

Romans 09 - Israel in the Past: Elected; The Salvation-Historical Role of Unbelieving Jews in the Present

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Romans 9

V. Sovereignty (9:1—11:36)

Romans 9–11 is a difficult passage that addresses Israel's unbelief and its implications for the credibility of God's promises and the gospel.

Paul's primary purpose is to explain how Israel's rejection of the gospel relates to God's righteousness and faithfulness. Since Romans 8 promises that nothing can separate believers from God's love, Israel's apparent failure to receive God's promises raises an important question: If God has not fulfilled His promises to Israel, how can Gentile believers trust His promises to them?

The central context of Rom 9 is Israel, not humanity as a whole. The author argues that Paul's descriptions of unbelief, hardening, rejection, and disobedience refer specifically to unbelieving Israel and should not be universally applied to all unbelievers.

In short: Rom 9–11 explains God's dealings with Israel, defends His faithfulness to His promises, and addresses how Israel's unbelief relates to the gospel and the assurance of salvation described in Rom 8.

Calvinism incorrectly applies the descriptions of unbelieving Jews in this chapter to all people, even though the text does not explicitly support (or even imply) that interpretation.

They believe the context for Rom 9 begins in 8:28–30, which (they say) teaches that God unconditionally chooses some individuals for salvation and others for damnation. This interpretation is then carried into Rom 9 to develop the doctrines of Unconditional Election, Predestination, and Reprobation.

But when Rom 9 is read in the context of chapters 8–11 and the entire epistle, Paul is addressing Israel's unbelief, how it came about, and how God uses both believing and unbelieving Jews to accomplish His purposes, rather than establishing a system of exhaustive divine determinism.

Based on a proper approach to this chapter, which addresses the problem of Jewish unbelief in Jesus and its implications for the credibility of Paul's gospel and ministry, we can conclude the following:

1. Unbelieving Jews are the focus of Rom 9.
2. Israel's eventual salvation through faith demonstrates that Paul's gospel has the power to save both Jews and Gentiles.
3. God is just in rejecting those who rely on works of the Law rather than faith, and He is free to save them through faith.
4. Salvation for the Jewish people depends entirely on God's mercy.

The significance of these conclusions is that Rom 9 is not dealing with philosophical issues related to the metaphysics of divine action and human freedom. Rather, it is the first part of Paul's answer to the

central problem driving the entire letter: the problem that Jewish unbelief is creating for the credibility of his gospel and his ministry.

(A) Israel's present rejection causes Paul grief (9:1-5)

(a) Statement of Paul's sorrow (9:1-2)

1 I am telling **the truth** in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,

1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,

1 I am telling the truth because I belong to the Messiah—I am not lying, and my conscience confirms it by means of the Holy Spirit.

1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

- Notice that there is no conjunction or particle at the beginning of this verse that connects it in any way to the end of the last chapter. The tone of Paul's writing also shifts dramatically, from celebration (8:31-39) to lament (9:1-3).

- Paul begins this section with a personal lament, making clear his burden for the Jewish people who have not accepted Christ. This heartfelt expression assumes a sympathetic Jewish audience who would feel this same burden.

- "...the truth" - *alētheia*, objective, factual truth

— To affirm the authenticity of his concern, Paul gives two witnesses of his truthfulness (Cf. Deut 19:15): his position "in Christ" and his clear conscience that the Holy Spirit had sensitized. The fact that Paul would give two witnesses emphasizes his strong Jewish identity.

— Paul knew that his readers would have difficulty accepting his spiritual concern for Israel. He used the best language possible to manifest that his inner feelings were completely free of deceit and falsehood.

2 that I have **great sorrow** and **unceasing grief** in my heart.

2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

2 I have deep sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart,

2 That I have great heaviness and continual [unceasing] sorrow in my heart.

- What Paul described as "truth" in v1 is outlined in v2-3...

- "...great sorrow" - *megas lypē*, deep grief, pain of body or mind.

- "...unceasing grief" - *adialeiptos adynē*, a violent onslaught of grief which was the outworking of his "great sorrow." This violent onslaught of grief was always present, unceasingly afflicting Paul's body and mind.

— Paul is pouring his heart out—he is talking passionately. This is not an academic or intellectual issue; he is totally involved with this issue. These first two verses contrast with his joy over his own condition (Cf. 8:38-39).

— Paul's love for his people (the Jews) was a love for those who hated him (Cf. Acts 22:22; 25:24). Before his conversion, Paul (Saul) led his people (Jews) in persecuting Christians as enemies of their

faith (Acts 9:1-2,14-16). Now, he was the enemy of his fellow Jews (Cf. 8:35; 2 Cor 11:24,26).

— Everywhere Paul went in his three missionary journeys, he would first go into the Jewish synagogue to preach Christ, and almost every time he would be kicked out, sometimes immediately, other times after a few days or weeks. And it was the Jews, including some Jewish believers (who felt that sanctification was through obedience to the Law) who persecuted him.

— Considering how the Jews overall treated him and rejected him, even trying to kill him, Paul's love for them and his deep desire to see them come to Christ is otherworldly/supernatural. This is not the kind of love wrought out of man, it is love that can only be displayed by God through us.

No man will ever even begin to try to save men unless he first loves them. [Barclay]

(b) Proof of Paul's sorrow (9:3)

3 For I **could wish** that I myself were **accursed**, *separated* from Christ for the sake of **my countrymen**, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

3 for I could wish that I myself were condemned and cut off from the Messiah for the sake of my brothers, my own people,

3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

- Paul, really how bad is this sorrow and grief that you're feeling? Here's how bad it is, Paul says: If me being cut off from Christ and spending eternity in hell would somehow bring salvation to the Jews, I'm down with that. If that transaction could be worked out, I'll pay the price.

- "...I could wish" - *euchomai*, imperfect tense (continuous or repeated action), indicative mood (a simple statement of fact). Paul continually, for a long time, has desired what he states next.

— His wish was hypothetical, he knew that God could not possibly grant it, but his selfless love was real. He was willing not simply to die for the sake of his people, but to be "cut off from Christ," to lose his salvation eternally, if that could bring about their belief. Moses said something similar (Cf. Ex 32:31-32).

— Paul's wish here expresses high emotion, not correct theology. In his other epistles, Paul did something similar: in 1 Cor 7:7, Paul "wished" that all believers would remain single (unmarried) so they had more time to dedicate to serving the Lord. In 1 Cor 14:5, he "wished" that all believers would have the gift of tongues, or even better, the gift of prophecy. In both cases, he knew these were not in God's will.

- "...accursed" - *anathema*, eternal damnation (Cf. Gal 1:8); Paul would welcome eternal damnation if it meant that unbelieving Jews would come to Christ.

— Paul demonstrated the heart of Christ here because Jesus did much the same thing (Cf. Gal 3:13):

Gal 3:13a: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us...

- "...my countrymen" - *adelphos*, brethren; brothers *and sisters*. The Greek word *adelphos* is typically used by biblical authors to denote fellow believers (their audience), however here Paul uses the word

to describe fellow Jews (Cf. Acts 13:15). Paul was as Jewish as they come ("a Hebrew of Hebrews," Phil 3:5), so his countrymen are the Jewish people (v4).

Reformed position: When Paul speaks of the anguish in his heart and his desire to be accursed because of his fellow Israelites, the reason he feels this way is not because Israel is merely losing out on temporal blessings. It was because his fellow Jews were not saved. Why are the Israelites separated from Christ?

- **Paul's explanation:** They were cut off for their unbelief (Cf. 11:20) despite the fact that God patiently held out his hands to them for a very long time (Cf. 10:21).
- **Calvinist Response:** Because God rejected them before the foundation of the world (before they did anything good or bad) and He refused to grant them the faith (by means of effectual regeneration) needed to be reconciled.

But it makes no sense for Paul to express anguish over the Jewish rejection of God if it was simply an unavoidable response to God's rejection. In other words, the Calvinist response makes no logical sense: if Jews are not saved because God rejected them, and Paul believed that, why would God patiently hold out His hand to them and why would Paul express anguish at Jewish unbelief when it was really God's fault for not effectually regenerating them?

Paul's expression of his longing for Israel's salvation (v1-3) is self-sacrificially loving, just like that of Jesus Himself. Yet, Calvinism's interpretation undermines the self-sacrificial nature of Christ's love and provision for these hardened Israelites. Are we to believe that Paul is more self-sacrificially loving than the Lord who inspired his words?

Dual Covenant Theology

There is a false teaching out there that believes that Jews are saved without Jesus, through obedience to their own (Mosaic) Covenant, and Gentiles are saved through their relationship to Jesus Christ.

The mindset behind this is to not contribute to rising anti-Semitism in the world today, but the belief itself is just not biblical. The belief behind Dual Covenant Theology is that Jews have been through so much throughout their history that we don't want to bother them about the condition of hell, just leave them alone. However, there could not be a more anti-Semitic thing than to not preach the gospel to the Jews and leave them alone to believe that obedience to their Covenant is pleasing to God.

Paul never taught Dual Covenant Theology, as is clear from 9:1-3. Paul's statement that he would rather be cut off from Christ if it meant that the Jews would be saved would be a ludicrous statement if Dual Covenant Theology was true.

If the Bible is clear on anything, it's clear that faith alone in Christ alone is the only path to salvation (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5; Gal 2:21). The moment we believe or espouse a doctrine where Christ is just an option is the moment we are saying that everything that Christ went through on the cross was in vain. It trivializes what Christ did.

(c) Reason for Paul's sorrow (9:4-5)

4 **who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and daughters, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the temple service, and the promises;**

4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises,

4 who are Israelites. To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises.

4 Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service *of God*, and the promises;

- Since any nationality can be saved through faith in Christ, and many from Israel do not believe, is there any benefit to being a Jew?

— As first mentioned in 3:1-2, Paul begins to remind the reader of the benefits and blessings of being a natural descendant of Israel. He highlights the distinctive blessings that God has bestowed upon Israel. This is part of the reason for his sorrow—because the Jews have been blessed and blessed and blessed by God like no other nation in the history of the world, yet they wallow in unbelief in Jesus Christ.

— They have privilege after privilege after privilege, yet Paul says that they are in spiritual blindness when it comes to Christ, the One to whom all of these promises and blessings pointed. It's sometimes true that the people with the greatest blessings cannot see the simplest of truths.

— The pain Paul felt for his unsaved countrymen became all the more severe when he considers how God has blessed them with all the privileges of being His own special people...and they completely fumbled the ball.

— Paul previously touched on the blessings God has given the Jews. He regarded Israel's blessings/advantages as "Great in every respect" (3:1-2):

1 Then what advantage does the Jew have? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

2 **Great in every respect.** First, that they were entrusted with the actual words of God.

- "who are" - *ēisin*, present tense. Since all of the following clauses outlining Israel's advantages in v4-5 lack a verb, *ēisin* governs each of them. This means that all subsequent phrases/statements are still true today, in spite of Israel's unbelief. This is a death knell to Replacement Theology.

- "...Israelites" - defines what Paul meant by saying "my countrymen, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (v3). The term "Israelites" connotes the chosen people of God, whereas "Jews" simply distinguishes them from Gentiles.

- "...to whom belongs" - present tense, not past tense; these privileges and covenants belong to Israel on the day Paul wrote this and they still belong to Israel today.

- "...adoption as sons *and daughters*" - God graciously adopted Israel (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1-2; Hosea 11:1), as He has Christians (8:15); Israel is the only nation called "God's son" (Ex 4:22). Israel has never nor can they ever in the future be dis-inherited (Cf. Is 63:16; Jer 3:17-19; 31:9,20).

— Normally, adoption refers to a believer's new status before God, as His children (Cf. 8:15,23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). Here, it refers to God's choice (election) of His people through whom He promised to bring salvation to the world (Ex 4:22; Deut 8:5; Hosea 11:1).

- "...the glory" - *shekinah*, the *visible* symbol of the sovereign God's authority and power as a shining presence in the OT:

- The cloud and pillar of fire that guided Israel at the Exodus (Ex 13:21-22; 40:36-38). It descended on Mount Sinai when God gave the Law (Ex 24:16-17).
- It filled the newly constructed tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35) and later temple (2 Chr 5:13-6:2), and later settled above the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Lev 16:2).
- At the time of Israel's exile to Babylon, the glory departed and returned to heaven in judgment of the people's sins (Ezek 10-11).
- We have God's glory with us today in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 2:11; 2 Cor 3:18; Heb 1:2-3).
- The *Shekinah* will once again inhabit the Millennial Temple (Ezek 43:4) by way of the East Gate.

- "...the covenants" - the Abrahamic Covenant, which promised land, seed, and blessing. These promises are further detailed in the sub-covenants: the land was further detailed in the Land Covenant (Deut 29-30), the seed promises were further detailed in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:11b-17; 1 Chr 17:10b-15), and the blessing was further detailed in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34).

— God initiated and established His special relationship to His people through these Covenants. He promised to be His people's God, to never abandon them, and to send a Savior for the world to reign forever on David's Throne.

— There are 8 Covenants in Scripture, five of which were made exclusively with Israel (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Land, Davidic, New; Cf. Eph 2:11-12); the others were made with mankind in general. Four of the five are unconditional (only the Mosaic Covenant is conditional). It is the four unconditional covenants that Paul is referring to here (Cf. Eph 2:12). See [8 Covenants of the Bible](#) for details about each of the Covenants.

- "...the Law" - the Mosaic Law, starting with the Ten Commandments and includes the other 603 commandments that further detail and amplify them. God gave the Israelites His Law to govern their political, social, and religious life, and to guarantee His blessing if they obeyed.

— Obedience to the Law does not guarantee anyone salvation, but instead it shows us the need for salvation by revealing to us the holy character of God. When we read and understand the Law, we see the character of God on display: what does He approve of, what does He disapprove of, how does God think, what things are pleasing to God, what things are displeasing to God.

— Israel is the only nation in this history of mankind to receive a set of Laws directly from God Himself (Cf. Ex 19:3-8; Deut 4:7-8; Ps 147:19-20; Mal 4:4).

- "...*temple* service" - refers to the services that were carried out first in the Tabernacle, then later in the Temple. This service included offerings, the priesthood, and the entire Levitical institution.

- "...the promises" - refers to the promises given to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3:

1. Land: "go to the land that I will show you"
2. Great nation: "I will make you a great nation"
3. Personal blessing: "I will bless you"
4. Great name: "I will make your name great"

5. Blessing to others: "you shall be a blessing"
6. Blessing on friends: "I will bless those who bless you"
7. Curses on enemies: "I will curse those who curse you"
8. Channel of blessing to the world: "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed"

- What was God's purpose for choosing the Jews? To give to Israel privileges and guarantees that God gave to no other nation, not for their own sake, but because God wanted to use Israel as a vehicle/channel/vessel of blessing to the entire world (Gen 12:3).

5 whose are **thefathers**, and **from whom is the Christ** according to the flesh, who is over all, **God blessed forever**. Amen.

5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

5 To the Israelis belong the patriarchs, and from them, the Messiah descended, who is God over all, the one who is forever blessed. Amen.

5 Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is [God] over all, blessed for ever. Amen.

- "...the fathers" - the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:6; Deut 6:10).

— God personally revealed Himself to them, and delivered, guided, and blessed Israel through them. He gave the patriarchs promises before Israel was a nation. Jesus ultimately fulfills all of God's promises (2 Cor 1:20).

- "...from whom is the Christ" - last but certainly not least, the Jews gave us Jesus Christ. As for His nationality in His humanity ("flesh"), Jesus was a Jew. As for His sovereignty, He is "over all." As for His deity, He is "God blessed forever."

— Despite all of the previous blessings God gave to Israel, they completely whiffed on the last blessing, not recognizing that Jesus Christ is their Messiah.

- "...God blessed forever" - "God" here is referring to Jesus, not the Father. Numerous scholars state that the Greek grammar here clearly and without question indicates that Paul is explicitly stating that Jesus is God.

- The list in v4-5 is the covenant inventory: adoption, glory, covenants, Law, temple service, promises, patriarchs, and Christ Himself. This is the inheritance, the promise, that is the topic of this chapter.

— The Jews are the people to whom the oracles of God were committed (Cf. 3:2). And they have, largely, rejected the gospel. The question Rom 9-11 will answer is not whether God is sovereign: Paul never doubted that. The question is whether God's Word has failed. If the covenant people can be permanently cut off from the covenant promises, what does this say about the covenant itself?

In verses 1-5, Paul opens the most theologically dense section of Romans with grief, not with doctrinal thesis, because the question this passage answers is not abstract: it is whether God kept His promises to His people.

(B) God's present rejection of Israel is consistent with God's promises because God has

always worked through individuals within the nation (9:6-13)

(a) Proposition stated (9:6)

6 But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel;

6 But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel;

6 Now it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all Israelis truly belong to Israel,

6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

- This verse frames the entire discussion. Understanding the question Paul is asking here is the key to understanding the rest of this chapter:

The question is:

Has God's word failed since those chosen to carry it are standing in opposition to it?

Or, to put it another way,

If the nation chosen to bring the Messiah and His message (v4-5) has rejected the Messiah and His message (v2-3), then has God's plan failed (v6)?

— The clear answer to this question is No and Paul goes on to explain exactly why in the following three chapters. The answer is No because the accusation is based on a false premise. Just because a person is a physical descendant of Israel does not mean this person is truly an Israelite. The rejection of those who are only physical Jews but not spiritually so is not a valid basis upon which to say the promises have been made void.

