

## Wednesday Evening Bible Study

May 17, 2023

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

The Dispensational Section (Chapters 9 – 11)

Text – Romans 9 – *God's Dealings with Israel in the Past*

### Introduction

Chapter nine begins a very important section of the Letter to the Romans that deals primarily with the Nation of Israel. In this chapter we will examine God's dealings with Israel in the past; in chapter ten, we will see how God dealt with Israel in Paul's day and how He is still dealing with them today. Chapter eleven will tell us about Israel's future. There are many principles in this portion of Scripture that will be a blessing and help to us as Christians today, but we must keep in mind that the main subject in these dispensational chapters is Israel, not the Church. Take a moment to notice the first few verses in chapters 9, 10, and 11. There should be no doubt whatever regarding the context.

This portion of Scripture has been the source of much needless squabbling among Christians for herein we find the verses that are commonly used by Calvinists to defend their position that men are either elected to Heaven or condemned to Hell without the free will to either exercise faith in Christ or reject His gospel. In other words, according to some, man does not have a choice.

This battle has been raging for centuries, and, in my view, it is senseless because there is so much that we can know absolutely for sure, and there is really so little that we can disagree about. Of course, I am referring here to Born-Again believers who believe the Bible is the Word of God.

Let's look at what we know for sure and what we can all agree about:

- 1 No man is deserving of Heaven. Paul spent a large part of chapters 1 – 3 proving that point, and since we have already covered this thoroughly in our study of Romans, I won't belabor the point here.
- 2 God would be perfectly justified in condemning all of us to Hell, so the question is not why does God only save some, but rather why does God save any, since we

are all deserving of judgment.

- 3 No man can save himself. Because the Law demanded perfection and because all men have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, there is no man that could meet the demands of the Law.
- 4 Salvation can only come by God's grace through faith in Christ. (Ephesians 2:8 & 9; Romans chapters 4 – 6)
- 5 Anyone who receives the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in His atoning death, burial, and resurrection (the gospel) will be saved. (Romans 10:9 – 13; John 1:12; John 3:16; 1 John 5:13)
- 6 God invites people to be saved. (John 10:13; John 3:16; Revelation 3:20; Revelation 22:17)
- 7 God commands those who are saved to preach the gospel to every creature and share with them God's invitation to salvation. (Matthew 28:18 – 20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8)
- 8 God is active in salvation. The Holy Spirit of God works in the hearts of those who receive Christ enabling them to believe. (John 6:44) The Word of God also works in the hearts of unbelievers showing them the way to be saved. (Romans 10:17)
- 9 Satan is also busy attempting to conceal the gospel from people and distracting them from being saved. (Matthew 13:4, Matthew 13:19; 2 Corinthians 4:3 & 4)
- 10 Those who receive the gospel by God's grace through faith in Christ are foreknown by God and are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, and are part of "the elect". (Romans 8:29)
- 11 Any individual who is "elect" or chosen by God is a believer, having received the Lord Jesus by faith. They have all, without exception, received the invitation given to "whosoever will". Conversely, any individual who dies lost has done so also by his own choice in that he did not believe (and thereby rejected) the gospel. Someone once said that the elect are the "whosoever wills", and the lost are the "whosoever won'ts"
- 12 Any person who is genuinely saved is secure eternally in Christ. (John 10:27 – 30; Philippians 1:6, Romans 8)

There are varying beliefs involved when discussing the doctrine of God's sovereignty, but here are some of the areas where we would disagree with some who hold to the doctrines of Calvinism:

- 1 We believe that God loves everybody and wants all people to be saved. (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9) The Calvinist would say that God loves only the elect. A Calvinist could not confidently tell someone that God loves him, because he does not know whether that person is part of the elect.
- 2 We believe that man has a free will, and that he can choose to receive Christ by faith or reject Him in unbelief. The Calvinist believes that man's will is controlled (not merely influenced) by God, and man can only choose the choice that God makes for him. Unfortunately, extreme Calvinists would even go as far as to say that God caused (chose, elect) man (and Satan) to sin against Him. Do not misunderstand, God does choose, or elect the saved, just as He did Israel, but the Scripture is also clear that God chooses those who place their faith in Him. God "calls" many, but only those who believe are chosen.
- 3 We believe that Christ's atonement was unlimited in that His shed blood was more than sufficient for every person (past, present, and future) on the planet, but is efficient only for those who put their faith in Christ. An illustration comes to mind of the Passover Lamb. There were more than enough lambs and lamb's blood to cover the doorposts of every house in Egypt, but unless that blood was applied to the doorposts, it would do no good (Exodus 12). The Calvinist would claim that the atonement was limited to only the elect.
- 4 We believe that man is depraved through and through, but we do not define depravity as inability. The Calvinist would claim that man is unable to decide for or against the Lord. This is not to say that God does not draw us and work in our hearts, but the decision to be saved is still ours to make. The Calvinist would say that a person is totally depraved and without the ability to turn to God for help. A man may not be seeking after God, but he can know that he is in a lost condition and he can recognize God when God comes looking for him.
- 5 We believe that God's heart is broken over lost sinners. The Calvinist believes that God elects some to salvation and some to condemnation before they are even born, without a choice.

