

ROMANS 9:1-11:36 | GOD'S WORK FULFILLED THROUGH ISRAEL

Supplemental Resource: Romans Graphically Presented, pg. 38

ROMANS 9:1-10:21 | PAUL'S PRAYER & GOD'S PLAN FOR ISRAEL IN THE DISPENSATIONAL CHANGE & BEYOND

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ROMANS 9:6-29 | GOD'S SOVEREIGN SELECTION OF ISRAEL

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Note: verses 6-16, see Session 25.

VERSE 17 - BLACK

In Romans 9:6-16, Paul argues that God is not obligated to fulfill the Kingdom promises to every Jew. He uses the examples of Ishmael and Isaac, as well as Esau and Jacob, to support his argument. Paul continues this theme by stating that God, who chose Israel, can also set her aside for a time to offer grace to all. To illustrate God's sovereign ability, Paul cites the example of Pharaoh during the days of Egypt, quoting from Exodus 9:16.

It is important to remember that while historical accounts can be used to illustrate theological arguments (as Paul does here), they are not a solid basis for those arguments. In this case, Paul is using the example of Pharaoh to show that God has the power to show mercy to whom he chooses and to harden the hearts of others. Many time Calvinists use *illustrations* of God's sovereignty (like this one) to *prove* God selects some to salvation and others to damnation. Paul does not make the same logically flawed argument because he is only using the historical account to *illustrate* God's ability.

VERSE 18 - BLACK

Paul draws a conclusion about God's sovereignty. It's worth noting that examples of God hardening hearts are rare in Scripture. These examples include Pharaoh, King Sihon (Dt. 2:30, Jude 11:20), and the kings of Canaan during the conquest (Josh 11:19-20). God hardened their hearts to accomplish a specific purpose on earth. The only other time we see this "hardening" is with God's chosen people, Israel (see Isaiah 63:17), to bring His obstinate nation to eventual repentance. Therefore, the Calvinistic concept of God softening the hearts of all the elect and hardening the hearts of all the damned is an over-generalization and cannot be based solely on these verses in Romans 9.

VERSE 19 - BLACK

In verse 19 Paul addresses an imagined reaction from a skeptic. If God chooses whom He will give mercy and whom He will give hardening, then the natural question is **Why doeth he yet find fault?** After all, can God hold someone else responsible for what God has done?

The typical Calvinist response is that God decrees, but man is responsible. In my opinion, it is impossible to reconcile this logically. However, Calvinism makes it work through what they call the "doctrine of compatibility." This "doctrine" disregards logic and claims that God's complete decree and man's complete free will are compatible.

Paul does not play this theological game. Instead, he presents the issue by acknowledging that God is sovereign (this will be fleshed out more fully in verses 20-26). Whatever God decrees is His responsibility, and He assumes full responsibility for it. God used the Pharaoh to accomplish His purpose through Israel, and He takes full ownership of it.

Calvinism has had to create an illogical scenario (God decrees but is not responsible for the decree's outcome) because they are applying this passage in an area where it does not apply. Properly interpreting the truth would solve their dilemma. When this passage is applied to God's work through Israel, it makes logical sense. However, when it is misapplied to God's offer of salvation to man, it creates confusion.

The message of verse 19 is that God has the power to do whatever He wants. This aligns with passages like Job 9:12 and Daniel 4:35. However, the Calvinist extrapolation that everything that happens is brought about by God's decision goes beyond what this passage actually says. Such an interpretation creates a significant conflict with free-will passages and requires an illogical "compatibility" doctrine for inherently incompatible things.

VERSE 20 - BLACK

Paul responds to the skeptic who asks how God can blame someone who was constrained to act as God decreed. Paul's response may be somewhat confusing as he says, "**Nay but...**", and then proceeds to chastise anyone who would dare challenge God.

The key to understanding this passage is to correctly interpret the introductory phrase, "**Nay but...**" Paul uses the Greek word *μενοῦνγε* (*menouge*), a compound word that could be literally translated as "indeed therefore." The Darby Translation translates it as "Aye, but..." While there is not an explicit negative in the word or sentence, it does inherently affirm the point of verse 19. Essentially, it says that God is responsible for what God decrees, but who are we to reply against God?

Paul's argument in asking, "**Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?**," is that God is not obligated to deliver on the promises of the Kingdom to that generation of descendants of Abraham. However, Paul also acknowledges that this decision belongs to God alone, and God is the only one who must answer for it.

VERSE 21 - BLACK

Paul simply gives an illustration from everyday life to display the sovereignty of God in the matter of His deliverance of promises to Israel. This "everyday life" illustration, however, had extra meaning to Israel since God Himself had used the illustration with Jeremiah (Jer. 18:1-6) and with Isaiah (Is. 45:9).