— While Jewish rejection of the gospel certainly has implications for everyone else (Cf. 9:22-26; 11:17-25). Paul's fundamental argument in Rom 9-11 addresses the problem that Jewish unbelief is creating for the credibility of the gospel he is preaching and the manner in which he goes about preaching it.

- Not every descendant of Israel was entrusted with the words of God, nor was everyone who is a child of God made a child on the basis that he or she is a natural descendent of Abraham.

— God's Word has not failed to come through Israel because not everyone from Israel has been given the noble purpose of bringing that Word (v5,21). In other words, not every individual descendant of Abraham was chosen to accomplish what the nation of Israel was chosen to accomplish—only a small subset of them were chosen for that purpose.

- "But" - *de*, continues Paul's same thought from v1-5.

- "...*it is* not as though the word of God has failed" - it appeared to the Romans as if it had failed, but it had not failed. This same objection was raised earlier in 3:3-4a, and answered there: "If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? Far from it!" The fact that the majority of Jews are in unbelief will not thwart the plans and promises of God.

— Not *all* Israelites are among God's faithful covenant people. Not all who descended from Abraham are the children of Abraham in the covenant sense. God's covenant people, the ones who believe in Him by faith, are the ones to whom God will keep His promises. Therefore, God's Word has not failed,

you (the Romans) just have a misunderstanding about who Israel really is. You're including those who don't believe in the Messiah by faith, but God is not.

— God *always* keeps His Word. No promise of God has ever, or will ever, fail. He is omniscient and omnipotent, sovereign, and no one can frustrate His divine purpose (Is 46:9-11).

— "word of God" - God's revelation of His plans for Israel in the OT (summarized in v4-5). God revealed that He had chosen Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:5-6). The Israelites were to function as priests in the world by bringing the nations to God (Cf. Is 42:6). They were to do this by demonstrating through their life in the Holy Land how glorious it can be to live under the government of God.

— Israel massively failed to carry out God's purpose and consequently suffered His discipline. So it looked as though "the word" that God had spoken concerning Israel's purpose had "failed," but it had not. Israel was the one who failed. But in the following chapters, Paul will show that God will ultimately accomplish His purposes for Israel.

— "failed" - *ekpiptō*, means "to fall out, of, or away," "to go off its course," or "to become void." It is a word used to describe withering flowers (James 1:11; 1 Peter 1:24) and of falling away from a straight course (Acts 27:17,26,29).

— Paul denies that the word of God has "gone off course" or "become void" in absolute terms. The perfect tense asserts a completed state: the word did not previously fall, and it is not now in a fallen state. The Word of God has not suddenly been frustrated by Israel's rejection. In fact, Israel's rejection was *very much part* of God's divine program and plan.

- "...they" - it's important to note, to understand this verse properly, that "they" does not distinguish between Israel and the Church or between Jews and Gentiles. Rather, Paul is distinguishing between Jews who believe (the Remnant) and Jews who do not believe (the non-Remnant).

- "...not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel" - Paul makes a distinction between ethnic descent and covenant membership. Not every descendant of Israel is chosen to carry out the purpose for which God chose (elected) Israel. Not every descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is blessed to be in the lineage of the Messiah or to be an inspired messenger of God's promises.

— "all Israel" - **the physical family (Israel as a whole)**; refers to general Israel, all persons, believers and unbelievers, of Jewish descent. It refers to those who can trace their family ancestry to the patriarchs; the entire nation, the whole natural seed of Abraham. This is Israel in a general sense, including those who believe (Remnant), and those who do not believe (non-Remnant).

— "*descended* from Israel" - **the covenant people defined by faith**; refers to believing Jews, the Remnant; note that Paul doesn't say not *any* are Israel, he says not *all* are Israel. God will fulfill His covenants with Israel one day to this group within Israel, not through the nation as a whole.

— So Paul says, the many descendants of Israel you are seeing stand in opposition to the Word were not chosen by God to carry the Word in the first place, thus it cannot be concluded that God's Word has failed.

— The distinction he's making here is between *believing* Jews and *non-believing* Jews. The dividing line is whether they placed their faith in the Messiah or not.

— The majority of Jews today are in unbelief, and only a tiny minority accept Christ as their Messiah, but don't let that scare you or deceive you into thinking that God's Word (promises) have somehow failed—because this is how God has always worked.

— Zech 13:8-9 says that during the Tribulation, two-thirds of Jews will be killed and one-third will be preserved. That one-third of the nation is the "remnant" who will come to Christ and be saved. It is through that remnant that God will fulfill His covenantal promises.

— "Israel" [2x] - used 11x in Rom 9-11 and in every case, including in the two cases in this verse, it refers to ethnic or national Israel. Never does the term include Gentiles within its meaning.

— Even through all physical descendants of Jacob constitute the nation of Israel, as Scripture speaks of Israel, God spoke of Israel in a more restricted sense: *saved* Israelites (Cf. John 8:39,44; Gal 6:16). Paul previously pointed out this distinction between the outward Jew and the inward Jew, namely the Jew who is a Jew only because of ethnicity/descent, and the Jew who believes in the Messiah (2:28-29; Cf. Matt 3:9).

Rom 2:28-29:

28 For he is **not a Jew who is one outwardly**, nor is **circumcision that which is outward in the flesh**.

29 But **he is a Jew who is one inwardly**; and **circumcision is of the heart**, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from people, but from God.

— The description of Jews by Paul in 2:28-29, along with Christ in John 8:37-44, are consistent with the history of Israel. Should the wicked, idolatrous kings of Israel and Judah be recognized as the true Israel, who would receive both the spiritual and materialistic blessings of the covenant promises? Certainly not! In the OT era, there was a vast difference between the true Jewish believer and the apostate, idolatrous Jewish unbeliever.

— God is unimpressed with genealogical lineage...the fact that someone is a Jew, a direct descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is unimpressive to God. God cares about our spiritual lineage (Cf. Matt 3:9; Rev 2:9; 3:9).

— Mere ethnic identification with Abraham is not a sufficient basis to receive all of the covenant promises given to Abraham. Christ affirmed that His critics were the *descendants* of Abraham, but He denied that they were the *children* of Abraham (John 8:37-39). In fact, He asserted that their father was the devil (John 8:44).

- After stating there are two Israels, and that there is a distinction between Israel as a whole and Israel as the believing Remnant, Paul now uses two illustrations below (v7-13), of Ishmael and Isaac (v7-9), and Jacob and Esau (v10-13).

Inclusio

In 9:6—11:28 Paul used a literary structure called an *inclusio*, where the author begins and ends a section with the same or closely related words, themes, ideas, or concepts. The repetition creates a set of "bookends" that mark the boundaries of the section, and often provides a clue about how the

material in between should be understood. It is a structure that is used often throughout the Bible, in both the OT and NT.

In 9:6, the problem is introduced:

9:6 But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel;

The issue is: Have God's promises in the OT to Israel failed because so many Israelites have rejected Christ? Paul's answer is No. He then spends 9:7—11:26 explaining why Israel's present unbelief does not mean that God's promises have failed. In 11:28, he concludes the *inclusio* by saying:

11:28: In relation to the gospel ***they are* enemies on your account**, but in relation to ***God's choice* they are** beloved **on account of the fathers**;

The reason why so many Israelites have rejected Christ is not because God's Word failed, but because of judicial hardening. God hardened Israel (partially) and turned His attention to saving Gentiles. It's not that Jews can't get saved...some (a small fraction) of them do. But the overwhelming ethnic makeup of the Church since Pentecost has been Gentile.

But at a future point in history, once "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (11:25), God will turn His attention back to Israel, then states unequivocally "all Israel will be saved" (11:26).

(b) OT proof (9:7-13)

(i) Isaac chosen over Ishmael (9:7-9)

7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: **"THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE NAMED."**

7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named."

7 and not all of Abraham's descendants are his true descendants. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that descendants will be named for you."

7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

- Paul will now give two OT examples (v7-9; v10-13) to show that God primarily worked through believers in the nation of Israel rather than the nation at large. Paul will use a history lesson to remind his audience that being a descendant of Abraham does not mean one is guaranteed the blessings listed in v4-5, which were specific to Isaac's descendants.

— Nor does Jewish ancestry from Abraham guarantee the eternal blessing of being a child of God, which comes by faith in God's promise (symbolized by Isaac, whose birth came by grace) to whosoever believes, not by works of the law (symbolized by Ishmael, whose birth came by works).

- "...THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE NAMED" - quoted from Gen 21:12 to show that only Isaac, not any of Abraham's other descendants, received the promises because of divine calling (election).

— This is the key that unlocks the entire passage, and separates false doctrine (Calvinism) from what Paul is actually saying. ***When Paul discusses election in this passage, he is discussing the corporate***

election of a covenant people defined by God's promise and entered into through faith, not a pre-temporal list of individuals decreed to either salvation or damnation before they existed.

— The proof of this is in the structure of the argument itself. Paul's question is: has God's word to Israel failed? His answer is: No, because God's word was never about ethnic Israel as a whole. It was always about the covenant line within Israel, those who, like Isaac, are children of promise.

— That this is a corporate election, not an individual election, is important to note and understand here at the outset because Paul keeps this idea of corporate election in his mind until at least v24. Not understanding the difference between corporate and individual election is where false doctrine enters the interpretation.

— God chooses a people through whom to work His redemptive purposes. The corporate identity of that people is defined by covenant faithfulness and genuine faith, not by bloodline alone. The election of Jacob over Esau (v10-13), and the calling of the Gentiles alongside the remnant of Israel (vXX-XX), are both expressions of the same corporate election logic.

— Abraham's two sons (Ishmael & Isaac), from two different mothers, are used allegorically by Paul to represent two covenants: Law & Faith, as Paul explains in Gal 4:21-25. This is Paul's way of using a history lesson to remind his audience that being a seed/descendant of Abraham does not mean one is automatically guaranteed the blessings listed in v4-5, because those were specific to Isaac. Ishmael got nothing.

— Ishmael had a genetic, ethnic connection to Abraham, but that fact did not establish him to be the sole heir, or even one of the heirs, of God's promises. This shows that merely being a descendant of Abraham saves no one. Isaac was chosen (elected) and received the promises, Ishmael was not elected/chosen and received nothing.

8 That is, it is not the **children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.**

8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

8 That is, it is not merely the children born through natural descent who were regarded as God's children, but it is the children born through the promise who were regarded as descendants.

8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

- "That is" - in other words; Paul now explains what the quote from Gen 21:12 means. What it means is that Isaac was a Jew, Ishmael was not. The promises were not given to all physical descendants of Abraham, but only to those physical descendants that God promised to give them to.

- "...children of the flesh" - God did not have all of Abraham's offspring in mind when He spoke of uniquely blessing Abraham's seed. His promise only went to the child born supernaturally (Isaac), in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

— Neither Ishmael, nor the sons of Hagar or Keturah, inherited the promises. Only Isaac, the son of the promise, inherited. Merely being a physical descendent of Abraham was not enough.

What counts is grace, not race. [N.T. Wright]

9 For this is the **word of promise**: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH WILL HAVE A SON."

9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."

9 For this is the language of the promise: "At this time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

9 For this *is* the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

- "...word of promise" - this is the way in which the word of promise given to Abraham (Gen 12:3) is to be fulfilled. Isaac will be the descendant of Abraham through whom the Word would come.

- "...AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH WILL HAVE A SON" - quoted from Gen 18:10. Note that at the time God gave Abraham this promise, Ishmael was born (Gen 16), but Isaac was not (Gen 21).

— God did not choose to bless Isaac solely because he was Abraham's son. Rather, He promised Abraham, before Isaac was born, that He would provide and bless a son for Abraham supernaturally.

— In the time between the two being born, after Ishmael but before Isaac, God makes it clear that Sarah (not Hagar) will become pregnant and have a son, and it is through him that the promises will be fulfilled.

— The point that Paul is making is that God does not work through all of Abraham's descendants. If He worked through all of Abraham's descendants, the promises would come through both Ishmael and Isaac. But that's not how God worked...He worked through a tiny minority of Abraham's lineage.

— The application today is...there is a small minority of Jews in faith today; most Jews are in unbelief, but that should not bother you because God has always worked through a minority of Abraham's descendants.

The point of this illustration (v7-9) is that although both Isaac and Ishmael were children of Abraham physically, Isaac was the son of promise and Ishmael was not. Isaac was the spiritual seed as well as the physical seed. Ishmael was only the physical seed.

Apparently, Paul knew that his argumentation might raise the following question: Isaac and Ishmael had the same father but different mothers. Does this fact not prove that there is a distinction purely based on physical descent and not based on election?

In order to address this objection, Paul used a second illustration in v10-13, namely, that of Esau and Jacob. Not only did these brothers have the same father and the same mother, but they were also twins. Proving that one of them was elected while the other was not would undermine the above objection.

Reformed position:Reformed position: The first thing Calvinism needs you to believe in order to understand their belief system is that first, God determined who was, and who was not, a child of promise. He elected Isaac over Ishmael (and Abraham's other children), and Jacob over Esau. No qualms with this because that what the text says.

The other, more important thing Calvinism needs you to believe is that Isaac was selected for salvation over Ishmael, and Jacob was selected for salvation over Esau. But salvation is not the topic or purpose of God's selection of these two individuals. This is the fork in the road between the proper interpretation of this chapter and the Calvinist interpretation. Calvinism reads that Isaac was elected to

salvation and Ishmael was not, but Paul is not talking about salvation here. He's giving an illustration so that his readers will understand what he said in v6. He's showing that God has always selected one over another, not to salvation, but rather to carry his promises. The fact that Ishmael was not the child of promise doesn't mean that God pre-temporally decided that he would burn in hell for eternity, with no choice of his own. Same with Esau. It means that the descendants of Ishmael, along with the descendants of Esau, were not chosen to carry the promises of v4-5 for the purpose of blessing the entire world.

Armed with the belief that Paul is speaking about individual salvation, which was gained in v7-9, Calvinism goes on to argue for their belief in "double predestination," the idea that God sovereignly elects those who will be saved and sovereignly chooses and destines everyone else to hell. Combined with Calvinism's doctrine of Unconditional Election, whereby God sovereignly chooses some to be saved and most to not be saved, double predestination focuses on those who aren't saved by God, those who are confined to hell from birth ("doomed from the womb"). Calvinism believes that God sovereignly chooses the eternal destination of every human being, whether it be heaven or hell, and no one has a free will choice to make concerning accepting or rejecting Christ. And even worse than that, Calvinism believes that God is actually glorified in sending most people to hell. The eternal damnation of these people ("reprobates"), due solely to His sovereign decision and no choice of their own, will burn in hell for eternity separated from Him—and Calvinism believes that God is glorified by this.

The over-arching problem with Calvinism's use of this passage to teach double predestination is that **the passage is not speaking of individual election, but Israel's national election**. Jacob and Esau in this passage represent God's sovereign choice of the nation of Israel, not Jacob or Esau individually. God is making a sovereign choice about which of these twins the Messiah will descend from.

(ii) Jacob chosen over Esau (9:10-13)

(a) Circumstances of the choice (9:10)

10 And not only *that*, but there was also Rebekah, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac;

10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac;

10 Not only that, but Rebecca became pregnant by our ancestor Isaac.

10 And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac;

- "And not only *that*" - Paul will now introduce a second example to illustrate his point.

- "...when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac" - Paul now takes one step further by not only seeking to prove that his claims about the children of Abraham are true, but to also show that not even the direct descendants of Isaac are guaranteed salvation or were chosen for the purpose of bringing the Word to the rest of the world.

- In the example of Jacob and Esau, we have two different children from the same woman (Rebekah, Cf. Gen 25:21-26). In the previous example there was two children from different women (v7-9, Ishmael and Isaac, from Hagar and Sarah).

— Both Jacob and Esau were physical descendants of Isaac, just like Isaac and Ishmael were physical descendants of Abraham. Esau was born first, yet God sovereignly decided (elected) that the Abrahamic Covenant would be sustained through Jacob, the younger twin.

— Thus, it is clear from this illustration (really, both illustrations) that God chose one of each generation (Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau) to be the recipients of the messianic promises, while He denied the other any involvement.

Reformed position: Calvinism looks at this passage (v10-13) and says that Jacob was chosen by God (elected) to salvation, and Esau was not, and He made this arbitrary selection before either was even born. But that's not what this text says. Paul is giving the second of two illustrations about the point he made in v6. Paul is not giving us theology in v7-9 or v10-13, he's *illustrating* something that he said earlier (v6) to reinforce his point.

Paul here doesn't say anything about individual salvation, about one of them going to heaven one day because of God's sovereign choice and the other going to hell because of God's sovereign choice. You have to read this conclusion into the passage because it's not stated or even implied.

Paul here is referring to *nations*, not individuals. In fact, in Gen 25:23 the Lord says just that:

Gen 25:23: And the LORD said to her, "Two *nations* are in your womb; And two *peoples* will be separated from your body; And one *people* [plural] will be stronger than the other; And the older will serve the younger."

Notice "nations" and "peoples." These are not two people, but two *peoples*. Paul here is not talking about the individuals, but the nations that came from each of them.

(b) Divine choice (9:11)

11 for though *the twins* were **not yet born and had not done anything good or bad**, so that **God's purpose according to His choice** would stand, **not because of works** but **because of Him who calls**,

11 for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,

11 Yet before their children had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's plan of election might continue to operate

11 (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

- God makes another sovereign choice...He's not going to work through both twins (Jacob & Esau), He's only going to work with one of the twins: Jacob.

