

4. Read Romans 9:6-13. Part of Paul's answer to the problem is that God has made sovereign choices including some and excluding others in his plans. How can we learn to be more at peace regarding God's sovereign choices?

5. Read Exodus 33:1-20 and Romans 9:14-18. How does the Exodus story told in chapter 33 help illuminate Paul's point in Romans 9:14-18?

6. How does knowing the story of Pharaoh's hard heart help us understand the point Paul is making Romans 9:14-18? (If you have a chance, read the article linked in the outline.)

7. We all have loved ones who have not acknowledged Christ as Savior and Lord. Some might be on your BLESS List (a.k.a., Top 5 List). Pray for them now and share one person's name that your group can pray for.

Gospel Integrity (A Series on Romans 9-11)

"Part 1"

Romans 9

Romans 9-11 addresses a nagging problem with the gospel for anyone familiar with the larger story of the Bible.

Here's the problem in a nutshell: God made many promises to Israel, his people—promises to bless her and care for her. He promised her a grand future. But when Jesus, their Savior Messiah King, is delivered to her, most of Israel rejects him. Most Israelites miss the fulfillment of the blessings he promised. Did his promises fail?

If God's word failed once, it could fail again.

Paul's 5-Part, Non-linear Answer (a framework for reading Romans 9-11):

- God's promises were never intended for every descendant of Abraham.
- God has always chosen some and excluded others from among Abraham's descendants.

Tangent: Is God's approach fundamentally unfair? This is where some of the most theologically combustible material is found.
- The distinguishing mark for God's people has always been faith, not ethnicity (or performance).
- The goal has always been to bless the nations through faithful Israelites.

Tangent: A stern warning to Gentile Christians.
- Perhaps God will use the response of the nations to eventually win back the rest of Abraham's descendants.

A Lament and a Doxology (Romans 9:1-5; 11:33-36)

Everything between the lament and the doxology is important, but it's not a comprehensive answer to the problem Paul tries to tackle. There's still mystery. There are important unanswered questions. And what Paul writes is not the last word from God.

Paul's Answer to the Problem

Romans 9:6-8 9 (Ishmael and Isaac)

Not all descendants of Abraham received the promise and God is orchestrating the plan.

Romans 9:10-13 (Esau and Jacob)

Not all descendants of Abraham received the promise and God is orchestrating the plan.

Tangent: Romans 9:14-18 (Is God unjust?)

"When Pharaoh's Heart Grew Harder: How does God relate to evil? by Tim Mackie (<https://bibleproject.com/blog/pharaohs-heart-grew-harder/>)

Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus

Blood: Pharaoh's heart "became hard" (7:22)

Frogs: Pharaoh "hardened his own heart" (8:15)

Gnats: Pharaoh's heart "was hard" (8:19)

Flies: "Pharaoh hardened his own heart" (8:32)

Livestock die: Pharaoh's heart "was hard" (9:7)

Boils: "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart" (9:12)

Hail: Pharaoh "hardened his own heart" (9:34)

Locusts: God announces that he has "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (10:1,10:20)

Darkness: God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (10:27)

Death of the firstborn: God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (11:10)

What Paul doesn't tell us in Romans 9-11 is sometimes as important to the story as what he tells us. Paul expects us to fill in the story with what we can know from his Word.

We should never be surprised by God's judgement. God is a just God. What should surprise us—given the part we play in the story—is our just God's compassion and mercy toward us.

Personal Reflection & Small Group Questions

Please complete this study on your own, then bring it to your small group for discussion.

1. Looking back over your notes from this week's sermon, what particularly caught your attention, challenged, or confused you?
2. Read Romans 8:35 – 9:5. Recall a moment in your life where you sensed both great blessing or triumph and deep sorrow at the same time? (If you have trouble thinking of a time like that, describe Paul's experience in this passage.)
3. Read Romans 11:33-36. How do you hold together the tension between affirming and seeking to understand the truths Paul teaches in these chapters and acknowledging the limits of our knowledge and understanding of God's sovereign ways?