

Romans 8:23-9:16: The Spirit and the New Exodus

Author: Dr. Craig Keener

Session 10

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener explores the transition from the triumphant themes of Romans 8 to the profound theological inquiries of Romans 9. Keener examines the concept of a "new Exodus" and the "already, not yet" tension of the believer's journey through earthly suffering, supported by the dual intercession of the Holy Spirit and Christ. He discusses the golden chain of redemption and the divine mystery of election, emphasizing that salvation is grounded in God's sovereign grace rather than ethnic descent or human merit. Ultimately, the text grounds believers in an eternal perspective, encouraging them to view suffering through the lens of God's unbreakable love and sovereign purpose.

Outline

I. Introduction (Romans 8:23-9:16)

- **A. Lecture 10 Focus:** The transition from the overwhelming victory of the Spirit in Romans 8 to the profound questions of divine sovereignty in Romans 9.
- **B. The Contrast Between Chapters:** Romans 7 is highly introspective (defeat, flesh, "I, me, my") whereas Romans 8 mentions the Holy Spirit more than any other chapter in the Bible, portraying overwhelming victory.

II. The New Exodus in Romans 8

- **A. Prophetic Expectations:** Prophets like Hosea (chapters 2 and 11) and Isaiah (chapters 11 and 40) foretold a new Exodus where God would lead His people back through the wilderness to the Promised Land.
- **B. Scriptural Allusions in Romans 8:**

- **1. Led by the Spirit:** Parallels Israel being led in the wilderness by the pillar of fire and cloud (8:14-16).
- **2. Inheriting the Promise:** Focuses on the adoption and the future inheritance, mirroring Israel's hope for the Promised Land (8:17, 8:23).
- **3. Groaning in Bondage:** Reminiscent of Israel groaning under Egyptian bondage where God heard their cries (Exodus 2:23-24; Romans 8:23).

III. The "Already, Not Yet" Tension and the First Fruits

- **A. Two-Stage Redemption:** Mirroring how Israel was redeemed from Egypt but remained in the wilderness before reaching their inheritance, believers experience salvation in two stages (already redeemed, not yet glorified).
- **B. First Fruits of the Spirit (*aparkhe*):**
 - **1. Definition:** The first fruits represent the actual beginning of the harvest, a tangible foretaste of the future world.
 - **2. Foretaste of Glory:** While believers still suffer in physical bodies, having the Spirit is a foretaste of the bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:20) and the age to come (Hebrews 6).
 - **3. The Down Payment (*arrhabon*):** Serves as God's guarantee of ultimate redemption (2 Cor 1:5, Eph 1).

IV. Double Intercession in the Believer's Life

- **A. The Holy Spirit's Intercession within the Believer (8:26-27):**
 - **1. Searcher of Hearts:** God, who searches hearts and minds, intimately knows the mind of the Spirit.
 - **2. Unspoken Groans:** The Spirit intercedes on our behalf during suffering, even when we are isolated or in complete duress.
- **B. Christ's Intercession before God's Throne (8:34):**
 - **1. Legal Advocacy (*parakletos*):** Christ stands as our advocate, rendering condemnation powerless.
 - **2. Defeat of the Accuser:** Jewish tradition viewed Satan as the continuous accuser of believers. Christ's heavenly advocacy leaves no place for the accuser's charges.

V. God Working All Things for Good (Romans 8:28-30)

- **A. Active Divine Agent:** God works all things for good in accordance with His eternal purposes (reminiscent of Joseph in Genesis 50:20).
- **B. Redeeming Tragedy:** Earthly brokenness allows believers to receive God's comfort and in turn comfort others (2 Cor 1).
- **C. The Golden Chain of Redemption (8:29-30):**
 - **1. Rhetorical Sororities:** Foreknown → Predestined → Called → Justified → Glorified. This is presented as a completed action from God's timeless perspective.
 - **2. Sovereignty and Responsibility:** Historical theological debates (Calvinists vs. Arminians, Augustine vs. Pelagius) often over-systematize, but both camps agree that God must draw the person, God must save, and perseverance to the end is required.

VI. The Unbreakable Love of God (Romans 8:31-39)

- **A. Scriptural Assurances:** "If God is for us, who can be against us?" echoes the Passover halal of Psalm 118:6.
- **B. The Gift of the Son:** Echoes the Akedah (binding of Isaac, Gen 22). Since God did not spare His own Son, He will freely give us all things as our ultimate inheritance.
- **C. Triumph Over Persecution and Trials:**
 - **1. Historical Realities:** Facing extreme poverty (nakedness/poorly clothed), famine (which regularly threatened over half the Roman Empire), and the sword (Jūs Gladii—Rome's power of capital punishment).
 - **2. The Roman Fire (A.D. 64):** Nero used Christians as scapegoats for the Great Fire of Rome, burning them as human torches in his gardens. Paul's message of eternal security was a necessary, life-or-death reality for the Roman church.
 - **3. Hyper-Conquerors (*hupernikao*):** We overwhelmingly conquer because nothing—neither life, death, nor spiritual and earthly rulers—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

VII. Sorrow for Israel and God's Sovereign Choice (Romans 9:1-16)

- **A. Paul's Intense Grief (9:1-3):**

- **1. Self-Sacrificial Love:** Paul wishes himself accursed/separated from Christ for the sake of his Jewish kin, mirroring Moses' offer in Exodus 32:32.
- **2. Complex Tension:** Demonstrates that even while rejoicing in the Spirit, a believer can carry perpetual sorrow for those who remain unbelieving.
- **B. Ethnic Israel's Unique Privileges (9:4-5):**
 - **1. Spiritual Heritage:** List of privileges including adoption, glory, covenants, the law, temple service, promises, and the fathers.
 - **2. Christ's Identity:** Christ is descended from Israel according to the flesh, and is explicitly praised as "God blessed over all"—a clear New Testament witness to His deity.
- **C. True Israel Defined by Promise, Not Descent (9:6-13):**
 - **1. Historical Precedent:** Ethnic descent does not guarantee covenant promise. Abraham had multiple sons (Isaac and Ishmael), but only Isaac was chosen.
 - **2. Jacob and Esau:** Isaac had twin sons, but God chose Jacob over Esau before they were born, illustrating that election is by grace and sovereign calling, not ethnic descent or human merit.
- **D. God's Sovereign Right (9:14-16):**
 - **1. Divine Justice:** God's mercy is entirely His sovereign right. Quoting Exodus, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy".
 - **2. Ultimate Foundation:** Salvation depends entirely on God's mercy, not on human willpower or effort.