- "...not yet born and had not done anything good or bad" - God made an unconditional choice of Jacob over Esau; the choice was not conditioned on any perceived goodness or value of one versus the other, nor based on anything Jacob or Esau, or anyone else, has done or would do. God made the choice before the twins were even born.

— This phrase means that God did not look down through the corridors of time and choose Jacob over Esau because of some goodness He would see in Jacob; God didn't pick the "winner" beforehand. This rules out any belief that God's choice (election) is based on His foreknowledge of men's good

works. If God did that (based His election on foreknowledge), you could make a good argument that He picked the wrong guy.

— God's choice of Jacob, the lesser of the two brothers in age and physical prowess, was for the noble purpose of bringing the Word to the rest of the world. God's choice to fulfill His promise is not based upon the impressiveness of the nation (Deut 7:7) or the morality of its representative head (Gen 25:23). The fulfillment of God's Word has never relied upon the faithfulness or morality of the individuals chosen to carry it out (Cf. 3:3-4).

— In addition, neither brother would be justified apart from grace through faith in God, even though they are direct descendants of both Abraham and Isaac. Salvation is always, forever and in the past, solely through faith in Jesus Christ.

— Paul's point is that God does not wait until He sees how individuals or nations develop, and what choices they make, before He elects them. God simply chose Jacob and the nation of Israel for reasons that lay within Himself, not because they merited election (Cf. Deut 7:6-8). This is a powerful refutation of the claim that election results from prior knowledge: that God chooses a person for salvation having foreseen that they will believe the gospel.

- "...God's purpose according to *His* choice" - the choice (election) in view settles which people carries the promise and serves the purpose. The election is not God's choice to save some and damn most.

— James White, a hardened Calvinist, calls this phrase "the keystone" of this section. He says "everything points to this one assertion. The pronouncement by God that the older would serve the younger was made on the basis of a choice by God that was made before they were born and before they could do anything good or bad. Paul's emphasis is upon the independence and freedom of God's choice."

- "...not because of works" - it's not because of works because both Jacob and Esau were not even born yet. So it couldn't have been about works. In addition, the Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional, it's not based on works.

- "...because of Him who calls" - the choice (election) of Jacob over Esau was a sovereign decision of God alone. He is God, thus He gets to make the rules. God alone is the Covenant Maker.

— Here's another phrase that Calvinism takes, puts it into a blender, and comes out with a wrong interpretation. This phrase simply re-emphasizes that God made this choice because He made it, it's His choice. His choice was not because of Jacob's or Esau's works, it was because He chose Jacob. Simple.

— John Piper comes to this verse and says,

The intended force of the phrase "not from works but from the one who calls" is felt most strongly when one contrasts it with the similar Pauline phrase "not from works but from faith. In Paul's thinking the latter phrase describes the event of justification (v32; Gal 2:16), never the event of election or predestination. Paul never grounds the "electing purpose of God" in man's faith.

— So to get this verse to align with his preconceived theological system, Piper contrasts what Paul says in this verse ("not because of works but because of Him who calls") to 9:32; Gal 2:16, both

salvation passages, then surmises that in Paul's thinking the latter phrase describes the event of justification, never the event of election or predestination.

— See what Piper does here? He has to "surmise" what Paul is talking about by going outside of the local context and "guess" that Paul is talking about individual salvation because he said "not by works." It's true the salvation is "not by works" but God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael or Jacob over Esau was also "not by works." God can make two completely unrelated decisions about how people are saved and how He chooses who will carry His promises, and both can be "not by works." Piper doesn't see this because he has to get Rom 9 to be referring to individual salvation in order to keep his belief in Calvinism afloat.

- This doesn't sit well with many people...the fact that God elected one over the other, for no good reason. One wasn't better than the other. God didn't base His choice on merit, only on His sovereign will. And keep in mind that the election was to be a blessing, not for salvation and eternal destiny.

— Later in v14-19, Paul will address the "fairness" of God's sovereign election. Paul anticipates the objections to this doctrine and deals with them directly.

Reformed position: Calvinism says this proves that God unconditionally elects some persons to salvation and reprobates the rest. But this misses the entire context. The proper context is that Paul is answering whether God's word to Israel has failed, and he argues that the promise always ran through a chosen line—Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau—the nations of Gen 25 and Mal 1. The choice (election) involved concerns who carries the covenant, not who is granted eternal life apart from faith.

The way they get the context of this passage to move from national election regarding who will carry forth God's promises to the world, to individual election for salvation or damnation, is to take the phrase "not because of works," which speaks of God's national selection of Jacob over Esau and stresses that He didn't choose Jacob because of anything Jacob did or would do, and correlate that with 9:32; Gal 2:16 which state that salvation is "not by works." That is not how you interpret the Bible.

(c) Statement of the choice (9:12)

12 it was said to her, **"THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."**

12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger."

12 according to his calling and not by actions), Rebecca was told, "The older child will serve the younger one."

12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

- "...THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER" - quoted from Gen 25:23.

- This choosing by God of the younger (Jacob) as favored over the older (Esau) is the exact opposite of how it typically worked in the ancient near east; in those days, the younger would always serve the older.

— If you go through the OT, God bypasses the firstborn in favor of a later-born son ~11x. This bypass was not for any reason other than to illustrate God's divine sovereignty. The verse says that the twins were still in their mother's womb and had not yet done anything good or bad, so God's election of one over the other was not based on works.

— But God in this case, and in other cases in Genesis, made a sovereign choice to choose the younger brother over the older. God basically said, I'm going to make a sovereign choice about which of these twins (Esau or Jacob) the Messiah will descend from. And because God is God, He can do as He pleases.

- Paul's point is that the election-purpose of God does not rest on human works. The choice (election) of Jacob was not based on anything Jacob had done, or would do. It's simply an act of God's sovereignty.

- It's interesting to note that Esau the man never served Jacob the man. This demonstrates again that Paul here is not referring to Jacob and Esau as individuals, but rather as nations/peoples. In fact, if you read the Genesis account of their relationship, it was the opposite: Jacob served Esau.

— When they met again in Gen 33, Jacob "bowed down to the ground seven times" as Esau approached" (Gen 33:3), called himself "your (Esau's) servant," and called Esau "my lord" 5x in one conversation.

— It was the nation of Edom, descended from Esau, that served Israel under David, not Esau individually. The prophecy only came true at the nation level, never at the individual level.

— The fulfillment of this quote is seen in 2 Sam 8:13-14, when all Edomites became servants to King David during his reign. Later, under Solomon, Edom remained under Israelite control (1 Kings 9:26-28). These historical events fulfill this prophecy, not in individual terms but on national terms, as the subjugation of one nation to another.

— Edom repeatedly opposed Israel in the OT (Cf. Num 20:14-21; 1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:13-14). God's judgment on Edom is described in Obadiah 10-14, which condemns Edom's violence against Israel. And again, the focus of His judgment is national and corporate, not personal or individual.

— The fact that Jacob became a less admirable person, in some respects, than Esau, shows that God's choice was not due to Jacob, or anything that God in His omniscience foresaw that he would do, but to Himself.

Divine Reprobation

The Reformed/Calvinist doctrine of Divine Reprobation is the "other side" of Double Predestination: the belief that God elected the majority of human beings to eternal damnation, without any possibility for salvation. Meaning, Jesus didn't die for them, and God created them specifically to burn in hell for eternity. They have *no chance* to be saved. And as if that is not bad enough, it gets worse.

Reformed/Calvinists believe that when God sends these people to hell, He is not simply exercising His justice, but He receives glory from it.

Calvinism defends this belief system vigorously because if it can be shown that this and other passages they use to argue in favor of divine reprobation does not demand to be interpreted that way, then the entire Calvinist system implodes. Their primary verses for this belief are v13,18, and 22.

Calvinists acknowledge that reprobation is enormously problematic and that the problem is compounded by a lack of biblical support. Wayne Grudem, Scottsdale Bible Church and noted Calvinist says, "...the doctrine of reprobation is the most difficult of all the teachings of Scripture for us to think about and accept because it deals with such horrible and eternal consequences for human beings made in the image of God." The repugnance of reprobation is why Calvinists like Grudem come

up with philosophically incoherent fixes like "single predestination," God's "asymmetrical relationship" to election and reprobation, God's "two wills," "two loves," and so on. None of these are found in the Bible; they are explanations used to smooth over the hard edges of their belief system. They essentially have to come up with alternative explanations, out of thin air and with no biblical support, to explain how they get to their conclusion. Grudem even concedes that it seems disingenuous to speak of God's sorrow over the reprobate if He decreed it. His answer is that "God can decree something that causes Him sorrow yet ultimately will bring him glory." But God's decreeing something *sorrowful* is not the problem with reprobation. The problem with reprobation is that God is decreeing something *evil*.

The fact is, ***What Paul says of unbelieving Jews in this passage cannot simply be transferred to all unbelievers.*** In fact, the point that Paul is driving home in Rom 9-11 is that God does not treat Jews the same way that he treats the rest of humanity. The things Paul says concerning the *unchosen, hated, not recipients of mercy, hardened, vessels of wrath, not saved, like Sodom and Gomorrah, pursuing salvation by works, unbelieving, stumbling, zealous without knowledge, disobedient, obstinate, failing to obtain what they are seeking, in a stupor, blind, bent, trespassing, broken off, not spared, enemies of the gospel* are things he is saying about unbelieving Jews, not everybody else.

If Calvinists want to try to infer that these adjectives apply eternally to all those individuals who will never believe in Jesus because God has foreordained it, that is certainly their prerogative, but it is not a demand of the text and their theological assertion fits very poorly within the context of Romans and with the rest of the biblical witness.

What Reformed/Calvinism interprets as divine reprobation in this passage *can easily* be interpreted much more simply and inline with Paul's intent, and the context of both the chapter and the entire epistle, as well as what Scripture says about the character of God. Essentially, these verses point out that ***God has always planned to condemn those people who do not believe the gospel and place their faith in Jesus Christ, not that He ordained their unbelief in the first place so that He could condemn them and somehow receive glory.***

Let's look at the larger context. The central issue Paul addresses in Romans is Jewish unbelief and what it means for God's righteousness and covenant faithfulness:

- In 1:16-17, Paul says the gospel is God's power for salvation to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. This raises a problem: if so many Jews reject the gospel, has God failed to keep His promises to Israel?
- The question becomes explicit in 3:5-8: *Is God unjust to judge Jews who have failed to believe, especially when their failure seems to advance God's purposes?* Paul firmly answers that God remains righteous as the Judge of the world.
- Rom 1-3 establishes that both Jews and Gentiles are sinners and that neither ethnicity nor possession of the Law provides salvation. Righteousness comes through faith, corresponding to the faith of Abraham.
- Rom 4-8 then explains how those who believe in Christ become part of the fulfillment of God's covenant purposes—sharing in redemption from sin, death, and ultimately creation's restoration.
- This makes Jewish unbelief an even bigger question: If God is fulfilling His promises through Christ and Gentiles are responding to the gospel, why are so many Jews rejecting it?

- Rom 9-11 addresses that question directly. Paul argues that Israel's present unbelief does not mean God has failed, broken His promises, or abandoned His covenant purposes.

The basic argument in one sentence: Rom 9-11 explains why Israel's widespread rejection of the gospel does not undermine God's righteousness or faithfulness to His promises, even though the gospel is bringing Gentiles into the people of God. The key theological question underlying the passage is therefore: How can God remain faithful to His covenant promises to Israel while so many Israelites reject the Messiah?

So if this is the context of the entire book of Romans, where did the Rom 9 reprobation interpretation of the last 1500 years come from? From this one fact: ***Paul's overwhelming concern about Jewish rejection of the gospel has not been shared by those interpreting the text in subsequent generations.***

When the concern for Jewish unbelief has been lost by those reading Romans, is it any wonder that confusion ensues? Is it any wonder that Paul's concern for Jewish unbelief, not shared by some prominent church fathers nor by the Reformers, have been personalized and replaced with exhaustive divine determinism through divine action?

Paul's response to Jewish rejection of the gospel in Rom 9-11 is that God has incorporated this rejection into His larger plan of salvation. Just as Christ's rejection (by the Father) and crucifixion ultimately served to bring salvation to the world, Jewish rejection has also served a purpose by demonstrating what does not save (lineage, Law, works), and what does (faith), and helping spread the gospel to the Gentiles.

Rightly understanding the context of Rom 9-11, as well as the overall flow and context of the entire epistle (Rom 1-11), shows that in Rom 9 ***Paul clearly intends to demonstrate the temporary resistance of Jews to the gospel as a redemptive function that brings salvation to all, including those very same unbelieving Jews.***

The Redemptive Aspect of Jewish Unbelief

God's present treatment of unbelieving Jews has a special role in salvation history because Israel has a unique place in God's promises to Abraham to bless the world. Israel's rejection and suffering are therefore part of a larger pattern that resembles Christ's own rejection and suffering: both involve apparent rejection that God uses to bring salvation to others, while ultimately leading toward vindication.

Paul describes this in 11:30-31, where Gentile disobedience is answered by Jewish disobedience, creating an opportunity for Gentile mercy and obedience—a pattern that compares with 5:19, where Adam's disobedience is overcome by Christ's obedience. In contrast, Calvinism sees the rejection of the lost primarily as a demonstration of God's justice, whereas Paul's emphasis in 11:30-31 is that God's judgment on unbelieving Jews is being used redemptively to extend mercy to the Gentiles.

(d) Confirmation of the choice (9:13)

13 Just as it is written: "**JACOB I HAVE LOVED, BUT ESAU I HAVE HATED.**"

13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

13 So it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

- Quoted from Mal 1:2-3...

— Over 1500 years separate this quote from Malachi from the previous quote from Genesis. This gives us a good "before and after" picture of what happened to Esau and his lineage (Edom).

- "...JACOB I HAVE LOVED" - this means that Jacob was "preferred" or "chosen," not "loved" in the emotional sense of the word.

- "...HATED" - *miseō*, the Bible does not use "hate" in the same way we do in English today; it's not animosity or emotional anger, but rather it refers to a choice between two options (Cf. Luke 14:26). Many examples in Scripture are given to show the concept of "hate" refers simply to rejecting (without disdain) one over another for a noble task (Cf. Gen 29:31,33; Deut 21:15; Matt 6:24; Luke 14:26; John 12:25).

— If there are two options, the option that is not chosen is said to be "hated" and the option that is chosen is said to be "loved." A good example of this is in Luke 14:26. In a call to discipleship, Jesus told a large crowd that if they choose to follow Him in the walk of discipleship, they must "hate" their own father, mother, wife, children, and even his own life.

— Jesus is obviously not commanding people to "hate" (emotionally) everyone close to them as that would contradict many other commands. Jesus is telling them that if there is a conflict between what your parents tell you to do and what Jesus tells you to do, pick what Jesus tells you to do. In that sense you "hate" your parents, not in the emotional sense, but in the choice that you make.

— So hate (as used in Gen 29:30-31; Luke 14:26; Rom 9:13) is not talking about an emotional hatred, it is talking about "passing over" of one choice in favor of another. God didn't "hate" Esau as the way we interpret hate...He made a pre-temporal choice to "pass over" Esau in favor of Jacob to fulfill His messianic promises. It simply means that God made a sovereign decision to move the covenant promises through Jacob, but Esau He set aside.

— In fact, no one reads any other biblical usage of "hate" as a soteriological decree, except in this passage. But the love/hate language here is the language of covenant preference between Israel and Edom, not the language of individual predestination to heaven or hell.

- So how does this quote from Malachi mesh with Paul's argument?

— It demonstrates that even direct descendants of Isaac himself (Edom) are not chosen for the noble purposes that God elected Israel, thus one should not assume that the opposition to God's Word of direct descendants is an indication of the failure of God's Word.

— God did not work through all of Isaac's descendants, just as He did not work through all of Abraham's descendants. This has been God's pattern since the very beginning...God works through a minority within the nation of Israel.

— Paul is telling the Romans here, through these examples, that they should not be concerned that God has abrogated His promises because He hasn't. His promises to Israel will be fulfilled, but only through a remnant of the entire nation, just as He has done since the beginning.

- At first glance, this verse appears to say that God arbitrarily loved (chose) one person (Jacob) and despised (did not choose) the other (Esau). But when you understand the context—both in Malachi and the OT background—it is crystal clear that this isn't about personal salvation or eternal destiny. It's about *nations*, not *individuals*.

— In fact, in Mal 1:4, the very next verse after this citation, Malachi clearly states that he's referring to Edom (the nation), not Esau (the individual). And notice what kind of choosing this is. God chose Abram to be the father of a nation. He chose Jacob to be the head of a people. When the Bible shows God choosing man, it is choosing a head, and the people who come from him. This is exactly what Ephesians says about us: "He chose us *in Him*" (Eph 1:4). Christ is the Head, the people are chosen "in Him." And you join the people in Him the way every verse says you join it: you believe.

- One of the things you have to do to interpret the Bible correctly is to understand the context. In real estate, the three most important things are location, location, location. In Bible interpretation, the three most important things are context, context, context.

— And when a NT author, even Jesus Himself, quotes a passage from the OT, we need to understand both the NT context *as well as* the context of the OT passage quoted, in order to interpret properly.

— In Malachi 1, God is addressing the *nation* of Israel and contrasting them with Edom—the *nation* descended from Esau. Both Jacob and Esau, the "heads" of both nations, have been dead for centuries when Malachi wrote this. The passage speaks of Edom's land being desolate and its inheritance given to jackals (Cf. Mal 1:3-4). This is the language of *corporate/national* judgment, *not personal* animosity. Malachi is not recounting God's emotional disposition toward two men—he's explaining the nation of Israel's favored status as God's covenant people in contrast with the nation of Edom's rejection.