*"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."* (Matthew 9:36-38)

Why would God weep over people that He sovereignly chose to send to Hell.

I like this quote by Reg Dunlop on this subject:

"Well aware am I that this is treading ground strewn with the weapons and scalps of many theological gladiator. Not for one moment does one presume to offer any final word on the mystery of how the divine foreknowledge and foreordination are to be reconciled with human freedom and human responsibility. He who speaks too glibly or dogmatically here commits the folly of rushing in where angels fear to tread. It is my unshakable conviction born in an effort to hold a balanced view of the teachings of God's Word - and that is that if a person is saved, it is by the grace of God, and if a person is lost, it is by his or her own refusal of that offer of that grace. Any view of the doctrine of election that arbitrarily limits the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, or that arbitrarily elevates certain individuals to eternal life while it consigns certain others to eternal death, can only be held by eyes blind to the fact that God wills not the death of any, but rather ALL should come to repentance"

Chuck Swindoll, who considers himself a Calvinist and espouses some of the five points of Calvinism<sup>1</sup> says this about the extremes on either side of the argument:

The first, and most common, is to say that salvation is entirely a "freewill choice" made by an individual. While this sounds reasonable on the surface, the implications are clearly unbiblical. This extreme: places the burden of salvation squarely on the shoulders of the individual, denies or minimizes the depravity of the human heart, suggests that one can lose his or her salvation, either by choice or by sinning, invariably leads to legalism (overemphasis on keeping laws to retain salvation)

The second extreme is to say that humanity plays no part at all in salvation or condemnation. Many go to this extreme to uphold the sovereignty of God and to avoid giving any glory to an individual for his or her salvation. While this is a noble end—one

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<sup>1</sup> TULIP – an acronym describing the five points of Calvinism – T – total depravity; U – unconditional election; L – limited atonement; I – irresistible grace; P – perseverance of the saints.

I appreciate—it nevertheless leads to equally unbiblical conclusions. This extreme: places the liability for an individual’s condemnation entirely on God, leads to the conclusion that God is culpable for evil, suggests that humanity has no stake at all in God’s plan to redeem the world, invariably leads to fatalism and paralysis (an under emphasis on human responsibility)

History is replete with examples of people who have taken this issue to one extreme or another, and evangelism has suffered as a result.

Those who emphasize God’s sovereignty and neglect human responsibility conclude that those predestined to believe will come to Christ whether Christians proclaim the good news or not. Foreign evangelism remained idle for decades until William Carey, a Calvinist, took his brothers by the theological lapels and shook some sense into them. Those who emphasize the responsibility of humanity and ignore God’s sovereign choosing adopt every means of manipulation imaginable to coerce individuals into trusting Christ. Now we have entire denominations unwittingly proclaiming, “God helps those who help themselves.” They add deeds to grace and saddle members with the responsibility to preserve their justification.<sup>2</sup>

I once heard a preacher say that on this side of Heaven’s gate will be written, “whosoever will, may come” and when we get to the other side, we will see the phrase “elect according to the foreknowledge of God”. I don’t know if that is true or not, but I do know this: anybody who wants to be saved today can be saved if they will simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. My job is not to worry about who is elect or who isn’t; it is to preach the gospel to every creature.

