

What's the Difference Between Being Part of the Chosen and Being Chosen?

Romans 9:6-13

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"But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring." - Romans 9:6-8, ESV

In our last devotional, we wrestled with how to answer the question, "Are Jewish people the chosen people?" One of the reasons why that's a tricky question is that election can have different meanings in the Bible. In the context of this passage, Paul doesn't use the words "chosen," "elect" or "election" about the Jewish people as a whole. In all of the things Paul says about his "kinsmen according to the flesh" in verses 4-5, he never says they are chosen or elect.

Why does Paul so carefully avoid using that word? Because in the context of Romans 8-9, Paul uses election to refer to individual salvation and not to refer to national privilege. He will later use the term election in a national covenant sense ([Rom. 11:28](#)). In today's passage, he clarifies personal election very sharply. He must do so because of an implied accusation against God that he is answering in this chapter: Has God's word, specifically God's covenant promises and purposes for Israel, failed?

Paul says the word of God has not failed, even though most Jewish people have rejected Jesus. Why? Because God's covenant purpose for the nation is not the same as His individual and saving election. Another way to express this is that there's a difference between national Israel and spiritual Israel, between the political and ethnic nation and the truly chosen people of God.

To support and illustrate his point, Paul uses the example of Isaac and Jacob, two of the patriarchs, who were chosen by God above their older brothers, Ishmael and Esau. In the ancient world, inheritance always passed to the oldest brother. Ishmael was a son of Abraham according to the flesh, but not according to the promise. Esau was a son of Isaac, but he was not chosen.

In the end, God's promise and God's purpose in election are what will never fail. God's promise was given to Isaac, not Ishmael. God's choice in election was Jacob, not Esau. The choice of Jacob over Esau is an especially clear one, because God made that choice *"though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad."* Paul's point is strong and clear: God's purpose in election always stands, not on the basis of works but on the basis of the One who calls.

If you have embraced God's promise in Jesus Christ, know that your faith in His promise is not an accident. You were chosen by God. You were given true and saving faith. You are a child of promise by God's purpose in election. Let that truth fill you with both great confidence and profound humility.