Reformed position: Calvinism reads this passage, completely out of its Romans context and the context of Malachi, to argue that God chose Jacob for life and chose Esau for death. They interpret "hate," not through the biblical definition, but make the assumption that God emotionally "hated" Esau and thus made a decision to consign him to eternal damnation. This results in their unbiblical belief in double predestination. They read this as God made a sovereign choice on both accounts...to save one and to sovereignly predestine the other to eternal damnation.

But this verse has *absolutely nothing* to do with Esau going to hell because he was not sovereignly chosen to be saved. It simply means that God did not choose him for the honor of carrying forth His purposes and bringing forth the Messiah.

Paul here is not laying out a theology of individual salvation...he's done that thoroughly already earlier in this epistle (Cf. 3:21—5:21). And interestingly, nowhere in Paul's defining treatise on salvation does he use the words "chosen," "election," or "predestination." He is showing that God has the right to sovereignly choose how and through whom His redemptive purposes unfold. Israel was chosen to carry the covenant and bring forth the Messiah—not because of works or merit, but because of God's overarching plan. Edom was not chosen for that role.

Through these two illustrations (v7-9; v10-13), Paul made three points:

1. God's Word has not failed, although Israel has failed; God's plan is still working itself out, and everything is going according to plan.
2. The spiritual blessings come not through one's physical descent nor personal merit. Rather, they come by the grace of God, due solely to the will of God.
3. Physical descent alone will not obtain these promises but rather physical descent *and* its spiritual appropriation.

Paul was not saying here—and has never said anywhere—that the promises given to Israel were taken away due to disobedience and given to the Church. What he was saying is that these promises are still going to be given to physical Israel, but to that part of physical Israel who believes by faith. It is not physical descent only that determines this but physical descent and its spiritual appropriation. As in 1 Peter 2:1-10, it is the remnant of Israel that is attaining the spiritual promises.

Despite Israel's disobedience, God's promises to the nation, like God Himself, remained unchanged. ***Disobedience never causes God to dishonor His own Word.*** If God had transferred all of Israel's promises to the Church, Paul could have omitted much of Rom 9-11. Instead, Paul proclaimed, "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (11:29). "Irrevocable" means not able to be changed or reversed. Through their unbelief, individuals, leaders, and entire generations may refuse to participate in the blessing of God's promises. Yet God does not remove His promise. He cannot remove His promises because His Word is attached to His unchanging character. His sovereign choice, or election, of Israel remains in force.

(C) God's election of some is consistent with God's justice (v14-29)

The question of fairness arises whenever someone makes a choice to favor one person or group over another. In v14-18, Paul dealt with the justice of God in doing what He did.

(a) First objection (9:14-18)

(i) Objection: God is unrighteous (9:14a)

(ii) Emphatic denial (9:14b)

14 What shall we say then? **There is no injustice with God, is there? Far from it!**

14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

14 What can we say, then? God is not unrighteous, is he? Of course not!

14 What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

- "...There is no injustice with God, is there?" - does God's sovereign choice to bless one over the other (Isaac over Ishmael and others; Jacob over Esau) make God unrighteous? Or at an even higher level, is God unjust for choosing the believing remnant instead of the whole nation as the beneficiaries of His covenant promises?

- "Far from it!" - *Mē genoito*, the strongest negation in the Greek language; also translated "God forbid!" There is no stronger way to say "absolutely not" in Greek than *mē genoito*. Paul says there is no possible way God can be unjust because He is God.

- The descendants of Abraham in Paul's day had two false perceptions:

1. Every descendant deserved the benefit of bringing God's Word. However, the truth being revealed here is that God has only selected a remnant through whom to bring His Word.
2. Every descendant deserved eternal life on the basis of their being of Israel. However, no one is saved based on nationality but only upon grace through faith.

— God is just in His being and He always acts justly. Through His redemptive death on the Cross, Jesus satisfied the righteous demands of God for the penalty of sin. On that basis, God can remain just and justify anyone who places his faith in Christ Jesus (Cf. 3:25-26). If Christ had not died, then God in His justice would have condemned all men because all men are under sin (Cf. 3:9).

Reformed position: Calvinism reads this verse as the proof text for unconditional, individual election. God dispenses mercy arbitrarily according to His own sovereign will, without any reference to the person's response. But Paul is citing a passage where Moses has interceded for Israel and God is responding to that intercession. The context of Exodus 33 is not arbitrary mercy. It is mercy in response to genuine entreaty, governed by God's own sovereign character.

Paul will now use Moses (Ex 33:19) and Pharaoh (Ex 9:16) as proof that God can do what He wishes in dispensing His grace and mercy. Nobody deserves God's mercy, and nobody can condemn God for His choice of Israel or His bypassing of other nations.

(iii) Proof (9:15-18)

(a) God confers mercy upon who He wants (9:15)

15 For He says to Moses, **"I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOMEVER I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL SHOW COMPASSION TO WHOMEVER I SHOW COMPASSION."**

15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

15 For he says to Moses, "I will be merciful to the person I want to be merciful to, and I will be kind to the person I want to be kind to."

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

- Quoted from Ex 33:19b...

- Paul quotes this verse from Exodus in reference to Moses' encounter with God. It gives a perfect historical example of when God was merciful to Israel when they deserved to be destroyed for their unfaithfulness for worshipping a golden calf.

— It also demonstrates Moses' self-sacrificial, Christ-like love for Israel (Cf. Ex 32:31-32) which paralleled Paul's stated self-sacrificial, Christ-like love for Israel in v1-3.

- "...I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOMEVER I HAVE MERCY" - God declares His sovereign prerogative in dispensing mercy. The point is that mercy is not owed, no one can demand it. But the verse does not say God refuses mercy to those who seek it, only that he is the one who determines to whom it is dispensed.

— "MERCY" [2x] - mercy is not getting the punishment we deserve. It is refraining from punishing someone who deserves punishment. Mercy *does not* mean effectual salvation. Paul is *not saying* that God is sovereignly electing to salvation" whomever He wants. This verse has nothing to do with a person's eternal destiny.

— God is never *less than* fair with anyone, but He fully reserves the right to be *more than* fair with individuals as He chooses. His reasons are never in us but always in Him. His absolute holiness, impartiality, justice, goodness, and love guarantee His choices always conform to His character, His Word, and His will.

— We are in a dangerous place when we regard God's mercy towards us as our right. If God is obliged to show mercy, then it's not mercy—it's an obligation. No one, including God, is ever being unfair by not showing mercy.

— A good example of Jesus' teaching on this concept during His earthly ministry is the Parable of the Landowner (Matt 20:1-16). See notes there.

- When Israel rebelled against God by worshipping the golden calf (Ex 32), God took the lives of only 3,000 of the rebels. He would have been justified in slaying the whole nation. His mercy caused Him to do something that *appeared* to be unjust. The fact is, no one deserves mercy, so God is not unjust.

— God's election is always by His grace, for His glory, and to our good. If God were not free to confer mercy onto whomever He wants, none of us would be blessed because none of us deserve His mercy.

— But this must be understood: the freedom God is declaring for Himself here is the freedom to pardon a nation that had just earned and deserved destruction. It's not a freedom to pick who is saved and who is damned for eternity. The very next sentence He says about Himself...

Ex 34:6: Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth;

- "...I WILL SHOW COMPASSION TO WHOMEVER I SHOW COMPASSION" - God's way of saying, I'm God and I don't need to explain Myself. He declines to give reasons, but it doesn't say there aren't any. The verse is about God pardoning people who deserved destruction.

— Divine mercy and compassion are expressions of God's sovereign choice. No person deserves divine mercy, and no person can do anything to merit it. The question shouldn't be why did God show mercy to one and not the other; instead, the question should be why does God show mercy to anyone, because no one deserves it.

(b) God is free to select those who will play positive and negative roles in His purpose (9:16-18)

16 **So then, *it* does not *depend* on the *person* who wants *it* nor the one who runs, but on God who has mercy.**

16 So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

16 Therefore, God's choice does not depend on a person's will or effort, but on God himself, who shows mercy.

16 So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

- "So then" - Paul now draws a logical conclusion based on what he just said: mercy does not depend on the one willing or running. In other words, it is not dependent upon human desire or effort, but rather solely on God's sovereign choice.

— In the case under scrutiny in this passage, God has chosen to extend His mercy only to that part of the Israel who believes, the Remnant.

- "...it" - refers to the fulfillment of God's promise to bring His Word despite Israel's unfaithfulness (Cf. 3:3-4). mercy?

- "...who wants it" - God does not show mercy on someone just because they want Him to.

- "...the one who runs" - God does not show mercy on someone because of their works, past, present, or future..

— Abraham wanted to have a son, and worked for it (in the flesh) through Hagar (who Paul used symbolically to present law and works, Gal 4:24). God, by His mercy, provided Isaac through Sarah (who Paul used symbolically to represent grace, Gal 4:21-26).

- "...but on God who has mercy" - God shows mercy simply out of His desire to do so. God's mercy is not extended as a recognition of human will, nor is it a reward of human work.

Reformed position: Calvinism comes to this verse and says, See, it says plainly that "willing" is ruled out specifically, and faith is an act of the will, so faith cannot be the grounds for mercy.

But this verse is answering the question Paul asked in v14: "There is no injustice with God, is there?" Basically, is God unfair? And the answer is that nobody is owed mercy, therefore God cannot be unfair when He chooses to dispense His mercy. No man's willing puts God in his debt. That is not the same as saying no man believes. You have to understand the context.

Calvinism changes the meaning of "mercy does not originate in human willing or running" and makes it mean "faith therefore cannot be a genuine condition of receiving mercy unless God first irresistibly causes faith in select individuals." But Paul never says that. Paul has already drawn a clear line between believing and working (4:5) so he can simultaneously deny that salvation is of works and insist that justification is through faith. Thus, faith does not become meritorious simply because one person believes and another refuses to believe. If it did, Paul's entire contrast between faith and works collapses.

Calvinism is ultimately concerned with God's sovereignty. They stress God's sovereignty over any other attribute of God. And to them, if God doesn't have complete and utter control over everything that happens on earth, every thought conceived, every word spoken, every good or evil deed, that somehow God is not sovereign. Fact is, God is sovereign...sovereign enough to decide how His sovereignty will be displayed to mankind. Sovereign enough to use the free will decisions of both good and evil people for His ultimate glory and to fulfill His plan. He doesn't need to control every thought or action, He is so sovereign that he can allow people to make their own free will decisions, but yet still see that His plan is carried out, exactly as He planned.

In the case of Pharaoh, Calvinism believes that the whole episode was God's doing, even Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart (although the text never says this). He is but a pot, a creature, not the Potter. He was formed and made and brought into existence to serve the Potter's purposes, not his own. He is but a servant, one chosen for destruction. And his destruction, and the process that led up to it (the plagues upon Egypt), were part of God's plan.

This is mostly true, except it leaves out a couple of important things: nowhere does it say in Exodus or Romans (or anywhere else for that matter) that any person, including Pharaoh, was created by God to

be destroyed. In addition, the Calvinist view does not leave any room for Pharaoh's repentance. Yes, Pharaoh hardened his own heart 6x before God hardened his, but before God began to harden Pharaoh's heart, God was open to Pharaoh's repentance. Calvinism doesn't believe that.

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, **"FOR THIS VERY REASON I RAISED YOU UP, IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE EARTH."**

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth."

17 For the Scripture says about Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for this very purpose, to demonstrate my power through you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

- Quoted from Ex 9:16...

- The reader may say, How could you do this God? God says, I do it all the time. Here's an example in Pharaoh. Paul is using God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart as a justification for God choosing Jacob over Esau to bring forth the Messiah.

- "...FOR THIS VERY REASON I RAISED YOU UP" - quoted from Ex 9:16. It means to cause someone to arise or bring someone onto the scene. This refers to God's sovereign purpose in bringing Pharaoh into the particular position of authority he occupied.

— Notice, however, what Paul doesn't say: he doesn't say that God created Pharaoh for evil or that God forced Pharaoh in any way, shape, or form, to commit evil. This is an important point to understand and remember through the rest of this chapter: God did not need to inject evil into Pharaoh in order to accomplish His purpose. He sovereignly used a genuinely rebellious man, and that man's own rebellion, to accomplish a righteous purpose.

— God raised up Pharaoh at this specific point in history and put him on the throne to serve as an example of what divine justice is all about. God had both an immediate purpose ("TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU") and a distant purpose ("THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE EARTH").

— "I RAISED" - *exegeirō*, used only 2x in the NT. Other usage is in 1 Cor 6:14 where it is God who raised the dead. Note that Paul here does not use the Greek word for "made," "forced," or "created for a purpose." He used a word that he used elsewhere to describe God raising the dead.

— So God was the Agent in the case of Pharaoh, that is clear, but you have to take a hermeneutical leap to interpret *exegeirō* as God decreeing or ordaining Pharaoh to eternal damnation. See further evidence and reasons in the note below.

- "...IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU" - God demonstrated His power through Pharaoh by repeatedly confronting Pharaoh's authority with His own superior authority. Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go. (Ex 5:2). And God answered Pharaoh through the plagues, "I am the LORD."

— God's hardening of Pharaoh also allowed Him to demonstrate His power over all the Egyptian false gods. Each of the plagues was designed by God to embarrass or destroy an Egyptian god (see notes after the passage in Exodus describing each of the 10 Plagues).

— Human rebellion does not have the power to thwart God's purposes. Pharaoh says no to God. God's response is essentially, Your rebellion will not prevent Me from accomplishing My purpose. Then God goes on to use Pharaoh's rebellion as the historical setting in which His power is displayed and His name is proclaimed.

— Pharaoh deserved death for his opposition and insolence, but God did not take his life during the plagues so that his continuing opposition and God's victory over him would result in greater glory for God (Cf. Joshua 9:9; Ps 76:10). This is another example, similar to v15, of God not giving people what they deserve—but extending mercy to them instead.

- "...THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE EARTH" - another purpose for God's sovereign election of Pharaoh was not just to demonstrate His power and destroy Egyptian gods, but also so that through the demonstration of His power, His name would be proclaimed throughout the world.

— And this is exactly what happened. In Joshua, ~40 years later, Rahab (a Canaanite) told the spies that they had heard about how the LORD dried up the Red Sea and it severely scared them. It put the fear of the LORD inside of them, and they knew that "the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in the earth beneath" (Joshua 2:10-11).

— Just as God manifested Himself through Pharaoh's judicial hardening, He also does through Israel's judicial hardening.

- The pattern is that human beings make a sovereign choice, out of their own free will. And once that choice was made, a divine pre-temporal plan went into action. We see this tension between man's free will and God's sovereign election all through the Bible: when man makes his free will choice, it is as if they are fulfilling a divine destiny.

— The moment Adam & Eve ate from the wrong tree, of their own free will, it fulfilled a divine plan. Rev 13:8 describes Jesus as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The cross was not a reaction to Adam & Eve's sin, it had already been foreordained by God through His foreknowledge.

— The moment Adam & Eve sinned, God didn't come up with the plan for the second member of the Trinity to become a Man and die to pay for the sin of the world. The plan was in place from before the foundation of the world.

- Judas was given a choice...he followed the Lord for three years, heard His teachings and witnessed His miracles, but through an act of his own free will he chose to reject Jesus Christ. The moment he rejected Jesus was the moment he fulfilled the preordained plan of God (Ps 41:9).

— In John 13:18 Jesus said: I am not speaking about all of you. I know *the ones* whom I have chosen; but *this is happening* so that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'

- In Acts 2:23, Peter says to the Jews who had rejected Christ, on the Day of Pentecost: "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."

— First, Peter tells them that the death of Christ was the predetermined plan of God; yet Peter turns around and tells them that *they* exercised their free will and nailed Him to a cross. The moment these Jews exercised their free will as image bearers of God was the moment that they fulfilled a divine script written before the foundation of the world.

— ***God's sovereignty is so complete and all-encompassing that He can use the free will choices of human beings to fulfill His divine plan.***

- What happened to Pharaoh is a good example of what happens to people when they put themselves into a place of such spiritual darkness that they are unable to receive truth. But long before they get to that dark point, people make their own free will decisions to reject truth.

— One of the scariest things we see in the Bible is that sometimes God allows people to have what they want, and sometimes God even expedites the process. But long before that happens, that person is making multiple poor decisions of their own free will.

— A good example of this is in Rom 1:21,28, where the same thing happens in the unbelieving Gentile world. Three times in that passage (v18-32), it says that "God gave them over" (v24,26,28) to a debased mind. This "giving over" was not at the initial stages of their unbelief, but at the late stage of their unbelief.

— In both the episode with Pharaoh, and the description of unbelieving Gentiles in Rom 1, ***God is not arbitrarily hardening the hearts of people so they cannot believe the gospel.*** God doesn't do that. Long before God makes the decision to hand people over to spiritual darkness so they cannot see or reason spiritually, they first *put themselves* in that position out of their own free will (Cf. Rom 1:18, men "suppress the truth in unrighteousness"). God's revelation to them is so obvious that they are "without excuse" for their unbelief and rejection.

Reformed position: Reformed/Calvinism looks at v17 and says, Look, right there, God "raised him up" in order to destroy him. And to assure his destruction, God hardened his heart. From this, they get their doctrine of double-predestination: the belief that God, before the foundation of the world, unconditionally elected some to be saved and elected others (the majority) to be damned for eternity (see note: **Divine Reprobation** after v12 above).