I like what Spurgeon prayed: “Lord, save the elect, and elect some more.” He also stated:

Now, have I not answered these two questions honestly? I have endeavoured to give a scriptural reason for the dealings of God with man. He saves man by grace, and if men perish they perish justly by their own fault. "How," says someone, "do you reconcile these two doctrines?" My dear brethren, I never reconcile two friends, never. These two doctrines are friends with one another; for they are both in God's Word,

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<sup>2</sup> Swindoll, Charles R. (2010-03-24). *Insights on Romans* (Swindoll's New Testament Insights) (p. 181). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

and I shall not attempt to reconcile them.<sup>3</sup>

Having said all this about Calvinism, let us return to the true context of this chapter, which is not the salvation or damnation of individuals, but rather the past dealings of God with Israel. Many Calvinists, by the way, believe that God is through with Israel, but nothing could be further from the truth, as we will see in this dispensational section of Paul's Letter to the Romans.

### I. Sorrowful Prayer (vs. 1 – 5)

*"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." (Romans 9:1-2)*

*"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."  
(Romans 10:1)*

This is Paul's description how he felt about the fact that his people, as a nation, were rejecting the grace that was being offered to them. You will notice that Paul says that his sorrow was heavy and continuous. He did not have a flippant attitude toward his lost brothers and sisters according to the flesh, and remember, these are the same people who were now trying to kill him. Would to God that we would have such a burden for our loved ones.

*"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."  
(Psalms 126:5-6)*

The founder of the Salvation Army was General William Booth. Some of his salvation soldiers were sent into the ghettos of Los Angeles in the 1920s and after three years of no results, they sent Booth a telegram: "It just won't work. We have tried everything. The gospel is just not being received here." A couple days later they received a two-word telegram from General Booth that said, "Try tears."

It is fascinating to me that this portion of Scripture that is so often used to justify a lack of evangelism begins with a burning desire for the salvation of souls.

*"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen*

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<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon, C. H. Delivered on Sabbath Morning, January 16th, 1859, by the REV. C. H. Spurgeon At New Park Street Chapel, Southwark.

***according to the flesh:"*** (Romans 9:3)

If I understand this correctly, Paul was stating here that if he could somehow trade places with these people he loved dearly (which he couldn't) for them to be saved, he would. Moses made a similar plea to the Lord:

*"And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."* (Exodus 32:31-32)

Notice what Harry Ironside said regarding this verse:

There is a difference of opinion among men of piety and scholarship as to the exact meaning of verse 3. Did it mean to say that there were times when he had actually wished, if it were possible, to save his brethren by being himself accursed from Christ—that he would have been willing to submit to this? Or is he simply saying that he understands thoroughly the feeling of the most earnest Jew, who in his mistaken zeal detests the Christ, because he himself had at one time actually desired to be accursed from Christ as standing with his brethren after the flesh? If we accept the latter view, we see in this verse simply an expression of the intensity of his feelings as an unconverted Jew. If, as the present lecturer is inclined to do, we accept the former explanation, then we put him on the same platform with Moses. But whichever view we finally accept, our sense of his deep interest in his people becomes intensified as we read.<sup>4</sup>

Paul had so much of a burden for Israel that shortly after writing this he travelled to Jerusalem against the will of God to testify the gospel to them. He ignored two warnings from the Holy Spirit, and then, once in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to him and told him to get out, because He knew the people of Israel (corporately) would not receive the message (See Acts 21 and 22).

***"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;" Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."*** (Romans 9:4 - 5)

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<sup>4</sup> H. A. Ironside. Romans and Galatians (Kindle Locations 843-849). Kindle Edition.

Verses four and five record for us eight characteristics that help to define and identify Israel:

1. "to whom pertaineth the adoption" – this is a reference to Israel nationally.

*"And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn."* (Exodus 4:22-23)

*"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."* (Hosea 11:1)

No other nation has been referred to as God's son; it is a special designation for Israel alone.

*"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth."*  
(Deuteronomy 7:6)

While it is true that individual believers are adopted (Romans 8:15) into the family of God and have become the sons of God through the new birth (John 1:12; 3:1 – 7), this passage is referring to Israel as a nation, and not Christians.

2. "and the glory"

This is most likely a reference to the glory of God, which represented the presence of God in the Tabernacle as they travelled through the wilderness; and was later manifested in the Temple:

*"And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."* (Exodus 40:35)

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3. "and the covenants"

God made several covenants with Israel through Abraham, Moses, David, and Jeremiah. (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 19; 2 Samuel 7:12 – 16; Jeremiah 31:31 – 34) Some have already been fulfilled, and some are yet to be fulfilled. This is an interesting and lengthy study, but for time's sake, we won't go into it here.

4. "and the giving of the Law"

The Mosaic Law was given to Israel.