VERSE 22 - BLACK

This verse (and the fuller context of vv. 22-24) is filled with interpretive challenge. I suppose that none of us should be confident we are fully cognizant of its meaning.

To understand this, let me suggest that we treat the "what if" scenario as a potential but not yet realized scenario, giving these verses a prophetic sense. This would make the verse a true "what if" statement, akin to saying "what if we go to the park...". The verb "endured" might initially suggest a past scenario rather than a future one. However, the verb is in the aorist tense, which can also be used for future events (see Matt. 24:15, Jn. 4:21, 1 Thes. 4:15 for examples). The aorist is often translated in the past tense simply because English lacks an equivalent tense, so we have to use one of our available tenses, even if it does not perfectly convey the meaning. In our "go to the park" scenario, we can see how this future use of the past tense works. We can say "what if we go to the park." But we can also say "what if we went to the park," using the past tense to refer to a future possibility. Therefore, it could be that Paul is referring to the future when he presents his "what if" scenario, pondering what would happen if God "**endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath.**"

This scenario would fit 2 Peter 3:9, written much later, when Peter says that God has been "**longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**"

If we accept this "future what if" scenario, then in context, Paul is arguing that God will not deliver His promises to Israel during this generation of Israelites (v. 6). He defends this idea by stating that God has never been obligated to every single child of Abraham (vv. 7-16). Paul then argues that God, in His sovereignty, has always used some people for destruction to accomplish His overall purpose, and is willing to take full responsibility for it (vv. 17-19). Finally, Paul argues that Israel, as God's clay, cannot dictate what God can or cannot do (vv. 20-21). Beginning in verse 22, Paul presents a "what if" scenario for the future, having built an argument that God is waiting to deliver His promises. I will paraphrase this "what if" scenario as follows: "What if God endures our nation, which seemingly He should destroy, for many generations into the future, before delivering His promises?"

This thought will continue and be completed in verses 23-24.

VERSE 23 - BLACK

Note that the commentary on verse 23 needs the context of the commentary on verse 22.

Paul's future "what if" scenario now moves forward beyond the endurance of verse 21, to the final delivery of God's promises. A future generation of Israel will be the "**vessels of mercy**" to whom God will "**make known the riches of his glory.**" The future **vessels of mercy** generation are "**afore prepared unto glory.**" And can the present lump of clay complain about such a scenario to a sovereign God?

I hold to a national election and not an individual Calvinistic-style predestination. The scenario I am describing assumes this national election. The nation is "**afore prepared unto glory,**" as can be seen in verse 4 of this chapter, as well as in many passages in the Hebrew scriptures, including Isaiah 60:21, Jeremiah 32:41, Isaiah 62:1, Ezekiel 36:24, Ezekiel 37:26, Jeremiah 33:9, and Zechariah 8:13.

VERSE 24 - BLACK

This verse seems to "throw cold water" on my "national election of Israel" theory. Paul indeed does clarify that it is Jews who are those "**prepared unto glory**" (v. 23). However, he adds "**not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?**" If Gentiles have been **prepared unto glory** then a Calvinistic rather than nationalistic interpretation is all-but-required.

But I believe there is a solution that supports a nationalist interpretation. The Greek phrase ἐξ Ιουδαίων (ek Ioudaion) can be translated as a location instead of a religious or ethnic group. In fact, the word "Jew" would be an anachronism created later to refer to a "Judean." In Scripture, the terms "circumcised" and "uncircumcised" were the only "Jew" or "non-Jew" terms that were unequivocally meaningful. See Acts 2:14 for an example of the word translated in the sense of "Judean." Furthermore, the phrase ἐξ ἐθνῶν (ek ethnon) is translated as "**out of the Gentiles,**" but it can literally be translated as "out of the nations" (see Rom. 4:17-18). To strengthen this argument, the prefix ἐξ (ek) is not used to say "God has selected people from among the Gentiles." Rather, it is used when referring to "coming out from the midst of something." It would be correct to use it when saying "coming out from the midst of the nations" but not correct to say "from among the Gentiles." If Paul wanted to say that God also called some out of the Gentiles, he would have used the prefix *apo*. See John 15:19 for an example of *ek* and Matthew 25:32 to see an example of *apo*. In short, **ek** is "from the midst of" and **apo** is "moving away from."

So a very strong argument can be made that verse 24 clarifies that those prepared beforehand are "us Jews", whether from Judea or the scattered among the nations.

A close examination of the scriptural support given in verses 25-29 will strengthen this argument.