To get to this interpretation, you have to completely lose the context of Rom 9. It has to be completely removed from your mind, then you have to buy into a belief system (Calvinism) that requires that God elect some for salvation and elect others for destruction. Calvinism's belief system (TULIP) *requires* this, otherwise it completely falls apart.

To get their preconceived interpretation of this passage to work, in order to defend their theological system, Calvinism has to redefine "hardening" to mean "God unconditionally determined Pharaoh's unbelief from eternity past by withholding the only grace by which he could possibly respond, and then punished him for the unbelief that was thereby unavoidable." But where does Exodus say that? Where does Rom 9 say that? Nowhere, but this is what Calvinism *needs* this to mean in order to make Calvinism work. But repeating "He hardens whom He wills" does not establish their definition of hardening. God's judicial act of hardening an already hardened rebel and God's causally determining the rebellion for which He hardens him are not the same proposition. But Calvinism needs you to believe that they are.

This false interpretation can be destroyed in two languages, both Hebrew and Greek:

Ex 9:16a: But indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain

The Hebrew is *he'emadtikha*. It is the Hiphil of *amad*, and *amad* means "to stand." Hiphil is the causative stem. So the sentence reads: "I have caused thee to stand." Not "made," and not "formed for this." Simply "kept standing."

In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek OT, the verb is *dieterethes* meaning "You were preserved." Passive. Something was done to keep Pharaoh in place. So both the Hebrew and Greek paint one picture. God kept a man standing who should have fallen, and the plagues are why he should have fallen.

Interestingly though, and this will be pointed out by Calvinists to try and defend their position, Paul did not quote that Greek. He changed it. Where the Septuagint uses the passive voice "you were preserved," Paul writes *exegeira se*, "I raised thee up," active voice, with God as the One performing the action. Calvinists will say, See, Paul strengthened the verse toward divine agency on purpose. And he did, no question. But the question is, What is God doing here? Look at the verse before and after Ex 9:16:

Ex 9:15-17:

15 For had I now put out My hand and struck you and your people with plague, **you would then have been eliminated from the earth.**

- God says, I could've easily wiped you out.

16 But indeed, **for this reason I have allowed you to remain**, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name throughout the earth.

- But I kept you alive, kept you standing, so that I could demonstrate My power and proclaim My name throughout the earth.

17 Still **you exalt yourself against My people** by not letting them go.

God here is not electing Pharaoh to eternity in hell. That's not the subject or the context. God could've, and probably wanted to, wipe Pharaoh from the face of the earth, but He decided not to at that point in time in order to fulfill His divine plan (v16b).

And in 9:20-21, it says that some of Pharaoh's own servants "feared the word of the LORD" and brought their cattle in, and others "did not pay regard to the word of the LORD" and left their cattle out. So in this same passage, Egyptians hear the same warning—some chose to heed it, others chose to ignore it.

To understand Paul's reference here, you have to read more than a single verse in Exodus (this is basic Bible study 101). You have to understand what is really going on with Pharaoh's heart.

When God called Moses (Ex 4:21), He commanded him to perform the miracles that God gave him the power to do, and told Moses (2x) that He would eventually harden Pharaoh's heart (Cf. Ex 4:21; 7:3). Just as God made a pre-temporal sovereign choice between Jacob and Esau, God determined beforehand that He was going to harden Pharaoh's heart.

But Exodus states that Pharaoh hardened his own heart 6x (Cf. Ex 7:13,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7) *before* God began to harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex 9:12; see notes on Ex 4:21). So by hardening Pharaoh's heart, God was confirming Pharaoh's own free will decisions (essentially, setting them in stone with no

chance for repentance), which fulfilled God's preordained divine plan which was to give God the opportunity to demonstrate His power to the world through the 10 plagues and the subsequent Exodus. See the hardening chronology below:

- 4:21: I will harden his heart (God's preview of things to come)
- 7:3: I will harden Pharaoh's heart (God's preview of things to come)
 - 7:13: Pharaoh's heart was hardened (Pharaoh's 1st hardening)
 - 7:14: the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn" (observation)
 - 7:22: Pharaoh's heart was hardened (after the 1st plague-water to blood; Pharaoh's 2nd hardening)
 - 8:15: he (Pharaoh) hardened his heart (after the 2nd plague-gnats; Pharaoh's 3rd hardening)
 - 8:19: Pharaoh's heart was hardened (after the 3rd plague-frogs; Pharaoh's 4th hardening)
 - 8:32: Pharaoh hardened his heart (after the 4th plague-flies; Pharaoh's 5th hardening)
 - 9:7: The heart of Pharaoh was hardened (after the 5th plague-murrain; Pharaoh's 6th hardening)
- 9:12: the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart (after the 6th plague; God's 1st hardening)
 - 9:34: He sinned again and hardened his heart (after the 7th plague-hail; Pharaoh's 7th hardening)
 - 9:35: Pharaoh's heart was hardened (after the 7th plague-hail; Pharaoh's 8th hardening)
- 10:1: I have hardened his heart (before the 8th plague-locusts; God's 2nd hardening)
- 10:20: the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart (after the 8th plague-locusts; God's 3rd hardening)
- 10:27: the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart (after the 9th plague-darkness; God's 4th hardening)
- 11:10: the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart (after Moses' proclamation of the 10th plague-death of the firstborn; God's 5th hardening)
 - 13:15: Pharaoh was stubborn about letting Israel go (Pharaoh's 9th hardening)
- 14:4: I will harden Pharaoh's heart (to chase after the fleeing Israelites; God's 6th hardening)
- 14:8: the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh (to chase after the fleeing Israelites; God's 7th hardening)
- 14:17: I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians (to pursue the Israelites through the parted Red Sea; God's 8th hardening)

After Pharaoh hardened his own heart on at least six different occasions, *then* God began to harden Pharaoh's heart. After God hardened Pharaoh's heart once, Pharaoh hardened his own heart again two more times. So God's hardening was judicial confirmation of a course Pharaoh himself initiated, not an arbitrary decree on a neutral agent.

If you only read the one verse in Exodus (9:16, which Paul quotes here), without seeing the entire picture of the hardening, you get the Calvinist view that God hardened Pharaoh's heart arbitrarily, with

no option for any free will choice on Pharaoh's part, then judged Pharaoh for it. That is not how this scene played out.

Interestingly, the Hebrew uses two different verbs for Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart and later God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The Greek translators of the LXX also used two different words. When Pharaoh hardens his own heart, the Hebrew is *kavad*, "to make heavy." When God hardens Pharaoh's heart, the Hebrew is *chazaq*, "to strengthen," or "to make firm." The Septuagint, the Greek OT, saw the difference and used two Greek words for it. Pharaoh's *kavad* became *baruno*, "to weigh down." God's *chazaq* became *skleruno*, "to harden."

In v18, Paul uses *skleruno*, the same word used in the LXX for God's hardening of Pharaoh, the strengthening of a resolve Pharaoh had already set. It is not the same word for what Pharaoh did to himself. In English both came out as "hardened" and the difference vanished. In the Hebrew and the Greek it was there the whole time.

Sometimes God will fulfill His promises by showing the Israelites mercy, but His Word will never fail. Sometimes God will fulfill His promises by hardening the Israelites, but His Word will never fail. God can harden the unfaithful when it serves His purposes.

18 **So then** He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

18 Therefore, God has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.

- "So then" - Paul draws a conclusion from what he said in v14-17. The objection in v14 was: because God sovereignly chooses to work through one nation instead of another, God is unrighteous and unfair?

— Paul's response again was No, God is not unfair. He is God, and because He is God, He has the ability and freedom to select those who will play both positive and negative roles in the outworking of His divine purposes, while also respecting the free will of His created beings.

— Moses is an example of election in regard to mercy; Pharaoh is example of hardening in reference to judgment.

— But it must always be remembered, as has been reiterated throughout the notes on this chapter, that God does not arbitrarily and unconditionally harden some so that they cannot be saved, while giving salvation to others whom He chooses to be saved.

- In Rom 1, 3x Paul spoke about how God *gives people over* to their own evil desires as a form of temporal punishment for sin. This is how God hardens people's hearts. In the case of Rom 1, God abandons the unbeliever and allows them to pursue the sin that they so desperately want to pursue. God doesn't do this immediately, He strives with sinners out of His abundant love for them, but at some point, God's mercy and patience run out, and He turns them over to the consequences of their sin as a judgment.

— In Pharaoh's case, we see this working out clearly. God did not create Pharaoh already hardened. God reached out to Pharaoh, gave him numerous chances, but at the same time He was ready, willing, and able to accept Pharaoh's repentance. But Pharaoh never repented. Then Pharaoh hardened his position in rebellion against God on six different occasions, each time refusing God's mercy. God was not unjust because He allowed Pharaoh's hardening process to continue.

— Finally, God's patience ran out. Just like those in Rom 1 whom He gave over to their sin, God began to harden Pharaoh's already hardened heart. The door to repentance on Pharaoh's part, that God had held open, was now closed. God gave him numerous opportunities for repentance, but those opportunities had finally run out.

— When you look at the whole story, you see that Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God 6x before God ever hardened Pharaoh's heart. Then God finally gave Pharaoh over to what he wanted all along.

— *Neither in the case of Pharaoh, or anyone else in Scripture, is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself.*

— God's hardening, then, is an action that renders a person insensitive to God and His Word that, if not reversed, culminates in eternal damnation. It does not cause spiritual insensitivity to the things of God; it maintains people in the state of sin that already characterizes them.

— The key point to understand in all of this, which Calvinism completes whiffs on, is that those who are judicially hardened or cut off are *not born* in this condition. They *have grown* into this condition (rebellion) over a long period of time.

Acts 28:27 (quoted from Is 6:9-10): FOR THE HEARTS OF THIS PEOPLE HAVE **BECOME** INSENSITIVE, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY HARDLY HEAR, AND THEY **HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.**"

— This verse perfectly describes God's hardening. The problem with the unbelieving Jews in Rome, which is who Paul is talking to in Acts 28:27, was not their inability to recognize and believe in Christ—the problem was that they weren't interested in believing. Right after quoting Is 6:9-10, Paul says this:

Acts 28:28: Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

— After presenting the gospel to the Jews in Rome, and having witnessed their rejection of it, Paul now moves his focus to the Gentiles.

— God didn't harden anyone from before the foundation of the world, making them completely unable to make a free will choice to follow God. That is an interpretation of this passage that Paul is clearly not writing in order to justify a preconceived theological system that requires God to do so.

Reformed position: Again here, the Calvinistic reading of this verse is that God elected one to salvation and another to damnation. You can see how the string of misinterpretations at the beginning of this passage, as early as v6, but in reality even back to 8:28-30, causes a snowball effect of bad theology. Verse after verse, it gets worse and worse, further and further away from the truth.

This verse does not say that God is free to elect some people to salvation and (most) others to eternal damnation. But they look at this verse and say, See, God hardens people (i.e. Pharaoh) to the point that

they cannot believe the gospel, so He could judge them. But they don't recognize that God only hardened Pharaoh's heart *after* he hardened his own heart 6x because they only read one verse in Exodus (the one quoted by Paul here), without understanding the context. At that point, God's mercy and patience ran out, and He confirmed Pharaoh in judgment (by hardening his heart) so that His sovereign plan could be carried out (to demonstrate His power and to make God famous, v17).

In the Calvinist mindset, God hardened Pharaoh's heart because He loved one and hated the other (Cf. v13), and they completely miss the entire chronology of God's predictions, Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart, and then God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart (as shown in the chronology in v17).

Paul *never* says or even implies that God created any human being for the purpose of damnation. What he does say is that in God's sovereign governing of the world, He reserves to Himself perfect freedom for dealing with man on His own conditions, not on man's conditions. Men are not lost because they are hardened; they are hardened because they are lost and they are lost because they are sinners.

(b) Second objection (9:19-29)

(i) Objection: God cannot hold people morally accountable (9:19)

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

19 You may ask me, "Then why does God still find fault with anybody? For who can resist his will?"

19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

- "You will say to me then" - Paul brings up another possible objection to his statement/question in vXX.

— In other words, Paul is saying: You (an Israelite hardened to accomplish God's promise) will say to me (an Israelite shown mercy to accomplish God's promise), why are we (the hardened Israelite) to blame if God's will is being fulfilled?

- Or, If God sovereignly elects certain people over others, how can He then hold those He didn't elect morally accountable?
- Or, If God hardens hearts, how can He blame anyone when they are doing what he willed them to do?
- Or, If God's will sovereignly determines outcomes, how can anyone be held responsible for resisting it?

— The imaginary objector here isn't asking an honest question...they are blaming God. "Why does He still find fault? and "For who has resisted His will?" are both accusations stated in the form of questions. Paul has already indicated in 3:5 that this is a manmade argument that reveals a heart that has become calloused in its rebellion.

3:5: But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking from a human viewpoint.)

— Paul's response to the objection there was *Mē genoito*, the strongest negation available in the Greek

language.

— Note that Paul doesn't answer this question directly, but instead deals with the attitude of the heart that produced the question. The question implies a total forgetfulness (ignorance) of the type of relationship man has to God: the relationship of the created to the Creator.

Now we come to two heavily contested verses, the story of the Potter. You may have heard a different story about the Potter, one which He fashions some people for mercy and others for destruction. But before you decide what the Potter does with His clay, listen to the Potter Himself.

We are told that God is the Potter and man is merely clay, and from this biblical truth an enormous conclusion is drawn: God may unconditionally make one person a vessel of mercy and another a vessel of wrath, and withhold from the latter the only grace by which he could ever believe, then destroy him for remaining exactly what God pre-determined he must remain. And if anyone questions that conclusion, "Who are you to answer back to God?" is supposed to end the conversation.

But Paul did not invent the Potter and the clay in Rom 9. He reached back into a biblical story already told, and strangely enough, when God Himself explains the imagery, the clay is not arbitrarily destroyed without regard to its response to Him.

(ii) Two answers (9:20-29)

(a) God's status as Creator gives Him the right to elect (9:20-21)

20 On the contrary, **who are you, you foolish person, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?**

20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

20 On the contrary, who are you—mere man that you are—to talk back to God? Can an object that was molded say to the one who molded it, "Why did you make me like this?"

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus?

- "...who are you, you *foolish* person, who answers back to God?" - Paul's first response to the objector in v19 is not to make a philosophical point, but rather to point out the irreverence in questioning God's choices and actions, along with the arrogance and presumption of the person who would question God. Do those cut off and hardened by God have the right to question God's judgments?

— It is an irreverent attitude to come to God and charge Him with unfairness or unrighteousness because He doesn't operate in the way I think He should operate. People making moral objections to how God runs His universe is like a coffee mug that you created that objects to the type of coffee you choose to put in it.

— Paul says that anyone making this objection, first and foremost, needs an attitude adjustment. They obviously do not have a proper view of God and themselves, and the differences between the two.

Instead, they have a view that places them on or near the same plane as God, where they think they have a right to question God's decisions or how He chooses to operate.

— This is what we're doing when we question God's fairness...a small human, with limited intelligence and a corrupted human nature, speaking against a perfectly righteous, omniscient, omnipotent God. If you get into the position of challenging anything that God says or does, you have to look at your motives for doing so.

— The point of the illustration is to place man in a proper relationship to the Creator: if God did not elect, none would be saved, for "there is none that seek after God" (Cf. 3:11). People are not lost because they are hardened, they are hardened because they are already lost.

- "...The thing molded will not say to the molder" - Paul loosely quotes this from Is 29:16. If you read Is 29:13-16, you clearly see that the clay is not asking why it was made. It is denying that it answers to the potter at all. Verse 16 is the key:

Is 29:16: You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made would say to its maker, "**He did not make me**"; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, "**He has no understanding**"?

— The man Paul is rebuking in v19 is the man who says "He did not make me" and "He has no understanding." It's the man who says if God hardens then why am I to blame. Paul answers him with the words Isaiah used against people who pretended God could not see what they were doing. The potter's rebuke is aimed at the man who uses God's sovereignty to escape his own responsibility.

21 Or does **the potter** not have a right over **the clay**, to make from the same lump one object **for honorable use**, and another **for common use**?

21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

21 A potter has the right to do what he wants to with his clay, doesn't he? He can make something for a special occasion or something for ordinary use from the same lump of clay.

21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

- Paul's second response (v20b-21) to the objector in v19 is that we, as created beings, are not qualified to question or challenge God or His divine plan. The reason is because God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent...and we're not.

— The other thing God has and we don't is a perfect character, which is absolutely holy, absolutely upright, absolutely just, and absolutely gracious. Seeing this, how can I sit in judgment of God on how He works?

- "...the potter" - God. This illustration establishes God's sovereign right over the clay, but the Jer 18 passage that Paul is drawing from for this illustration shows the potter relenting when the clay turns, which means the potter's authority includes the authority to show mercy to clay that responds.

- "...the clay" - represents Israel, who had grown calloused in rebellion (Acts 28:27) and who the Potter molded into two kinds of vessels:

- "...for honorable use" - those unfaithful Israelites remolded, by means of signs from Christ Himself, to bring the Word.

- "...for common use" - those unfaithful Israelites remolded, by means of judicial hardening, to accomplish the purpose of bringing redemption through the cross (rejecting their Messiah and crucifying Him) and the grafting in of Gentiles. But salvation is still open and available to these currently unbelieving Jews if they believe (Cf. 11:11-32).