*"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:"* (Exodus 19:5)

*"Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you."* (Exodus 31:13)

5. "and the service of God"

Aaron's family and the tribe of Levi was given charge of the Tabernacle and later the Temple. They were the only people on earth who were permitted to enter God's presence.

*"And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."* (Exodus 19:6)

6. "and the promises"

The Old Testament is replete with promises that were given exclusively to the children of Israel, including the promise of a Messiah.

*"Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers,"* (Deuteronomy 6:17-18)

*"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."* (Joshua 1:8)

*"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* (Genesis 3:15)

*"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."* (Isaiah 7:14)

7. "whose are the fathers"

This is most likely a reference to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons, the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

*"And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and*

*circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs." (Acts 7:8)*

8. *"of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came"*

This is perhaps the greatest blessing of all: Christ was born a Jew, from the tribe of Judah, and was of the offspring of David according to the flesh.

## II. Selected People (vs. 6 – 13)

The obvious objection that Paul is dealing with here involves God's promises to Israel. What is God going to do with Israel? Has God forsaken Israel? God forbid. (Romans 11:1) God just made a lot of promises to the believer in Romans 1 – 8, but how can we believe those promises if God does not keep the promises that he made to Israel. In dealing with this important issue, Paul will first explain that not every one that descended from Abraham were included in the promises. The promises that God made to Abraham were given to specific descendants. The point that he is working towards is that not all the people that were physically descendants of Jacob were going to receive the promises, but a remnant would be saved, but their salvation would come through faith. (Romans 9:27)

***"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:" (Romans 9:6)***

In other words, Paul is saying that God's promises regarding Israel are still valid.

This is a strange expression. In other words, not all the offspring, the natural offspring of Israel, are the real Israel. The Jew in Paul's day raised the question as to why the Jew had not wholeheartedly accepted Christ since theirs was an elect nation. Is not this failure on God's part? Paul partially dealt with this problem at the beginning of Romans 3. Now Paul is going to make a distinction between the natural offspring of Jacob and the spiritual offspring. Always there has been a remnant, and that remnant, whether natural or not natural, has been a spiritual offspring. This is a distinction within the nation Israel, and he is not including Gentiles here at all. The failure was not God's; but the people had failed. God's promises were unconditional.<sup>5</sup>

***"Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall***

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<sup>5</sup> McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (Romans 9-16)* (electronic ed., Vol. 43, p. 27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*thy seed be called."* (Romans 9:7)

God's covenant with Abraham bypassed Ishmael and went through Isaac.

*"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."* (Romans 9:8)

Even though Ishmael was a physical descendant he was not counted for the seed. This does not mean that he was condemned to Hell; it merely means that this chosen nation would not include him. (Genesis 21:12)

*"For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son."*  
(Romans 9:9)

The promised seed would come through Sara, Abraham's wife, not Hagar.

*"And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;"* (Romans 9:10)

Now God will trace the nation through Jacob the younger son of Isaac and Rebecca.

*"(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;)"*  
(Romans 9:11)

The nation of Israel came through Jacob and not Esau. Please be careful to note that it does not say anywhere in this passage that Jacob was elected for Heaven, and Esau was elected for Hell. The "calling" here is not to salvation. Jacob was elected by God's sovereign choice to be the father of Israel, and I think that we will see that God's foreknowledge has a lot to do with that choice.

*"It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger."* (Romans 9:12)

Esau never served Jacob while he was alive, but his descendants served the descendants of Israel. Again, we are not dealing here with individuals, but rather with the nation of Israel, and the Edomites, which were the descendants of Esau.

*"As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."* (Romans 9:13)

This is a quote from Malachi 1:2 – 3, the last Book of the Old Testament. God never said that he hated Esau when he was alive. He did say that Esau would serve Jacob, but as we have already determined that was a reference to his descendants. God rejected (hated –

same word as was used for Saul when God rejected Saul from being king – [1 Samuel 15:23, 26; 16:1]) Esau and his descendants by His sovereign choice, but it does not mean that Esau, as an individual, was condemned to Hell before he was born. If Esau or any of his descendants went to Hell, it was because they rejected God. Had any one of them placed his faith in God, he would have been saved.

### III. Sovereign Power (vs. 14 – 24)

***"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." (Romans 9:14)***

Was God being unrighteous when He chose Abraham over every other human being on the planet? Was he being unjust when he selected Isaac over Ishmael, or Jacob over Esau? Absolutely not! God is God. He is omniscient, and He knows exactly what he is doing. As we have seen, His decisions regarding the men he chose were not based upon a person's past performance, but often upon what God knew they would do in the future.

