning the placement of chapters 9-11. Many think it was added by later writers, and many feel it was previous material of Paul's that he inserted here. On the other extreme, a very few interpreters think it is the central theme of the book.

Think with me for a moment where we have come in the book of Romans. So far, the book has been very theological. Chapters 1-4 argued from several different standpoints the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Chapters 5-8 mapped out what sanctified living should look like. These were heavily weighted down with theology and philosophy.

In chapter 12, Paul lays out the practical ramifications of this theology, what should our relationships look like as a church? Since we are the body of Christ, all saved by faith, and all growing in Christ, how should we act towards one another in very practical ways? Remember, the church is comprised not only of Israelites; it is now comprised of people who have come from many different countries, languages, and customs. It will be a complicated and often painful task to get along.

So why are these three chapters placed here? My naïve, simple mind tells me that they are placed perfectly. Chapter 8 concluded the first two sections by reminding us that we are God's chosen people. He handpicked each one of us to be His children. Naturally the Jewish believers would be confused and they would say something like, "I thought

we were God's chosen people." The deeper question is, "Have the Jews lost their chosen people status? And if so, how does that square with what we have studied so far concerning the certainty and security of our calling and salvation?"

This section will explain what it means to be chosen by God. But I think what we will see by the time we get to chapter 11 is that within the church, the playing field will be level between all peoples and all nations. To quote Paul in Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." We will see that this will be crucial to his guidelines for Christian conduct in the church.

#### B. PROBLEMS IN INTERPRETATION

To be sure, even though I am simple and naïve, there will still be problems in the interpretation; since so many scholars throughout the centuries have had so many disagreements as to the meaning, I do not presume to have the definitive answer. So let me apologize ahead of time to all of you whose theological toes I may step on.

Part of the problem is that we are about 2,000 years removed from this text. The people of the church in Rome certainly understood Paul's meaning clearly. It is just too difficult for us to reconstruct the situation so that there could no longer be any debate concerning the meaning.

Next, Paul tends to use the same word in different ways. As we have already seen, he uses the word law to refer to the Mosaic Law, natural law, moral law, and even civil and political law; it's often tricky to know which one applies. In this section he uses Israel in at least two and possibly three different ways. He will use Israel to describe the nation of Israel; the political, social and ethnic designators are referred to as Israel. On the other hand, Israel refers to the particular people set-aside to fulfill the promise God

made back at the beginning of time after Adam and Eve had sinned. God promised to send one who would crush the power of evil. Further, Israel is the name God gave to Jacob and it was from Jacob that the 12 tribes of Israel came. So we will have to be alert to the way Paul uses Israel and Israelite in this section. It is the same as today. When someone says they are a Jew, they could mean they are culturally Jewish, politically Jewish, nationally Jewish, or religiously Jewish.

And of course, there are the normal problems of determining where punctuation goes since the early texts we have were written in all small letters with no separation between words since they had to save space on the scrolls.

### C. REMINDERS

Let me also give us some reminders as we start this section. The early Christian church was a Jewish movement. Jesus was a Jew, all the apostles were Jews, and most of the early church leaders were Jews. The question in the early church was never if Jews could be Christians, the pressing question was whether or not Gentiles had to first become Jews in order to become Christians.

Second, this letter is written by the Apostle Paul who had the most Jewish upbringing and education one could have. He not only belonged to the most zealous sect of Judaism, the Pharisees, he was on the fast track to leadership in that sect. He had a real love for Judaism and his fellow Jews. The things that are said concerning the nation of Israel in this section are said by a Jew. I am guessing it would be inappropriate for an outsider to say such things. We as Gentiles should be very careful how we present these passages to Jews.