Reformed position: this illustration is what Calvinism leans on most to dissuade any question of their faulty interpretation of this passage: God shapes some vessels for honor and some for dishonor, and (to them) the clay has no say. So where did Paul get this illustration? There are four OT passages and one NT passage dealing with a potter and clay: Is 29; Jer 18; Is 45; Is 64. Paul quoted from Is 29:16 (see notes above). Below is the non-Calvinist interpretation of the other potter/clay passages, and none of them argue in favor of the Calvinist interpretation. In fact, they all argue strongly *against* the Calvinist interpretation.

Jeremiah 18. The potter is working a vessel. It is marred in his hand. So he turns and makes it again into another vessel. Then God explains the picture Himself: "if that nation against which I have spoken turns [repents] from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I planned to bring on it." (Jer 18:8) The clay responds. The potter reshapes the vessel depending on whether the nation turns. The point is: *judgment announced can be reversed by repentance*. It does not end with the potter's absolute sovereignty, it ends with conditionality: if the nation of Israel turns from its evil, God will relent of the disaster He planned. But if Israel does evil, God will relent of the good He intended for them. The potter's sovereignty in Jer 18 includes the sovereign right to respond to the clay's turning (repentance). This is the fullest potter passage in the Bible, and it is a summons to turn (repent), not a sentence already determined.

Isaiah 45:9, "Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?'" God is announcing that He will use Cyrus, a pagan Persian king, to deliver Israel. Israel objects. God says, who are you to question the potter? The potter in Is 45 is *God's freedom to use the outsider, the Gentile, in His plan*. This is exactly what Paul is defending in Rom 9-11.

Isaiah 64:8. "But now, LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter." And the next verse: "Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD, Nor remember wrongdoing forever." The clay speaks to the potter. It calls Him Father. It asks for mercy. The whole Calvinist argument assumes the clay cannot address the potter. In Isaiah it does, and it asks for mercy, as a child does to a father.

2 Tim 2:20-21. "Now in a large house there are...*implements* of wood and of earthenware... some *are* for honor...others for dishonor. If anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be an implement for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work." If the vessels of dishonor were a technical description of an individual whom God had immutably fashioned for that condition, why does Paul say right after this, "If a man therefore purge himself of these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim 2:21). Paul takes the illustration of vessels of honor and dishonor and said the difference is based on our moral response, not about God's pre-temporal decision to save some

and damn the rest. God's vessels for honor or dishonor are not unchangeable identities imposed upon them without regard to his response.

More Depth on the Potter and Clay of Jer 18

Jeremiah watched a vessel become marred in the potter's hand, and the potter made it again into another vessel "as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer 18:4). Then God said, "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? ...as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand" (Jer 18:4-6). No one questions God's sovereignty to do as He wills with the clay.

Yet God immediately explains what He means. If He pronounces that a nation will be plucked up and destroyed, "IF that nation...turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Conversely, if He announces blessing and that nation turns to evil and refuses His voice, He say that He will withhold the good He intended for it (Jer 18:7-10). He then tells Judah, "Return ye now every one from his evil way," and their answer is that they will continue after the own devices and evil hearts (Jer 18:11-12).

See how God's own explanation makes the threatened consequences (good or bad) *based on the response of the people*? The Potter is sovereign throughout, but His sovereignty is not arbitrary, it's purposeful. If they continued in sin, they would reap judgment. If they repented and turned to Him, they would be blessed. The clay being in His hands never means that the clay's response to His warning is irrelevant.

The Potter has unquestionable authority over His house, and His clay, but what kind of vessel someone becomes is not disconnected from repentance, cleansing, obedience, or persistent rebellion.

Want another example? What about Nineveh? Jonah walked into the city announcing, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). If an announcement of destruction necessarily revealed an unconditional decree to destroy, Nineveh was finished. God Himself had announced its overthrow. But that's not what happened. The Ninevites believed God, humbled themselves, and turned from their violence. Scripture then says, "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them, and He didn't do it" (Jonah 3:10).

God's announcement of destruction told Nineveh what its wickedness deserved. It did not mean that God had eternally fashioned those people for destruction and made any other outcome impossible.

The warning became God's merciful means of bringing them to repentance.

Want another example? We see the same thing in God's dealings with Pharaoh. God told Moses beforehand that Pharaoh would resist and that He would harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex 4:21; 7:3-5). But simply knowing beforehand doesn't make God the moral cause of Pharaoh's wickedness. Nor does God's sovereign determination to use Pharaoh's rebellion for His own purposes requires that God first had to create the rebellion He intended to judge.

When Exodus begins, an Egyptian system oppressing Israel and murdering Hebrew sons was already in place (Ex 1:8-22). When God's command reached Pharaoh's ears, Pharaoh answered, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice? ...I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go (Ex 5:2). This defiance is all Pharaoh. And it gets worse (see chronology of Pharaoh's hardening and God's hardening in the notes after v17). We have no right to erase Pharaoh's self-hardening in order to

defend God's hardening any more than we have the right to erase God's hardening in order to defend Pharaoh's responsibility.

The entire time, while Pharaoh hardened his heart 6x, God never stopped revealing Himself. Pharaoh received command after command, warning after warning, plague after plague, relief after relief. God's revelation of Himself became so undeniable that Pharaoh eventually said, "I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Ex 9:27). Yet after relief came again, it says "he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart" (Ex 9:34).

See how the entire narrative of Scripture, as illustrated by the potter and clay in Jer 18, or Jonah and the Ninevites, or Pharaoh's hardening while God is calling speaks to the fact that God is patient and merciful, always leaving room for repentance...until He doesn't.

Want yet another example? There's a detail in the story of Pharaoh that provides yet another illustration that refutes the Calvinist interpretation of this chapter (Rom 9):

Before the plague of hail, God warned the Egyptians to bring their servants and cattle under shelter. "He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh" obeyed the warning, while "he that regarded not the word of the LORD" left them outside (Ex 9:20-21). The distinction is not between Egyptians whom God arbitrarily decided to warn and Egyptians He refused to warn. The warning went out to ALL. Some of them decided, of their own free will, to heed God's word while others, out of their own free will, decided to disregard it.

Pharaoh himself continued resisting God under an ever-increasing revelation of the same God he had originally mocked with, "Who is the LORD?" So when God eventually judicially hardened Pharaoh, He did not turn a humble seeker into a rebel. Pharaoh had repeatedly resisted the light given to him. When God hit His limit, He judicially hardened Pharaoh in his rebellion in order to serve His sovereign purpose: "For this same purpose I have raised thee up, that I might shew My power in thee" (9:17; Ex 9:16).

Paul described the same thing in Rom 1. Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness, refuse to glorify God, exchange His truth for a lie. At some point, God removes the drawing and conviction ministry of the Holy Spirit and "gives them up" (1:24,26,28) to do what they have been clamoring to do from the beginning: sin up a storm. God did not judicially harden these people and decree that they disregard general revelation/creation, turn to homosexuality, and have a depraved mind. It was their choice, "...*they* are without excuse" (1:19), and "...*they* knew (of) God, but *they* did not honor Him as God" (1:21). 2 Thess 2:10-11 says that people during the Tribulation period will, "receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," and "for this cause God shall send them strong delusion."

So why should Rom 9 suddenly be required to mean that before any response whatsoever from the clay, God secretly fixed every individual into one of two immutable categories? This isn't even the question of Rom 9! Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Pharaoh, mercy and hardening enter Paul's argument in response to the question Paul raises in v6: Because the people who possess the covenants, promises, and fathers have largely rejected their own Messiah, has God's Word therefore failed?

The answers that follow, using the examples of Isaac and Ishmael, etc., show that God remains sovereign over the historical course of His promise, and Israel cannot claim Him as an ethnic possession. God's mercy is free to overflow Israel's national boundaries. Then Paul identifies the

"vessels of mercy" as those who God called "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (v24) before quoting Hosea's great promise: "I will call them My people, which were not My people" (v25).

Then Paul tells us why Israel stumbled. The Gentiles attained "the righteousness which is of faith" while Israel did not. Why? "Because they sought it not by faith...For they stumbled at that stumbling stone (v30-32). That explanation belongs to the same passage and context as "whom He wills He hardens." We should allow Paul to retain both statements instead of using one to erase the other.

Then, throughout Rom 10, Paul continues to dismantle the Calvinist argument of Unconditional Election. "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (10:1). If this is true, is Paul's desire and prayer irrelevant and counter-productive because God has already pre-temporarily hardened those who haven't believed? Of course not. Israel "have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (10:3). Yet (whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed," the same Lord is "rich unto all that call upon Him," and "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (10:11-13).

In Rom 11, Paul explains the present condition of Israel (the unbelieving branches) in language so plain that it ought to control how we read what came before: "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith (11:20). Notice that Paul doesn't say they were "broken off" because they had been eternally manufactured as vessels incapable of anything except unbelief. He says they were broken off "because of unbelief." More remarkably, he says of those very broken branches, "And they also, IF they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is above to graft them in again (11:23).

Rom 11 will not permit Rom 9 to mean that the unbelieving Israelite is simply an ontologically fixed "vessel of wrath" for whom movement from his present condition is impossible. But you will never get a Calvinist to respond to how Rom 11 affects Rom 9. Paul contemplates the same unbelieving branches being grafted in again if they do not remain in unbelief. This is why the OT background matters. Paul did not create a new Potter in Rom 9. The God who sent Jeremiah to the Potter's house is the God Paul is discussing. The God who warned Nineveh is the God of Rom 9. The God who endured Pharaoh's resistance and eventually hardened him is the same God in Rom 9.

Ezek 18:23: Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he would turn from his ways and live?

Ezek 18:32: For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live!"

Ezek 33:11: Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then should you die, house of Israel?'

It's very difficult to read those words, then accept that God's longsuffering toward a vessel of wrath means He is merely delaying the destruction of someone whom He has unconditionally determined never to enable to repent. If divine reprobation was true (which it's not), how can you reconcile God's distaste for the death of the wicked with the Calvinist belief that He arbitrarily elected the vast majority of people to burn in hell, with no chance at salvation? You can't.

Paul has already told us what God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering are doing: they lead to repentance (2:4). He has already told us what the hard and impenitent sinner is doing: treasuring up

wrath unto himself (2:5). Then Rom 9 describes God enduring with great patience vessels of wrath with much longsuffering.

Nineveh shows what happens when people heed that patience and warning: they turn and believe, and mercy meets them. Pharaoh shows the other possibility. Warning follows warning, revelation increases, even Egyptians around him begin fearing God's Word, yet Pharaoh persists in hardening himself. Eventually the God he repeatedly resisted judicially hardens him and his rebellion becomes the stage upon which God's power is displayed. These are not two different Gods.

If God had already determined that a particular person would never receive God's grace, without which repentance would be impossible, what meaningful purpose would His longsuffering toward that person serve? What repentance is the delay giving room for? What alternative to destruction is God's goodness leading him toward if God Himself has eternally determined never to enable him to take it? To describe God as "enduring with much longsuffering" someone whose destruction He made unconditionally inevitable would drain longsuffering of any significance when he said God's goodness and longsuffering lead sinners to repentance.

You do not need to diminish God's sovereignty to avoid that conclusion. The Bible never asks us to. The Potter remains sovereign when Nineveh repents and He spares it. He remains sovereign when Judah refuses His warning and judgment falls. He remains sovereign when Pharaoh hardens himself, and He remains sovereign when He judicially hardens Pharaoh. He remains sovereign when unbelieving branches are broken off, and He will remain sovereign if those same branches cease from unbelief and He grafts them in again.

Conclusion

There is no Calvinist potter in the Bible. Not in Isaiah 29, the one Paul quotes, where the clay's sin is pretending its maker cannot see. Not in Jeremiah 18, where the potter relents when the clay turns. Not in Jeremiah 19, where the vessel is broken because they "hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words." Not in Psalm 2, where the vessel dashed in pieces belongs to the heathen who "rage" in the first verse. Not in Isaiah 45, where the potter uses a Gentile. Not in Isaiah 64, where the clay calls the potter Father. Not in Paul's own second letter to Timothy, where a vessel changes by purging itself. To read v21 as fixed shaping, you have to disassociate it from every other potter in Scripture, including Paul's. [wsb.bible]

Based on v21, Calvinism says that you're not allowed to question their doctrine of double predestination because God is God and you are not. So by taking numerous verses out of context and misinterpreting them to fit their preconceived theology, they end up with a doctrine of Unconditional Election, Predestination, and Divine Reprobation. Then once they arrive there, they come to this verse and say, "Who do you think you are, fool, to question God?" Or, who are you (clay) to talk back to or question the Potter (God). The whole thing is a circus designed to prevent any scrutiny of a very diabolical portion of their belief system.

To them, for someone (a non-Calvinist) to say to God that it isn't fair or just to choose people to go straight to eternal destruction, without ever having the ability or chance to be saved, is questioning God and this verse says you can't do that. But it's clearly not questioning God because first of all, that's not what this (or any other) passage says, and second, that belief completely disrespects the

character of God and flies in the face of dozens, if not hundreds, of other verses clearly showing God's desire for all to be saved.

How to Answer Calvinism's Teaching and Allegations in This Passage?

First for foremost, you have to put Rom 9 into its context. In Rom 9-11, God is not dealing in soteriology as He was in Rom 3-5, or sanctification, as He was in Rom 6-8. In Rom 9-11, God is dealing with His sovereignty in regards to the nation of Israel.

In Rom 9, as has been shown, Paul is not dealing with *individual election* of believers...he's dealing with the *national election* of Israel. Paul explains how Israel *nationally* tripped over Jesus because they wanted salvation their way, not the way in which God prescribed. They wanted/tried to be saved through their own righteousness, but that's not how it works. They need the imputed righteousness of Christ.

In Rom 10, Paul explains what went wrong, and in Rom 11 he explains how God will keep every single promise He made to the nation of Israel. They will go into the 70th Week of Daniel and near the end, call out to Christ to rescue them.

Is 65:21-22:

21 "They will build houses and inhabit *them*; They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

22 "They will not build and another inhabit, They will not plant and another eat; For as the lifetime of a tree, *so will be* the days of My people, And **My chosen ones** will fully enjoy the work of their hands.

- The choice God made in the OT of Israel was a national election, not an individual election.

Deut 7:7-8:

7 "The LORD did not make you His beloved nor **choose you** because you were greater in number than any of the peoples, since you were the fewest of all peoples,

8 but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- Again, God elected Israel nationally; He did not elect individual Jews.

So when Calvinism comes to Rom 9 and reads individual election to either salvation or damnation into it, they are not understanding the context. Rom 9 describes God's *national* election of Israel, not His *individual* election of certain people over others, or the special election of some people to go to hell (divine reprobation).

In summary, the Calvinist interpretation of Rom 9 fails because it is:

1. Divorced from the context of Rom 9-11, which is not the salvation of mankind, but Israel.
2. Assumes unconditional meanings for ambiguous language.
3. Seeks to prove a preconceived theology through the text (eisegesis) rather than reading and understanding the text as written/intended (exegesis).

4. Divorced from both the OT background quotations which have to do with the relationship of Jews and Gentiles and how God's plan includes the salvation of both groups, as well as the verb tenses and original meaning of words.

(b) God elects to demonstrate His mercy (9:22-29)

22 What if God, although willing to **demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with great patience** objects of wrath prepared for destruction?

22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

22 Now if God wants to demonstrate his wrath and reveal his power, can't he be extremely patient with the objects of his wrath that are made for destruction?

22 *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to [prepared for] destruction:

- Paul now goes on to explain that when God uses His divine prerogative of election, He does so in harmony with His character. If you're going to study election and foreknowledge, but ignore everything else that God teaches about Himself in the Bible, you're going to walk away thinking that God is evil, capricious, dangerous and arbitrary.

— A good paraphrase of this verse would be:

But if God, notwithstanding His divine sovereignty, has in His actual dealings with mankind shown such unexpected mercy, what becomes of your complaints of any injustice? In reality, God has been long-suffering. He has been merciful, and there can be no real complaints against Him. God has endured with much long-suffering vessels that fitted themselves for destruction.

— When God exercises His divine prerogative, He doesn't do it outside of His righteous character. He doesn't elect some over others to be evil or mean *because His divine character doesn't allow Him to do so*. When God emphasizes one of His attributes, He doesn't do so at the expense or diminishment of any of His other attributes. To think or believe otherwise brings God down to human level because that's how humans operate.

- "...demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known" - just as God manifested Himself through Pharaoh's hardening to accomplish His will, He will likewise do so through Israel's hardening.

- "...endured with great patience" - *makrothumia*, means to "bear long with what is difficult." God patiently put up with Israel, even in their stubborn rebellion, so as to accomplish a greater redemptive good (the crucifixion and the grafting in of Gentiles). This is not the execution of a predetermined decree. This is a God who bears long with what is painful, who endures, who waits. A God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Cf. Ezek 33:11) endures these vessels of wrath with great long suffering.

— This is exactly what God did with Pharaoh, He didn't just arbitrarily judge Pharaoh, rather He endured with great patience, seeking to allow Pharaoh ample room for repentance (see notes on v17-18). God didn't immediately come into Pharaoh's life and override his free will. And God didn't elect Pharaoh to reject God and spend eternity in hell before the foundation of the world. Rather, God endured with Pharaoh until the very end, until Pharaoh had gone so far in his rebellion that he solidified

himself against God. It was only at that point that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to bring about His divine purpose (v17).

— Paul is saying here that God endures with great patience even those vessels who are foreordained to work a negative purpose in God's plan. Jesus stood beside Judas until the bitter end, even calling him "friend" up until just minutes before his betrayal.

