

Jacob and Esau – a second example

• *Rebekah's revelation – the older would serve the younger*

• *The usual custom reversed*

• *'The purpose of God according to election'*

• *An illustration of the way salvation is brought about*

• *God's purpose cannot fail for those He has chosen*

• *God's way of working is varied and selective*

Paul moves to a second example. ¹⁰And not only this, but also there was Rebekah who conceived on one occasion, by one man our father Isaac. In this case the two children were conceived on one occasion and both had the same godly father. ¹¹For before they were born or had done anything either good or bad, but in order that the purpose of God according to election might continue, ¹²not from works but from the One who calls, it was said to her, 'The elder will serve the younger.'

Before Jacob and Esau were born Rebekah received a revelation about them¹. The two children would become two nations and the child to be born last would be served by the one who was to be born first. This was the opposite of the usual custom. In the days of Isaac and Rebekah the principle was that the oldest son, the firstborn son, would be the leader of the family and receive the main family inheritance. Any younger brother would serve him and have a lesser inheritance. Rebekah was told that this would be reversed. Only Jacob would be the heir of the promise to the line of Abraham. The Edomites (Esau's descendants) would serve Israel (Jacob's descendants).

This was God's 'election' or predestination of what would happen through Jacob. It had nothing to do with good works. It was 'before they were born or had done anything either good or bad'. 'Election' means God's habit of selecting or choosing out members of the human race to carry forward his purpose, or to save them. God predestines some people to be the people of Jesus¹. He chooses them before the foundation of the world². 'God from the beginning chose you for salvation', said Paul to the Thessalonians³. We are saved 'not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace'⁴. This is 'the purpose of God according to election'.

As in 9:6–8 Paul is only using an illustration. Whatever may be the issue in Genesis 25, salvation is the issue in Romans 9. Paul's terms are all about salvation. He uses words like 'Abraham's seed'¹, 'not from works'², 'calling'³, 'destruction'⁴, 'glory'⁵, 'righteousness by faith'⁶, 'saved'⁷. These terms are dealing with individual salvation. 'Whomsoever' in Romans 9:15 refers to individuals.

Paul is seeking to show that the purpose of God which brought us to salvation cannot fail or be aborted. In Paul's day the gospel was reaching mainly gentiles, not Jews. But, says Paul, this is typical of God! He has had a habit for centuries of leaving aside one part of the nation of Israel and bringing blessing to only a small part of it. But for those whom he has chosen, the saving purpose of God never fails. God loves every human being, but there is also a **purpose** in God's working in this world which is varied and selective.

Paul's paragraph in 9:10–13 concludes: ¹³as it is written, 'Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.' 'Hated' means 'treated less favourably', as in Genesis 29:30, 31, 33, Luke 14:26, John 12:25 and elsewhere. We must be careful to let the different teachings of Scripture stand side by side. God wants all men and women to be

¹ Genesis 25:23

¹ 8:29
² Ephesians 1:4-6
³ 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

⁴ 2 Timothy 1:9-10

¹ 9:7
² 9:12
³ 9:7, 12
⁴ 9:22
⁵ 9:23
⁶ 9:30-33
⁷ 10:1

¹ 1 Timothy 2:4

• *God desires all to be saved*

• *Yet not all accept this offer*

Trust in Jesus! – our response to God’s offer of salvation

1. *Salvation does not depend on good works*

2. *The deepest reason why anyone is saved is the electing purpose of God*

3. *God has a continuing purpose of ‘election’*

saved^{□1}. He takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner^{□2}. He wants no one to perish^{□3}. As John Calvin put it: ‘This is his wondrous love towards the human race, that he **desires** all men and women to be saved. God stretches out his hand to all alike, but he only **grasps** those whom he has chosen.’

The death of Jesus Christ is for everyone. Yet the fact that God is so kindly towards us does not actually lead us to accept his offer. Although God has already done so much for us and says, ‘Come for all things are ready’, it takes even more of the grace of God to get us to accept his offer. God loves the world^{□1□2} and explicitly says that the ‘bread of life’ is given (‘my Father gives you’^{□3}) whether faith is present or not (‘yet you do not believe’^{□4}). There is a difference between God’s wish and God’s secret purposes. God does not always give himself everything he wishes for and takes pleasure in. But God loves you and Christ died for you, and offers you salvation. Don’t let the mysteries of predestination make you doubt it! Trust in Jesus and then give God the glory for your having done so!

1. **Salvation does not depend on good works.** Bad works do not stop salvation, good works do not bring salvation. Jacob was chosen ‘before they were born or had done anything either good or bad’.

2. **The deepest reason why anyone is saved is the electing purpose of God.** Salvation does not depend on humanly-produced faith. The faith of the Christian is the result of God’s promise and plan – although it does not feel like that at the time of believing.

3. **God has a continuing purpose of ‘election’.** In each generation God chooses to use people or to save people in exactly the way he wants. Jacob was chosen but not Esau. In Paul’s day God brought thousands of gentiles to Jesus, but Israel generally speaking was left aside. God’s purpose of election was continuing in the matter of who was being brought to salvation. Everything depends on God’s continuing purpose of bringing to salvation the people of his choice. We should treat every person as possibly one of God’s elect, but God’s choices are surprising.

□2 Ezekiel 18:23

□3 2 Peter 3:9

□1 John 1:29; 3:16, 17; 4:42

□2 1 John 2:2

□3 John 6:32

□4 John 6:36



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