And finally, we must keep in mind that the letter is addressed to the church in Rome that consisted of both Jewish and Gentile believers; it is a blended church. However, at the very beginning of the letter, Paul makes it very clear that the Gospel is for the Jew first and then for the Gentile. So we must keep all this in mind as we study through these three chapters. Let's keep in mind **THIS SECTION OF ROMANS DEALS WITH GOD'S CHOOSING PEOPLE, HIS PLAN OF SALVATION, AND HIS BUILDING OF UNITY AMONG HIS PEOPLE.**

II. INCREDIBLE PROVISIONS / INCREDIBLE FAILURE (Vs. 1-5)  
**IT IS INCREDIBLE TO THINK ABOUT HOW GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH SO MANY BLESSINGS AND THE SAME TIME HOW MUCH ALL OF THOSE BLESSINGS GO UNCLAIMED BY SO MANY PEOPLE.**

Verses 1-5 describe both incredible blessings and incredible failure. This is something that we should ponder as believers who have been blessed by God: **IT IS INCREDIBLE TO THINK ABOUT HOW GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH SO MANY BLESSINGS AND THE SAME TIME HOW MUCH ALL OF THOSE BLESSINGS GO UNCLAIMED BY SO MANY PEOPLE.**

A. PAUL'S PAIN (V. 1)

Verse 1 gives us some insight into the depth of Paul's pain as he thinks about Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Promised Messiah. I'm sure Paul is addressing the Jewish Christians in the church at this time. There were many that accused Paul of being a traitor since his ministry at this time was directed primarily to Gentiles. Look how passionately he starts out; he phrases it both in the positive and the negative: He says, "I am telling the truth. I'm not lying." He authenticates it by bringing in the testimony of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and his conscience. We know that Paul was overly religious and

his conscience must have been super sensitive. It was almost as if he was saying, “I swear to God my conscience is clean in regards to what I am about to say.

I may be going out on a limb here, but I can’t help but feel that Paul’s feelings and his ministry mirror the feelings and movements of God; as Paul mourns for the rejection of Jesus, so does God. We know that Jesus wept over Jerusalem while He was on earth. Further, God was now looking to call a people for Him out of Gentile nations it seems He was putting Israel aside for the moment. More and more, Paul’s mission was geared less and less to Jews, and more and more to the Gentiles. So this passion and pain of Paul seem to parallel God’s pain and passion as well.

#### B. PAUL’S PEOPLE (Vs. 2-4a)

Paul’s passion is for his people as described in verse 2 through the first half of verse 4. Those of you who read your Old Testament regularly will readily identify these sentiments with Moses following the incident where Israel built the golden calf and started to worship it, while Moses was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. God was ready to wipe the whole nation of Israel right off the map but Moses interceded for them. Knowing how much God loved him, Moses said that if God was unwilling to forgive them, he might as well erase his name from the book of life.

Here Paul says that if it would be possible, he would be willing to lose his salvation if only the entire nation of Israel could be saved and not lost. Paul is saying that instead of the whole nation of Israel being cursed and doomed to be cut off from God, he would rather suffer that fate himself.

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets wept over the rebellion of Israel. We see God emotionally distraught about His chosen people rejecting Him and their

exploitation of one another. During the life of Jesus, He also mourned the rejection of true religion by the Israelites of His day.

And Paul defines his people as Israelites, his brothers and sisters, his own race. Actually race is translated in the Greek as his kindred or those he was born together with, according to the flesh. The phrase according to the flesh appears in the NASB. Paul is talking about the national, political, social Israel here.

Here is the tension. How can so many of God's chosen, covenant people are perishing. In fact, during the history of Israel, how could the majority of God's chosen, covenant people go so far astray ... so far astray that God had to allow them to be conquered and enslaved by foreign nations? From the beginning of the nation up until Paul's time, there were holy men and women who mourned the religious rebellion of the nation of Israel.

#### C. PAUL'S PUZZLEMENT (Vs.4b-5)

Paul's puzzlement over the whole thing is described in the second half of verse 4 through verse 5. Paul describes the nation of Israel's election here; through Moses, God flat out told Israel that He had chosen them out of all the nations of the earth to be His people.