2 Peter 3:14-15:

14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found spotless and blameless by Him, at peace,

15 and **regard the patience of our Lord as salvation**; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you [in Rom 9:22],

— There was nothing within God that said, I hate Judas and I'm going to override his free will and use him to betray My Son. That's not how God worked in Judas, it's not how He worked in Pharaoh, and it's not how He worked in Ishmael or Esau. And it's not how he works in us. God is patient, He stands with us until the very end. In Judas' case, there was wooing, there was grief, there was friendship, there was servanthood (Jesus washed Judas' feet), and there was true sadness on the part of Christ when Judas betrayed Him.

- "...objects of wrath" - unbelievers; all unsaved people are prepared for destruction because destruction is the necessary consequence of sin (Cf. 3:23). In context, due to their continual unbelief and rebellion, Israel prepared themselves for wrath and destruction.

— In the case of the "objects of wrath," God is passive. People prepare themselves for destruction by failing to repent (Cf. 2:4-5). On the other hand, God actively prepares the "vessels of mercy" to enjoy "the riches of His glory" (v23).

— Therefore, if people are saved, the credit belongs to God alone. If others remain lost, they alone are responsible.

- Here's another place where the verb tense argues against the Calvinist interpretation of this passage:

- "...prepared for destruction" - *katērtismena*, perfect passive participle of *katartizō*. The passive voice means that the verb form does not specify who did the "preparing"; it is a form where "were prepared" and "prepared themselves" look identical, but unlike v23, God is not given as the object of the preparation.

— The text here does not say that God prepared them for destruction. But in v23 (see notes there), the "objects of mercy" are specifically the ones that God "prepared beforehand." The verb is active and God is the subject. Paul could've easily used the active voice of *katartizō* in v22, except he didn't. But he did use it to describe God's mercy. The asymmetry here is not accidental—Paul is careful about what he attributes to God's direct action.

— On the wrath side (v22), the only thing God is said to do is "endure with great patience." Patience is a waiting word. You do not wait patiently for something you created in order to destroy.

Reformed position: Calvinism interprets "prepared for destruction" as God preparing vessels of wrath (those He created specifically to be destroyed) for destruction. But the verse doesn't say that. In fact,

Paul makes a clear contrast between the vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy, specifically saying that God prepares the vessels of mercy, but not saying that God prepares the vessels of wrath. Calvinism reads into the passage that God is the one preparing the vessels of wrath to destruction because they need to uphold their system. Here's James White again:

Since God wishes to make known the "riches of His grace" to His elect people (the vessels prepared for mercy), there must be vessels prepared for destruction. There is no demonstration of mercy and grace where there is no justice. The vessels of wrath, remember...should never choose to be anything else, and they detest the vessels that receive mercy.

God's wonderful grace will be praised throughout eternity because of the great contrast between the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy. Why? Because the only difference between the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy is the sovereign grace of God that changes the heart of the rebel sinner and turns him from being a God-hater into a God-lover. This is why there is no basis for man's boasting, ever.

Although it is nowhere stated in this verse, Calvinism needs you to believe that God is the one who prepares the vessels of wrath for destruction. But Paul is very specific in the Greek he uses in v22-23. In v22, he uses the passive voice of *katērtismena* meaning it is unspecified who is doing the preparing, but it certainly is not God. God is mentioned earlier in the verse as displaying "great patience" to these vessels of wrath. If Paul wanted to state that God was the one preparing them, he could've easily done so. The noun was already present in the verse. He didn't, but Calvinism and James White want you to believe that He did. But Paul does state plainly in v23 that God is the One who is preparing the vessels of mercy. James White again:

They [vessels of wrath] are said to have been specifically 'prepared for destruction.' That is their purpose.

But this statement is the problem: "prepared for destruction" is Paul's language. "That's their purpose" is James White's language. And when he says there 'must be vessels prepared for destruction' so that God's mercy can be displayed to the elect, he has gone even further beyond what Paul says.

Paul says that God demonstrates wrath and makes His power known while enduring vessels of wrath with much longsuffering. He does not say God needed to create a class of human beings for inevitable damnation so another class could appreciate grace.

So God doesn't prepare the vessels of wrath for destruction, but He does prepare the vessels of mercy for salvation. That is clear in these two verses. But Calvinism says that God prepared both the vessels of wrath for destruction and vessels of mercy for salvation because they need these verses to mean that in order to prop up their theological system.

It's important to not confuse God's actions with man's responsibility:

Ps 58:3: The wicked have turned away from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth.

Prov 16:4: The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

1 Peter 2:8: and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; *for* they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this they were also appointed.

Ezek 3:20: Again, when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and commits sin, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require from your hand.

Ezek 20:24-25:

24 But the Spirit entered me and set me up on my feet; and He spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself inside your house.

25 And as for you, son of man, they will put ropes around you and bind you with them so that you do not go out among them.

Yet, John 3:18: The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

23 And ***He did so*** to make known the riches of His glory upon **objects of mercy**, which **Heprepared** beforehand for glory,

23 And ***He did so*** to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

23 Can't he also reveal his glorious riches to the objects of his mercy that he has prepared ahead of time for glory—

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

- "...*He did so*" - He did what? He endured with great patience the vessels of wrath prepared (not by Him) for destruction (v22).

- The promise made to Abraham to bless all families of the earth (by the coming Messiah and His message) is now being fulfilled through the hardening and election of Israel.

God endured with much patience, and prepared beforehand, that vessels of wrath, who were prepared for destruction, might know the riches of His glory when through faith they become vessels of mercy.

- "...objects of mercy" - **all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3), whom God has promised His blessing from the very beginning.**

- "...He prepared" - *proetoimazō*, a different Greek word than "prepared" [*katartizō*] in v22. Here, it means "to prepare before" or "to prepare in advance." It's in the active voice meaning that God made these vessels fit for salvation.

— It appears only one other time in the NT (Eph 2:10). Both times, God uses it to speak of God's foreordaining something or someone for good. While unbelievers fit themselves for destruction (v22), God makes believers fit for salvation. Men fit themselves for hell, but God fits men for heaven.

— While unbelievers fit themselves for destruction (v22), God makes believers fit for salvation. Those whom He elects, He fits for salvation. To those who He fits for salvation He makes known the riches of

His glory because they were prepared beforehand unto glory.

Reformed position: James White, of v21-24, says:

The Potter's freedom pulses through these words, flowing inexorably into the sea of sovereignty, rushing any would-be proponent of free will out of its path. God has the perfect right to do with His creation (including men) as He wishes, just as the Potter has utter sovereignty over the clay. Just as God had demonstrated His wrath and power by wasting idolatrous Egypt, so too He demonstrates His wrath upon "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."

Calvinism lost the plot on this chapter so long ago that this is where they end up: that God elected some people to be saved and other not to be saved, and irregardless of the hundreds of pleas from God in the Bible for people to repent and be saved, those pleas are irrelevant and pointless because God has already set every man's eternal destiny from before they were born. Hogwash! James White continues:

Why are there vessels prepared for destruction? Because God is free. Think about it: there are only three logical possibilities here. Either 1) all "vessels" are prepared for glory (universalism); 2) all "vessels" are prepared for destruction; or 3) some vessels are prepared for glory and some are prepared for destruction and it is the Potter who decides which are which. Why is there no fourth option, one in which the pots prepare themselves based upon their own choice? Because pots do not have such a capacity! Pots are pots!

This is utter nonsense! This is where Calvinism's unbiblical belief in Total Depravity meshes into their unbiblical belief in Unconditional Election. If "pots are pots" as James White exclaims, then literal pots don't sin either. Literal pots don't disbelieve. They don't hear the Gospel. They don't reject Christ. They don't harden their hearts. They don't repent. They don't answer back to God. And literal olive branches don't either, yet Paul says branches were broken off because of unbelief and others stand by faith. Calvinism literalizes the helplessness of pottery when it serves meticulous divine determinism, then suddenly remembers that Paul is speaking metaphorically when every other property of pottery becomes inconvenient.

It should be obvious that the Potter/clay imagery establishes God's authority over His creatures. It does not follow that every physical incapacity of clay becomes a theological statement about the human will. It is horrible exegesis to claim the particular inference that the vessel metaphor rules out responsive agency because "pots are pots." That is infantile at best, and disrespectful to proper Bible interpretation at worst. Paul consistently uses vessel imagery then explicitly speaks to a person's response in connection with becoming a vessel of honor (Cf. Jer 18:7-12; 2 Tim 2:20-21).

It's interesting that many Calvinists never go past v23 in their exegesis of this chapter. They feel like Paul has said what he said, and that the rest of the chapter doesn't really matter. They have their doctrines secured, Unconditional Election, Predestination, and Reprobation, they think, securely intact from verses 6-23, so they stop reading. This is a mistake. Huge mistake.

AndrewH, a former Calvinist who runs the blog "Beyond Calvinism" says:

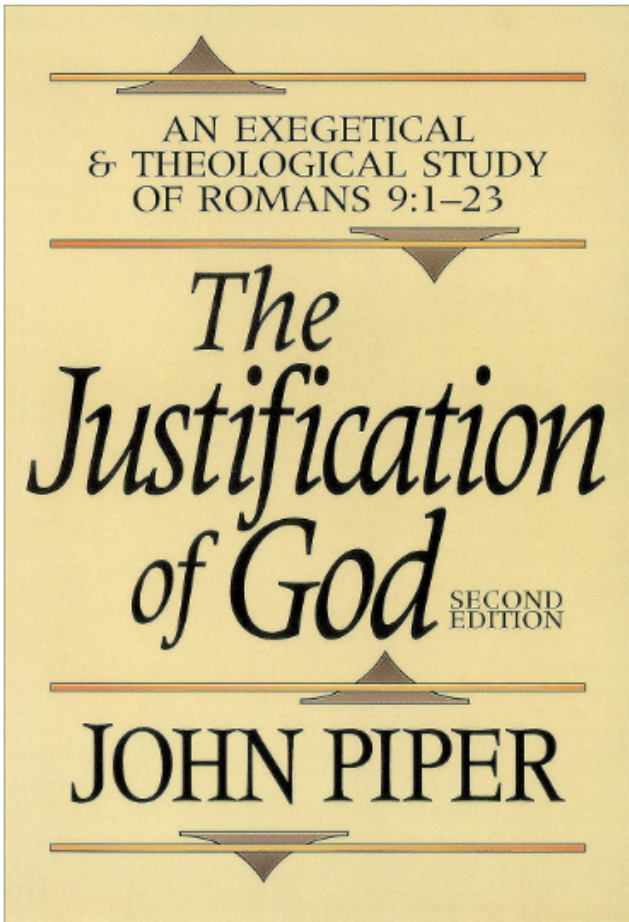
Romans 9 was the passage that really led me into Calvinism, and later, the passage that held me there. The key which allowed me begin considering other interpretations was when I finally [exegeted] Romans 9 from beginning to end, rather than stopping around verse 23.

A common problem in Calvinism and the scholars who promote it is *selective reading*. Pull a verse here, quote a verse there, and use those blocks to construct a doctrine/belief system. But when that belief system is put up against the whole counsel of God, it quickly falls apart.

After considering v23 in his commentary on Romans, F.F. Bruce, who considered himself "an impenitent Augustinian and Calvinist," wrote:

*It is a pity that in some schools of theological thought the doctrine of election has been formulated to an excessive degree on the basis of this preliminary state in Paul's present argument, without adequate account being taken of his further exposition of God's purpose in election at the conclusion of the argument (i.e. verses 25-32). [F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p 190].*

In John Piper's book, *The Justification of God*, which is generally considered the leading Calvinist exposition of Romans 9, **HE STOPS HIS EXAMINATION OF ROMANS 9 AFTER VERSE 23!** Why doesn't Piper finish his exposition of Romans 9 in v33, like Paul does? Important question. The answer is because the conclusion that Paul draws in v30-33, his summary of everything he said in v1-29, cannot be reconciled with the conclusions in Piper's book or Calvinism's belief system. So in Calvinism, if a part of the Bible doesn't align with your preconceived belief system, you just ignore it. That's what Piper does.



But we should let Paul finish speaking. Let him reach 9:32 and tell us that Israel failed "because they sought it (salvation) not by faith." Let him reach Rom 10 and describe God stretching out His hands to a disobedient people. Let him reach 11:20 and tell us plainly, "because of unbelief they were broken off." Then let him reach 11:23 and tell those broken-off people that "if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in." All of these verses, plus others, fly directly in the face of Calvinism's conclusions from 9:6-23. This is why they stop at v23.

If your interpretation of Rom 9 requires Paul's explanation in Rom 11 to become an embarrassing complication, perhaps the problem isn't that everybody else refuses to understand Rom 9 correctly. Perhaps you stopped reading and drew conclusions too soon.

24 *namely us*, whom He also called, not only from among Jews, but also from among Gentiles,

24 *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

24 including us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but from the gentiles as well?

24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

- "*namely us*" - up to now, Paul has been concerned with two groups: believing Jews and unbelieving Jews. Now he turns to the calling of Gentiles to point out that God has also fitted/prepared some of them for salvation. The principle of election applies to both the nation and to the individual.

— Election is a category God enlarges to take in whosoever, Jew and Gentile alike, made His people by His call.

*To be sure, election assures that those chosen will be saved, but it alone does not save them. People are saved through faith in the substitutionary death of Christ. And, of course, they must learn about the death of Christ somehow in order to have content to their faith. Thus election, the death of Christ, testimony of His death, and personal faith are all necessary in the salvation of an individual. Election alone does not save. [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 363].*

We may not understand everything God does, and we may not understand God's purpose when He exercises His divine prerogative, but one thing we do understand is that at the end of the day, God has in His mind mercy for every single human being. Scripture is clear that God desires none to perish, but all to come to a knowledge of Him (Cf. 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

So when God does something that we do not understand or even agree with, we can rest assured that when He exercises His divine prerogative, He does so consistent with all of His other attributes, because at the end of the day, God is merciful to all, even to the Gentiles (v25-26).

God does not condemn the innocent but judges sinners for their rebellion and rejection of truth. In His mercy, He calls both Jews and Gentiles to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Believers are recipients of His mercy and will share in Christ's eternal glory, while those who reject Him face His righteous judgment.

Ultimately, God's supreme purpose in salvation and all of history is to reveal His glory. Through creation, the Fall, election, redemption, and the restoration of all things, God displays His mercy, compassion, power, and righteousness, with the exaltation of Jesus Christ at the center of His divine plan.

The end of this chapter doesn't say what Calvinists need it to say to uphold their misinterpretation of this passage. Paul has been defending God's sovereign freedom to work through a chosen corporate people. He has shown that this corporate election always operated through the line of promise, not through ethnic descent alone. He has shown that God used Pharaoh's hardness for his purposes without causing that hardness. He has shown that God's mercy is sovereignly dispensed and his longsuffering is real.

Now Paul brings it home. The Gentiles who were not pursuing righteousness attained it, through faith. Israel, which pursued righteousness through law-keeping, did not attain it. Why? Because they sought it the wrong way—not by faith, but by works. They stumbled on the stumbling stone.

Their stumbling is attributed to a real choice on their part, about a real mechanism (salvation). Paul does not say God predestined Israel to stumble. He says Israel *chose* the wrong path, law-observance (works), instead of faith in the One the law pointed toward. The choice was/is genuinely theirs. The consequence follows from their choice.

And then, at the end of the chapter that the Calvinist reads as the premier proof of individual unconditional election, Paul closes with *pas ho pisteuōn*: whosoever believeth on Him shall not be

ashamed. Game over.

25 as He also says in Hosea: "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE **NOT MY PEOPLE**, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'"

25 As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'"

25 As the Scripture says in Hosea, "Those who are not my people I will call my people, and the one who was not loved I will call my loved one.

25 As he saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.

- A quote from Hosea 2:23b...

— In this verse, Hosea is speaking of a future restoration of Israel following her discipline by God. The inclusion of Gentiles is not in view in this verse.

— Notice that even in the original context of Hosea (Hosea 3:1), Paul acknowledges God's genuine love for Israel despite their rebellion. This reality is echoed by Paul throughout this entire passage (Rom 9-11; Cf. v1-3; 10:1,21; 11:11-32).

- "...NOT MY PEOPLE" - *Lo-Ammi*, means "not My people." God told Hosea to name his child "Lo-Ammi" meaning "not My people." However, God also promised that this was temporary.

— People formally not known to be His people are now benefitting from the redemptive plan that God has brought to pass through both the noble and ignoble vessels formed by the merciful Potter from the predominately unfaithful lump of clay.

— Gentile salvation was not a fulfillment of these passages from Hosea (v25-26), but an application because of a similar situation. Hosea declared that the Israelites were God's people, but because of their sin, God was going to expel them from the land and for a period of time, they would become "not My people."

— Hosea 2:23 and 1:10, in their contexts, refer to a reversal of Israel's status. Peter also quotes this in a similar manner (1 Peter 2:9). Although positionally Israel always has been and always will be God's people, experientially they only receive the benefits of being God's people when they believe. So Israel for a time would become, experientially, not God's people and no longer receive the benefits of being His people, but they would later repent and become God's people, experientially, again. This is what Hosea is speaking about—Israel moving from the position of "not My people" to "My people" again.

— Paul's quote of these verses from Hosea show that a similar situation has happened with Gentiles who believe. While in a state of unbelief, Gentiles were "not My people," but now that they have been made "vessels of mercy" and God has fit them for salvation, they have become "My people." They moved from being "not My people" to "My people."

— Because of this point of similarity between Jews and Gentiles, the prophecies of Hosea 1:10b and 2:23 are applied to them (us). Hosea had the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom in mind, however because of a similar situation, Paul applied these verses to Gentiles.