*"And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Genesis 18:17-19)*

***"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." (Romans 9:15)***

None are deserving of mercy; all of us deserve judgment. Remember, however, that this statement, though applicable to the context of salvation, is used here parenthetically in the context of God's choice of Israel as His people. As far as salvation is concerned, God has chosen to have compassion on anybody who believes on His Son. God reaches out in a general way to this world through Creation, through the Word of God, through the inherent knowledge of right and wrong written on every man's heart. I believe that when a person, any person, responds to the light he is given, God will give him more light. God, through His foreknowledge, knows who will respond and who won't.

***"So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." (Romans 9:16)***

Paul is still speaking parenthetically here. It is not our will or our work that save us; it is

God's grace. Stifler states it succinctly when he says, "Willing and running may indicate the possession of grace, but they are not the originating cause"<sup>6</sup> The big question, however, is whether man has free will to receive God's grace or reject it. I think man, in his sinful condition is very capable of resisting God. Stephen stated to the religious leaders that were about to stone him, "ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."

***"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. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."*** (Romans 9:17 - 18)

We dealt with the question of God hating Esau in verse 13 and discovered that God did not condemn Esau to Hell before he was born, and now we will consider another of the favorite characters used by Calvinist to prove that man has absolutely no choice in salvation.

First, let's consider God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. If you carefully review the historical passage in Exodus, we will discover that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, before God hardened it, and God knew because of his foreknowledge what Pharaoh would do.

*"And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand."*  
(Exodus 3:19)

The Calvinist almost makes it sound like Pharaoh was a Sunday School superintendent that only wanted to serve the Lord, but God forced him to act against Pharaoh's own will, and then sent him to Hell. When God hardened Pharaoh's heart, He was merely forcing Pharaoh to do what was already in his heart. Pharaoh's mind was already made up. He wasn't going to submit to God's will voluntary, but God used Pharaoh's obstinacy to advance God's will anyway. The same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay.

***"Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?"***  
(Romans 9:19)

Here is the conclusion that the true Calvinist will have to come to. If God is sovereign over man's will, then I cannot help who I am and the decisions that I make. I am basically a robot, and I am not responsible for my decisions. God has created some for Heaven, and some for Hell, and there is nothing any of us can do about it. That's nonsense. Though God could

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 31 – 32.

certainly force anyone to do anything He wants them to do, He allows men and women to make their own choices. Because God providentially used a man like Pharaoh to advance His will does not mean that he forced Pharaoh to reject God throughout his entire life. Pharaoh had already made up his mind about God, and God knew that Pharaoh wasn't going to change it.

***"Nay but, O man, who art thou that replest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Romans 9:20)***

I think that we spend too much time trying to figure out what is perhaps beyond the level of our human comprehension, instead of just understanding and obeying what is clearly taught for us in the Scriptures. I do not know why some people have little or no interest in the things of God, and I do not know why it is that some folks seem to be drawn to Him like a fly to the porch light. All I know is that God did something wonderful in my heart when I got saved, and even way before my salvation. Looking back, I can see the hand of God in many things that were used of Him to bring me to the place where I trusted Him. I also know that God wants me to love all people, and to live a godly testimony before them, and to let them know about God's love for them as well. I have been thinking about these things for years, and I still can't completely wrap my head around them, but there is a lot about God's will for my life that I do understand, and I must concern myself with what I know God wants me to do.

***"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:21 - 24)***

God is certainly sovereign over His creation. He can and is doing what He wants to do, and whatever He does is right. Notice the phrase, "fitted to destruction". Many believe that this means that God created some for the sole purpose of using them and then destroying them. However, the Bible does not say here that God "fitted" them. The phrase could mean that they fitted themselves to destruction.