He adopted them as sons. He adopted them in Egypt. He chose them to be His and He delivered them from their slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand. God set them free from the most powerful nation on earth at the time and God left Egypt in ruins for their mistreatment of His newly adopted people.

Now when we hear this as believers, we must remember that Paul described us as adopted children of God in chapter 8 of Romans as well. He wants us to identify with these special blessings as well.

The Hebrews experienced the presence of God in their midst through the pillar of clouds during the day and the pillar of fire at night. In chapter 8 Paul reminded us that Christ lives in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. We said that the fullness of God lives in us.

Next, God gave many covenants to the Israelites. They were the recipients of the promises made to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In chapter 4 Paul said that because of our faith in Christ, we became children of Abraham, and heirs of God.

God gave the nation of Israel his special laws that governed them religiously, ceremonially, and civilly.

We received the law of love, which summarizes all the laws. Paul will talk about this law later on in Romans. Jesus told us to love God and to love one another. He said that those two laws cover all the religious laws.

God singled out Israel to reveal how it is that He wanted to be worshipped. The NIV says temple worship but the Greek merely has worship. Jesus said that we were to worship God in truth and in spirit. Paul will talk about worship in the Christian community in the next section of Romans as well, along with love.

God made many promises to the nation of Israel. He told Abraham that he would make Israel a great nation. In chapter 8 Paul said that God promises that nothing in this world or the next could ever separate us from His love. He further promised that since

He justified us, He will also sanctify us and glorify us. He promised to complete the good work He started in us.

Israel had a great tradition of spiritual heroes. They had the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; they had Moses, Joshua, the Judges, King David, and the prophets.

But not only that, they produced the Messiah, Jesus. Jesus was a Jew, according to the flesh. That phrase 'according to the flesh' will be important with what immediately follows.

Before I get to that, let me remind us that Paul is saying that we as Christians share that same heritage of faith as well. Hebrews 11 contains a sample list of the great line of spiritual heroes we come from. We certainly share in the greatest Hebrew of all, Jesus.

Here is the translation problem. Look at the end of verse 5. Since there was no punctuation in the early manuscripts, depending where you put the comma can make a difference in the interpretation. If you put a period after Christ, or according to the flesh, whichever translation you are using, then the translation would read, May God Who is over all be praised forever. However, I think the most natural reading would be as the NIV, NASB and NLT all catch the flavor. Paul is identifying Jesus as God; Jesus is a Jew according to the flesh and God according to the Spirit. It is Jesus as God Who is over all and who is to be praised forever! Amen.

Paul is writing to the church in Rome, expressing his deep sorrow over the fact that his people, God's chosen people, the Israelites had all these special provisions and blessings, yet they rejected their Messiah and are perishing.

Now keep in mind, this is a Jew talking about Jews. We should never degrade Jews, nor should we ever persecute them. Paul wants to remind us that we now stand in this same line and have received all they have. We should be on guard not to ever reject God in any way, and we should have a deep aching in our hearts for all the unsaved, Jew, Gentile, and all peoples. If our church does not have a heart to reach the lost, then we are not a legitimate church. Maybe a question each one of us should ask ourselves is, “Do I have a heart for people who don’t know Jesus, when was the last time I told someone about Jesus, and have I ever led anyone to salvation in Christ?” You see: **IT REALLY IS INCREDIBLE TO THINK ABOUT HOW GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH SO MANY BLESSINGS AND THE SAME TIME HOW MUCH ALL OF THOSE BLESSINGS GO UNCLAIMED BY SO MANY PEOPLE.**

III. INCREDIBLE PLANNING (Vs. 6-13)  
**IT IS INCREDIBLE TO THINK HOW CAREFULLY GOD HAS PLANNED OUT OUR SALVATION AND HOW INCREDIBLY DETAILED THE PLAN IS.**