26 "AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD."

26 "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."

26 In the very place where it was told them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called children of the living God."

26 And it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

- A quote from Hosea 1:10b...

- This prophecy refers to Gentiles who turn to Christ now or in the future. Every Gentile alive today is the object of the mercy of God described here.

— As mentioned in the notes for v25, a people formerly not known to be His people (Gentiles) are now benefitting from the redemptive plan God has brought to pass through both the noble and ignoble vessels formed by the merciful Potter from the predominantly unfaithful lump of Israelite clay.

— Paul is using the Scriptures to demonstrate that this has always been God's mysterious redemptive plan (Cf. Eph 3:1-13).

— At the end of the day, once all votes are counted and all opinions tallied, there isn't a single person who will be able to point a finger and say God, You were not good, You were not kind.

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL MAY BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, ONLY THE REMNANT WILL BE SAVED;

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved;

27 Isaiah also calls out concerning Israel, "Although the descendants of Israel are as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore, only a few will be saved.

27 Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:

- v27-28 is quoted from Is 10:22-23...

- God's kindness and mercy will also be bestowed upon the Jews...that same nation who rejected Him and put Him to death on the cross. Is 10:22-23 anticipated the depletion of Israel through Sennacherib's invasion, which was God's instrument of judgment. Israel's election as a nation did not preclude God's judgment of the unbelievers in it. His mercy and faithfulness are shown in His sparing of the Remnant.

— Regardless of the Israelites' unfaithfulness throughout the generations God has always saved a believing remnant from physical destruction so as to carry out the purpose for which Israel was first elected: to bring the Word to the world. God's promise would never fail, even if Israel is unfaithful.

— From the beginning, it was only a Remnant that would be saved: Is 10:20-23; 11:11,16; 37:32 (written before Babylon); Jer 23:3; 50:20; Micah 2:12; 4:7; Zeph 2:7. When Paul wrote Romans, the believing Remnant of Israel was within the Church, as it is today.

— Study “the Remnant”: Gen 45:7; Is 1:9; 10:21-22; 11:11,16; 46:3; Jer 23:3; Ezek 6:8; Amos 5:15; Micah 2:12; 5:7-8; Zeph 2:7,9; 3:13; Zech 8:6,12.

28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY.”

28 for the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly.”

28 For the Lord will carry out his plan decisively, bringing it to completion on the earth.”

28 For he will finish the work, and cut *it* short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

- In this quote from Is 10:22-23, Paul reaffirmed the point he made in v6—that the Word of God has not failed because Israel as a nation rejected the Messiah. Rather, the rejection was part of God's plan. Consequently, the Word of God is being fulfilled, right on schedule and according to plan. God *will* accomplish His purpose and the Remnant will survive.

29 And just as Isaiah foretold: “IF THE LORD OF ARMIES HAD NOT LEFT US DESCENDANTS, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE GOMORRAH.”

29 And just as Isaiah foretold, “Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah.”

29 It is just as Isaiah predicted: “If the Lord of the Heavenly Armies had not left us some descendants, we would have become like Sodom and would have been compared to Gomorrah.”

29 And as Isaiah [Esaias] said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah.

- Quoted from Is 1:9...

- If God had not tempered His judgment with mercy, He would have destroyed Israel as completely as He had obliterated Sodom and Gomorrah because that's what they deserved. Had God not intervened with His grace, the Jewish people would have been destroyed. But through election, God preserved a Remnant.

— It is through this Remnant that God will fulfill His program, not the entire nation. God keeps the nation alive because of the believing Remnant, thus the believing Remnant is responsible for keeping the entire nation alive.

— The reason all attempts to annihilate the Jews have failed is because there has always been a believing remnant among the Jews.

God, however, did not judge the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah in like manner. In his sovereign grace, He preserved a “seed.” That seed goes beyond the obvious survival of physical Jews to the divine calling of a believing Remnant within Israel. Later on, Paul will argue: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Cf. 11:5).

We are so wrong and shortsighted if we focus on the negative when we think of election. Instead, election is opportunity. The Bible focuses on the positive. God's ultimate purpose in human history is not judgment; God does not elect to send people to hell, and sending people to hell (especially those who aren't even able to make their own decision) does not in any way bring glory to God. The Bible

clearly shows that hell was our starting point from the beginning, since Adam's choice to sin against God. If this was God's purpose, He would not have given us Scripture, and He surely would never have sent His Son to be our Savior. Instead, He would have done nothing.

If sovereign election does not seem "fair," what seems fair about the Cross? God exercised His power and authority by electing the Son as just provision for our salvation. What is fair about that?

Election is both necessary and gracious. It could not be otherwise because "there is no one righteous, not even one (3:10-11). Sin so pervades every one of our actions and natural understanding that, if God had not chosen to call out a people to belong to Him by faith, no one would be saved. The real wonder is that (why?) God displays His mercy to anyone. We are all sinners, with no righteousness of our own to offer to God. But God, in His infinite wisdom of Jesus Christ, accomplished the righteousness that God requires.

(2) Israel in the present: Rejected (Rom 9:30—10:21)

From 9:30—10:21, Paul carefully explains that Jewish unbelief is not God's fault. The gospel came first to the Jews, but most worked for human righteousness, which saves no one. Tragically, most failed to see their need for salvation, so they did not find God's righteousness. Now that Jewish and Gentile believers are members of the Church, a question was on the mind of many: Is God just? Was it fair that the Jews, who pursued righteousness by the Law, had not attained it? Is it fair that the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, obtained it?

(A) Israel pursued righteousness by Law rather than by faith (9:30—10:4)

(a) Israel's refusal to righteousness by faith (9:30-33)

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, but the righteousness that is by faith;

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;

30 What can we say, then? Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, have attained righteousness, a righteousness that comes through faith.

30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

- "What shall we say then?" - Paul now summarizes what he said in the first 29 verses of this chapter. If you are having a difficult time understanding v1-29 and Paul's overarching point, you're in luck because he summarizes it here.

— If your interpretation of v1-29 differs from Paul's summary here, you have a wrong interpretation. You need to re-read the preceding arguments to find out how they fit and build toward the following conclusion. This is Paul's Holy Spirit-inspired summary of his Holy Spirit-inspired text in v1-29.

- Paul is very clear regarding why some are saved while others are "separated from Christ" (v3). Those who are saved, "attained righteousness...through faith" (v30). Those who are separated from Christ are separated because they pursued righteousness (or you might say, "pursued a right standing with God") "not by faith (as the Gentiles did), but as though it were by works" (v32).

— Understand Paul's conclusion again because it significantly differs from the Calvinist conclusion for v1-29. This is why Calvinism completely ignores v23b-33 of this chapter...because it doesn't fit into their preconceived belief system.

— If Paul's argument had been, as the Calvinists claim, that "His promise gave expression to an 'electing purpose' (v11) by which God aims to preserve his complete freedom in determining who will be the beneficiaries of his saving promises, who will be the 'Israel' within Israel (v6b). His purpose is thus maintained by means of the predestination of individuals to their respective eternal destinies.

— Within the context of Rom 9, according to John Piper, this means that God maintains his sovereign 'purpose of election' by determining, before they are born, who will belong to the 'saved' among Israel [Piper, *The Justification of God*, 218]. If Paul would have come to this same conclusion, he would've summarized his argument very differently.

— Here's a Calvinist re-write of Paul's summary of v1-29 in 9:30—10:1. This is what Paul would've said if he was trying to communicate Reformed theology (Calvinism) in v1-29:

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by ~~faith~~ unconditional election of individuals (with faith merely being evidence of an individual's prior election);

31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

32 Why? Because they ~~did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works~~ had not been unconditionally and individually elected for salvation. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever is irresistibly caused to believe in him will not be put to shame."

10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they ~~may be saved~~ have always been vessels of mercy, otherwise there is no hope for them.

— If faith is being completely rewritten out of Rom 9, which is what Calvinism does (and replaces it with Unconditional Election), why would Paul bring up faith at all? The burden of proof for Unconditional Election, of which Rom 9 (up until halfway through v23) is their key proof-text, resides on Calvinism to explain why Paul's summary completely contradicts their interpretation/conclusion.

- Paul says that Gentile believers in Christ "got it" because they came to Christ in the right way, by faith.

- "...who did not pursue righteousness" - because the Gentiles did not possess the Mosaic Law that would have quickened their moral sensibilities, they were not seeking to attain righteousness as the Jews were. Nevertheless, they managed to attain righteousness, not by keeping the Law but by faith their received the imputed righteousness of Christ.

— This is the paradox. Verse 31 shows the other side of the paradox.

— "pursue" - Paul couches the terminology of a foot race in his conclusion. Israel struggled hard to obtain ("pursued") the prize of righteousness that God requires for acceptance by Him. However, they crossed the finish line behind Gentiles, who were not running as hard.

— "righteousness" [3x] - *dikaïosynē*, throughout this passage, the term refers to salvation; to be more precise, it refers to justification and the resulting imputed righteousness of Christ (Cf. 1:17; Phil 3:9).

— The only answer to why Gentiles are being saved is that God, in His grace, sought them. Their salvation shows that righteousness comes by grace through faith in Christ.

- "...attained" - *katalambanō*, to lay hold of, find, to make one's own; better translated "obtained"; the Gentiles "obtained" God's righteousness by receiving it as a gift.

— Note that the English word "attained" [*katalambanō*] is used in all four translations [NASB20, NASB95, ISV, KJV] in v30, it is only used in the KJV in v31. However, it is a different word [*phthanō*]. Both verbs are aorist active indicative, 3rd person singular.

31 however, Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not **arrive** at that law.

31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law.

31 But Israel, who pursued righteousness based on the Law, did not achieve the Law.

31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not **attained** to the law of righteousness.

- Israel, in contrast to the Gentiles, did not "get it" (obtain salvation) because they came to Christ in the wrong way, by Law (works). Israel hoped to gain righteousness by doing good works (keeping the Law), but believing Gentiles obtained the prize by believing the gospel ("faith").

— In other words, Israel, pursuing after a law which should give righteousness, did not arrive at such a law. *This is a terrifying statement.* The Jews tried to produce a righteousness of their own through the Mosaic system. They didn't produce it—and look at the nation today. Judaism redefined itself after the destruction of the temple (70 AD) at the Council of Jamnia (90 AD). There is no place for sacrifices, so sin is rationalized away rather than accepting the work of their Messiah.

— Notice what Paul *doesn't say* here (because it's important)...he does not say, as Calvinism does, that Israel is cut-off and that the Gentiles are in because of election/predestination. Instead he says it is because of belief (faith) versus those who pursued righteousness by works (compare with 11:20,23).

— If Paul had made the argument in v6-23 that Calvinists claim, then v30-33 just does not fit (not to mention chapters 10-11). Many Calvinists, when honestly looking at v30-33, then going back and re-examining v6-23 after understanding Paul's conclusion, finally see how the whole passage falls into place. Many previous Calvinists credit Paul's conclusion in v30-33 with pulling them out of Calvinism because Paul's conclusion in these verses do not sync with the conclusion of Calvinism in v6-23.

— One example, after understanding Paul's conclusion, it is clear that v22-23 are a much better parallel with Eph 2, Rom 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, and especially 2 Tim 2:20-21 than the idea of double predestination.

- "...arrive" - *phthanō*, the point Paul was making is rooted in Mishnaic Judaism. The concept of this religion is that man can gain righteousness through his own efforts. If man succeeds in diligently following after a law of righteousness, then he will gain righteousness. Yet, the truth is that those who tried to accomplish this task never arrived at that law. They failed to attain righteousness.

— People today love to come up with their own way to God, their own religion, and ignore the doctrine and precepts clearly described in Scripture whereby the lost sinner obtains the righteousness of God.

— You can't ignore the laws of Scripture just like you can't ignore the physical laws of the universe. The spiritual laws of the universe are just as binding as the physical laws of the universe. I can't one day say that I'm going to ignore the law of gravity...it doesn't work that way. In the same way, I can't one day say that I'm going to ignore the laws of Scripture on how to obtain the righteousness of Christ. You come to God by way of faith, or you're never going to get there.

— And the Gentiles did just that...they came to Christ in faith. The "dogs" or "unwashed masses" got it right by faith, whereas God's chosen and blessed nation didn't get it and attempted to come to God by works of the Law.

- "...attained" [KJV] - a poor translation because it is a different Greek word than "attained" in v30.

32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though they could by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,

32 Why? Because *they did* not *pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,

32 Why not? Because they did not pursue it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on achievements. They stumbled over the stone that causes people to stumble.

32 Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

- "Why?" - why didn't the Jews "arrive at the Law" (receive God's righteousness, v31)? Because they did not pursue it by faith.

- "...as though they could by works" - instead, Israel decided to pursue God through works righteousness. That was a poor decision. Works righteousness is where we seek to earn favor and merit before God based on what we do. This is the very definition of "religion."

— Paul explains the paradox...the reason Israel (excluding the Remnant) did not obtain righteousness was because they did not come to it on the basis of faith; rather, they trusted their own works that, in the end, failed to bring them to righteousness. Consequently, Israel "stumbled" over Christ. Jesus taught this, using the same "stone" analogy, in Matt 21:42,44; Cf. Heb 11:6.

— So Israel, who sought it failed to attain it because they were trying to attain it by works. Gentiles, who did not seek it, did attain it in the end, because they found it by faith.

— Jesus Christ showed up on time, in fulfillment of multiple OT prophecies. Because they were in the dark about the meaning of the OT and how to come to Christ the right way, they tripped over Him like you would trip over something that you can't see in the dark.

- "...They stumbled over the stumbling stone" - intent on winning through her own effort, Israel failed to recognize the "Stone" prophesied in Scripture, who was sent to provide salvation for her.

— Israel's problem was its rejection of righteousness by faith and its insistence on attaining righteousness through works. By stumbling over the doctrine of righteousness through faith in the Messiah, Israel became guilty of rejecting God's provision for righteousness. Their pursuit of righteousness through works reflected an underlying rejection of the Messiah Himself.

33 just as it is written: "BEHOLD, I AM LAYING IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND THE ONE **WHOBELIEVES IN HIM** WILL NOT BE **PUT TO SHAME**."

33 just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

33 As it is written, "Look! I am placing a stone in Zion over which people will stumble— a large rock that will make them fall— and the one who believes in him will never be ashamed."

33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

- Quoted from Is 8:14; 28:16 (Cf. 1 Peter 2:6-8). Paul doesn't quote these verses verbatim; he takes the first and last part of Is 28:16 and inserts Is 8:14 in the middle.

- "...WHO" - here Paul maintains Isaiah's more general wording, with "who" referring to those elected by God.

— The Jews' past pursuit of righteousness through their own works caused them to miss Christ's presence among them. To prove this point, Paul combines two verses from Isaiah.

- Is 28:16 concerning those who believe: they will not be ashamed of this doctrine of salvation. The Remnant did not stumble over Jesus. For the Jewish believer, Jesus is not the Stone of Stumbling nor the Rock of Offense. He is a "sanctuary" (Is 8:14) and "the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:1-10).
- Is 8:14, which confirms the two-fold attitude of both stumbling and rejection. God intended the Messiah to be the provider of salvation, however the Jews did not allow Him to fulfill this function for them. Consequently, this Stone became a stumbling block for them (Cf. 1 Cor 1:23)

— Jesus' offer of salvation through faith in Him, apart from works, proved to be two things: a "stone of stumbling" and a "rock of offense."

— They stumbled over the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith plus nothing, and they were offended by it

- "...BELIEVES IN HIM" - *pas ho pisteuōn*, the reason for Israel's stumbling! Israel didn't "stumble" (not believe) by faith because of some pre-temporal choice of God (predestination), he says that they chose (in and of themselves) the wrong way to pursue/obtain righteousness. The choice was *theirs*, not God's, and the consequences followed from their choice.

- "...PUT TO SHAME" - disappointed

Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ did not make God unfaithful or unrighteous in His dealings with the nation. What it did was make it possible for Gentiles to surpass the Jews as the main recipients of salvation.

Why Are More Gentiles than Jews Saved in the Present Dispensation?

From Abraham to Jesus Christ, that situation was reversed. In the OT era, there were more righteous, saved Jews than Gentiles. What makes the difference? Two reasons are given:

1. The Gentiles received the righteousness of God by faith in total dependence upon the gracious provision of God (9:30-32).

- Israel, however, sought to gain divine righteousness through outward conformity to the Law of Moses in total dependence upon the ability of self to do so.
 - Israel had the advantage of receiving the law of Moses directly from God (Rom 3:1-2; 9:4). God didn't give the Law so that men would try to keep it in order gain salvation. God gave the Law to show men how holy He is and how unrighteous men are.
 - The Law was designed to create a conviction of moral inadequacy within man. In its moral blindness and hardness, Israel refused to acknowledge their insufficiency.
2. Israel stumbled over the provision of the divine human Messiah who alone could save them (v33; Is 8:14; 28:16; Matt 21:42; 1 Cor 1:23; 1 Peter 2:6-8).
- In their attempt to work for their salvation, Israel tripped over the provision of the Messiah to do that work for them. They wanted a Messiah who would lead the nation to political freedom and glory; they could not believe in a crucified Christ.
 - Paul's purpose in this chapter is to explain Israel's position in the plan of God. Israel was an elect nation, given privileges that no other nation had, yet it failed miserably to follow God's program of blessing for the world.

In the previous section, Paul dealt with Israel's rejection of the Messiahship of Christ from the standpoint of divine sovereignty. In this section, he explains why Israel failed from the standpoint of human responsibility.