Notice what Wiersbe says regarding these verses:

We must never think that God enjoyed watching a tyrant like Pharaoh. He endured it. God said to Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people ... and have heard their cry ... for I know their sorrows” (Ex. 3:7). The fact that God was long-suffering indicates that He gave Pharaoh opportunities to be saved (see 2 Peter 3:9). The word “fitted” in Romans 9:22 does not suggest that *God* made Pharaoh a “vessel of wrath.” The verb is in what the Greek grammarians call the middle voice, making it a reflexive action verb. So, it should read: “*fitted himself* for destruction.” God prepares men for glory (Rom. 9:23), but sinners prepare themselves for judgment. In Moses and Israel God revealed the riches of His mercy; in Pharaoh and Egypt He revealed His power and wrath. Since neither deserved any mercy, God cannot be charged with injustice. Ultimately, of course, God’s purpose was to form His church from both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:24). Believers today are, by God’s grace, “vessels of mercy” which He is preparing for glory, a truth that reminds us of Romans 8:29–30.<sup>7</sup>

Don’t lose sight of the overall context of this passage. God is explaining to us what he is doing with Israel. Not everyone born to a Jewish family will receive the promise. Only those who come to God through faith will receive it, and that will be just a small remnant.

#### IV. Supporting Principles (vs. 25 – 33)

Now Paul will go back to his original context regarding Israel, and will use many supporting Old Testament passages to support what he is saying.

*"As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." (Romans 9:25)*

This is a quotation from Hosea 2:23, referring to the fact that God would open the door to the Gentiles.

*"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." (Romans 9:26)*

This is a reference to Hosea 1:10. The churches today, which are made up of mostly Gentiles are not the new Israel. God has not forsaken His people Israel in this age of the Church, but he has set them aside for a while. He will turn His attention back on them again when He pulls His Church up out of here, as we will see in chapter eleven.

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<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 545). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

*"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25)*

*"Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth." (Romans 9:27 - 28)*

This is a reference to Isaiah 10:22 – 23. Only a small portion of Israel will actually come to Christ. The judgment referred to here in these verses is most likely alluding to the Great Tribulation period.

*"And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha." (Romans 9:29)*

This is a reference to Isaiah 1:9. God in His mercy saved a small remnant of Israel. They are the ones who have been called of God (v. 24) and have believed the gospel.

*"What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;" (Romans 9:30 - 32)*

The Gentiles who “attained to righteousness” have done so through faith, and the Jews who have not “attained unto the law of righteousness” have not done so because they tried (and failed) to do it through their own works.

Again, quoting from Wiersbe:

Paul moved next from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. Note that Paul did not say “elect” and “nonelect,” but rather emphasized faith. Here is a paradox: the Jews sought for righteousness but did not find it, while the Gentiles, who were not searching for it, found it! The reason? Israel tried to be saved by works and not by faith. They rejected “grace righteousness” and tried to please God with “Law righteousness.” The Jews thought that the Gentiles had to *come up* to Israel’s level to be saved; when actually the Jews had to *go down* to the level of the Gentiles to be saved. “For there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of



God” (Rom. 3:22–23). Instead of permitting their religious privileges (Rom. 9:1–5) to lead them to Christ, they used these privileges as a substitute for Christ.<sup>8</sup>

***"As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." (Romans 9:33)***

This is referenced a few times in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16.

The good news for the Gentiles is that because of the Jews rejection of Christ, the gospel was opened to the Gentiles. Of course, God knew this all along, and it was all part of His overall plan, but God did not force the Jews to reject their Messiah, that was their own decision.

*"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." (Psalms 118:22-23)*

Israel may have stumbled, but someday a remnant of them will get back on their feet and turn to Christ.

*"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." (Romans 11:11)*

### **Concluding Statements Regarding the Issue of Sovereignty**

No one will deny that there are many mysteries connected with divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Nowhere does God ask us to choose between these two truths, because they both come from God and are a part of God’s plan. They do not compete; they cooperate. The fact that we cannot fully understand *how* they work together does not deny the fact that they do. When a man asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled divine sovereignty and human responsibility, Spurgeon replied: “I never try to reconcile friends!”

But the main thrust of this chapter is clear: Israel’s rejection of Christ does not deny the faithfulness of God.

You will never be able to reconcile the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. But Paul is making it very clear here that if you are going to be saved it is *your* responsibility. It is “whosoever will may come” (see Mark 8:34) and “... him that

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 545.

cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). You can come; don’t stand on the sidelines and say, “I’m not elected.” But I have never heard of anybody being elected who didn’t run for office. If you *want* to be saved, you are the elect. If you don’t, you’re not. And that is all I know about it. I cannot reconcile election and free will. I have come to the place in the sunset of my life that I can say that God is sovereign, and He is going to do this according to His will. And His will is right—there is no unrighteousness with Him. He won’t make a mistake. Men make mistakes; men in government make mistakes, yet people believe in them. My friend, why don’t you believe in God? He is righteous, He is good, and whatever He does is right.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> McGee, p. 38.