So now the church in Rome is starting to perhaps sweat a little bit. In chapter 8 Paul said that we were chosen by God and given all these promises and assurances. What happened to Israel’s election? If as a nation they rejected Jesus, have God’s promises failed? Verses 6-13 describe God’s incredible planning. As we read this section, we must stand in awe of God’s works: **IT IS INCREDIBLE TO THINK HOW CAREFULLY GOD HAS PLANNED OUT OUR SALVATION AND HOW INCREDIBLY DETAILED THE PLAN IS.**

A. GOD’S WORD (V. 6)

In verse 6 Paul anticipates the church’s anxiety and addresses the credibility of God’s word. In this section, Paul is going to make a distinction between the nation of

Israel, Israel the person, and Israel as the people who the promise of Messiah is passed down through, in other words, religious, faithful Israel. As we said, if we were to read through the Old Testament, the history of Israel, we would immediately see that for the most part, the majority of Israel rejected God's laws. The prophets were always in the minority. The Old Testament story is a continuous story of God's people rejecting Him and going their own way. But the promise of God that unites the entire Bible was give way back in Genesis 3 after Adam and Eve sinned and let sin into the world. God promised that a Deliverer would come; one who would take care of this sin problem. God told Abraham that through his seed all nations would be blessed. Ultimately that seed produces Jesus Christ Who died that we could be freed from the ultimate consequence of sin, which is eternal separation from God. We will talk about that more but for now, Israel seems to be that small group of Jews who remain faithful to God throughout the ages. True Israel is defined here by those who remained faithful to God; the Bible term for these people is the faithful remnant.

#### B. GOD'S PROMISE (Vs. 7-10)

Verses 7-10 narrow this down to God's promise; it seems as if the promise of a savior is what Paul has in mind here. Abraham had several choices for an heir; he had Eliezer, his adopted servant, he had Ishmael, his son through Hagar, he had 6 sons by his wife Keturah, and he had his son Isaac, who he had through Sarah. All were blessed by God and prospered and all were made children of the covenant by circumcision. However, God chose Isaac to be the one through whom the promise of Messiah would pass.

Some may argue that all these descendants had different mothers so Isaac was the natural choice. However, look at verse 10, that I want to read to you as literally as possible. I'll try to sanitize it a little. It says, "And not only this, but also Rebekah out of one act of intercourse with Isaac produced children that we know were twins. Not only did they have the same father, they had the same mother, and the same act of intercourse produced both of them. How would God choose here? It is not just by natural descent because we have now seen that God makes the choice.

#### C. GOD'S PURPOSE (Vs.11-13)

Verses 11-13 describe the purpose of these choices, and the interesting thing is that we can not figure out according to any human logic how God makes the choice. There doesn't seem to be any way to understand His choice. Right up front, in verse 11 Paul reminds us that even before they were born, even before they had a chance to do anything good or bad, God decided to choose Jacob, whom God later names Israel, over his older brother, Esau. Look according to the customs of the day, God reverses that; the older brother should have received the promise, but in this case God choose the younger. I would challenge you to follow this seed throughout the Old Testament. God chooses Judah, Jacob's third son, born to the wife he really didn't like. Later, God chooses David, the youngest boy in the family. It doesn't matter how we try to figure it out, there is neither rhyme nor reason to how God chooses. Why does He do that? It says in verse 11, "in order that God's purpose in election might stand." The verse goes on to remind us that He didn't make the choice according to works. Think about it. Esau often acted more noble and godly than Jacob did. David committed adultery and murder. Then to top it off, the seed of promise was passed on through David's son Solomon, with the

woman whom he committed adultery. Just go back and read the genealogy of Christ in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, you will be amazed at some of the names there.

God made sure to elect people in at least two ways. There was always a faithful group of people who dedicated themselves to following God. Second, He made sure that the promised Messiah would come to life from the nation of Israel. God would always have a few faithful witnesses and the Messiah would come and defeat sin. That happened through the death and resurrection of Jesus and today, the church is His faithful witness to the world.

