

Facilitator:

1. Open with prayer.
2. Welcome any newcomers.
3. Try to keep your discussion to an hour at the most.
4. Refer to the Romans 9 “one sheet” if you have further questions.

Facilitator: Encourage your members to **BRING THEIR BIBLES** and use them during Connect Group.

CONNECT Group study questions for June 10, 2018

Title: Understanding Sovereignty—Romans 9:6-18

Read Romans 9:6-8.

1. As he does so often in his Writings, Paul is using Israel as a metaphor for salvation. What does he mean when he says, “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel?” Who exactly are the real Israel according to these verses?

Facilitator: This would be a good place to remind your group of the discussion from last Sunday about the Church. The Church are the people of God. We are the Israel of God. We are the children of Abraham, the promised “offspring,” though we are not Jewish. There are Jewish people in the Church (and this is how God will keep his promises to Israel, by saving them through their faith and by becoming a part of the Church—Rom 11:26), but the Church is not Jewish in its character like national Israel is. The Church is made up of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

2. What is the story being referred to in v.7? (Hint: It’s from Genesis 21.) How does this Old Testament reference serve as support for the point Paul is trying to make?

Facilitator: This is the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael. Paul’s point is this: It wasn’t Abraham’s eldest biological son that became the heir. It was another son through whom God intended to fulfill his promise. In the same way, it is not those who are biologically descended from Abraham who are the heirs of salvation. It is God’s other sons and daughters, the Church, who have received the promise given to Abraham by faith. This is what Paul means by “the word of God has not failed.” Abraham’s moral failure in the siring of Esau does not wreck the plan of God, because God always intended to fulfill his promise to Abraham through Isaac. Likewise, Israel’s moral failures in rejecting Jesus does not wreck the plan of God, because God always intended to fulfill his promises, not through a national people (Israel), but through all nations (the Church) (e.g Gal 3:7-9, Rom 4:13-17).

Read Romans 9:9-13.

3. What story is being referred to in vs. 10-13? (Hint: It’s from Genesis 25.) How does this Old Testament reference serve as support for the point Paul is trying to make?

Facilitator: This is the story of Jacob and Esau. The law of the “first born” was a cultural hallmark in the ancient world. The eldest son is the one everyone expected to get the birthright and the inheritance. But God chose Jacob to receive the birthright and the inheritance instead. God didn’t choose Jacob because he was a good person. Jacob was a conniving and deceitful opportunist. God chose Jacob before either man had done anything good or bad (v.11), so that

we might learn how God works. If God only chose good people to be saved, no one would be saved. It takes an act of sovereignty on the part of a merciful God for any sinner to be saved.

4. If Paul begins by talking about Jacob and Esau, then why does he finish with a quote from Malachi (v.13), which isn't about Jacob and Esau but rather about their descendants? What is Paul's point here?

Facilitator: The message of the Book of Malachi mirrors Paul's larger point in Romans 9. The descendants of Jacob (Israel) and the descendants of Esau (Edom) both sinned against God in terrible ways. Malachi details these sins. Edom sinned against God, was judged by God, and God destroyed them. Israel sinned against God in the exact same ways, in worse ways, and yet God didn't destroy them. Why? How can God possibly love Jacob's offspring? Why would God show mercy to a man and his descendants when so much of their lives were spent in opposition to God? God's answer is, "So that the purposes of election might stand." Paul is going to make this same argument about the Church. National Israel tried to be God's people and obey God's laws and do all the stuff he told them to do, and when Messiah came they missed him completely. And now God is showing mercy to pagan Gentiles who haven't tried for one day to obey the Law of Moses. But they are being saved by faith. It would be easy for biological Jews to claim, "That's not fair!" Paul is simply pointing out that if God were fair, we would all perish, but if God wants to show his mercy to the Gentiles (his "vessels of mercy," v.23), then that his business and his business alone.

Read Romans 9:14-18.

5. Whenever Paul writes "What shall we say then?" he is either reaching a conclusion or making a summary statement. In this case it's a summary statement. How does Paul summarize his argument so far?

Facilitator: Paul summarizes . . .

- *God doesn't operate out of what is fair. If he did no one would be saved. (9:14)*
- *We should be absolutely grateful for God's grace that we didn't deserve. (9:15-16)*
- *In case we don't understand God's mercy after all that, Paul gives us one more illustration to make his case: Pharaoh. This story is from Exodus 9. The story of God's dealings with Pharaoh illustrate that God is willing to rearrange the entire geopolitics of the ancient world in order to save his people. Israel and Pharaoh are vessels of wrath because of their disobedience and hardening. We are vessels of mercy purely by God's love. He has prepared us for glory purely by his goodness toward us. We couldn't earn it. We didn't deserve it. It doesn't make any sense! **"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy."***