I want us to pay special attention to verse 13. This section sums up God's choice. Referring to His choice while the twins were still in the womb God said, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." This is a Hebrew idiom; it is a way of comparing the intensity of a situation. For example, Jesus said that unless we hate our mother, father, wife, etc. we cannot be His disciples. Now Jesus does not mean that we must hate our parents or spouses. What He means is this: we should love Him so intensely, that compared to the way we love Him, the love we have for our loved ones looks like nothing.

Look, I'm extremely compulsive. I don't know if you have ever seen the new television show, "Monk." He is a detective that is pathologically compulsive. Now when you compare me to him, you may be tempted to say that I'm normal, I'm not normal, but comparatively, I am.

So when God says, "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated," He means that by this incredible promise I have chosen to bestow on Jacob, it almost looks as if I hate Esau. Actually, God incredibly blessed Esau.

Here is what I think Paul wants us to get out of this. We as Christians stand in this long line of people who have been chosen and blessed by God. There should be a part in us that gets nervous and anxious if we are not pursuing our calling because Israel lost her blessing. But we should stand in awe and sing the Doxology as we think that God chose us; and we should never be proud, since we can point to no good reason why God chose to save us and call us His children: **IT IS INCREDIBLE TO THINK HOW CAREFULLY GOD HAS PLANNED OUT OUR SALVATION AND HOW INCREDIBLY DETAILED THE PLAN IS.**

So think about this church in Rome. The Jewish believers are honored that God called them to be part of the remnant and the promise, but at the same time are heartbroken that the majority of their family, friends, and nation have rejected Christ.

The Gentile believers must be humbled to think that God would even consider making them part of this remnant and promise. They are a minority of the Gentile world. Why would God choose to call them?

The entire church at Rome would have to look at one another as God's chosen children. None of them had anything to boast about because God chose them arbitrarily, from a human standpoint. None of them deserved to be chosen; nevertheless they received all these blessings God gives to His chosen. Both the Jewish and Gentile believers were both overwhelmed with joy for their salvation but saddened to think many of their family, friends, and countrymen would spend eternity in hell: **IT IS INCREDIBLY WONDERFUL TO KNOW THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN US, AND INCREDIBLY TRAGIC TO THINK THAT SO MANY REFUSE TO RESPOND TO JESUS' OFFER OF SALVATION.**

I hope that we take our election and calling by God seriously. The Hebrews were called to be a light to the nations. Do we take seriously our purpose to evangelize the lost? Again, when was the last time you shared Jesus with someone or led someone to salvation?

Listen to this story of a missed opportunity. I hope it doesn't apply to us spiritually.

**The other day I ran across the story of a man who had a great opportunity that he missed. His friend took him for a ride one day way out in the country. They drove off the main road and drove through groves of trees to a large uninhabited expanse of land. A few horses were grazing, and a couple of old shacks remained. The friend, Walter, stopped the car, got out, and started to describe with great vividness the wonderful things he was going to build. He wanted his friend Arthur to buy some of the land surrounding his project to get in on the ground floor.**

**But Arthur thought to himself, *Who in the world is going to drive twenty-five miles for this crazy project? The logistics of the venture are staggering.***

**And so Walter explained to his friend Arthur, "I can handle the main project myself. But it will take all my money. But the land bordering it, where we're standing now, will in just a couple of years be jammed with hotels and restaurants and convention halls to accommodate the people who will come to spend their entire vacation here at my park." He continued, "I want you to have the first chance at this surrounding acreage, because in the next five years it will increase in value several hundred times."**

**"What could I say? I knew he was wrong." Arthur tells the story today. "I knew that he had let this dream get the best of his common sense, so I mumbled something about a tight-money situation and promised that I would look into the whole thing a little later on."**

**"Later on will be too late," Walter cautioned Arthur as they walked back to the car. "You'd better move on it right now."**

**And so Art Linkletter turned down the opportunity to buy up all the land that surrounded what was to become Disneyland. His friend Walt Disney tried to talk him into it. But Art thought he was crazy.**